They say it takes a village to raise a child. The whole of class 1-A is just going to have to settle for Yagi and Aizawa.

(A drabble collection focusing on the in-between moments of BNHA)

Notes

Will I EVER stop making these collections for my new fandoms? Probably not. This will be updated whenever, but feel free to send in prompts for anything you'd like to see, here or on tumblr <3

Itsclcydebitches.tumblr.com
"You straight up lied to them, Shouta."

Toshi had another one of those idiotic grins on his face, fairly vibrating with accusatory amusement as he leaned on the back of the staff room couch. Aizawa continued drinking his coffee in silence, giving Toshi the same amount of attention he'd give to a worm.

Which was to say, none.

Worms were a whole lot less persistent though.

"I didn't lie," Aizawa finally said. He deliberately pulled the paper he was reading a little closer to his face. "I changed my mind."

"Mmm. And didn't tell the kids."

"They didn't need to know."

Toshi just shook his head, indicating that he knew this conversation was a losing battle. Good. Maybe he'd leave.

"Except..."

Dammit.

"You've never changed your mind." Toshi came around to stand with hands on his hips, the iconic All Might pose that, to be frank, wasn't nearly as intimidating in this body. Aizawa resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "You've taught here how many years now? Six? And during that time you've accumulated 154 expulsions." Somehow Toshi's tone managed to mix astonishment, awe, and disappointment all into one. "You always expel at least one student during the first examination and usually half the class by day three. Your standards are legendary. Hizashi says it's because you don't want the workload of teaching a full class...but I think you saw something." There was a twinkle in Toshi's eyes that Aizawa didn't like. "What it is about this class, hmm?"
Go somewhere else if you want to play at being friends.

Aizawa said it to the kids every year. Didn't matter if he walked in on small talk or an all-out brawl. He always dissuaded them from being kind to one another... just to see who had the guts to throw it back in his face. Because raw talent he could work with. Those with battle quirks and pure power at their fingertips could be taught a certain level of morality, a code that would carry them onto being decent, resourceful heroes of the streets; the foot-soldiers who helped keep the tide at bay.

But true heroes? Those with the level of self-sacrifice needed to make real change in the world? Those were rare.

Aizawa wasn't one of them. He'd just learned to spot their type.

This year's entrance exam held only two with that spark in them. The girl with the gravity quirk was one of them, though Aizawa had been on the fence about her at first. Would she have run if she hadn't been trapped? Saved the boy if he hadn't saved her first? It was muddled, and that spark hadn't shined until he'd heard about her request to transfer some of her points; the first in U.A.'s history.

And the Midoriya boy...

No hesitation. No regret. Aizawa saw pro heroes nightly with less steel in their spines and grit in their teeth. He'd watched the exam tape with a manic grin on his face, a grin that only grew when he'd recognized Midoriya from the fight against the sludge villain months ago. Oh yes. He had plans for this boy.

—Right up until he'd seen how the boy's power had shattered his body.

Disappointment had a bitter taste. It wasn't an issue of Midoriya's control, but his persistence. Quirks developed young and any child who'd had years to master the toll a quirk took on his body—or at least lessen the impact into something manageable—and hadn't obviously didn't possess the level of dedication needed to become a pro hero. It didn't matter how pure his intentions were. Hell, maybe his attack on the arena trap had just been a fluke. Either way, Midoriya was useless to him. Zero potential.

Which made his first day at U.A. so interesting.
What kind of lazy child pushed through a test he had no chance of passing? Since when did the inept display strategic thinking that rivaled Aizawa's own? That little trick with the softball... fucking hell. Midoriya was like a spark *discovering* his quirk.

So Aizawa had to be sure.

"Shouta?"

Toshi was blinking down at him, looking a little worried about how long he'd been quiet. Honestly. Aizawa stood, yawning in his face and tossing the paper he'd been reading at his scruffy chest. Toshi fumbled before managing to catch it.

"Midoriya's file?" he asked, shoulders hunching. "Why—?"

"I didn't know quirks could develop so late," Aizawa murmured, reaching out to flick the paper and watching Toshi stiffen. "Turns out the kid only registered it a few weeks ago. Odd, isn't it?"

Toshi visibly swallowed. "Y-yeah."

"But I can work with a late bloomer. A class is only as strong as its weakest link, and the Midoriya boy has potential. It wouldn't be rational to expel them."

Toshi honestly looked surprised at that and Aizawa let him, shuffling out of the lounge without looking back. Let the great All Might keep his secrets. Aizawa had plenty of his own.

Power. Intellect. The heart of a hero.

He said every year that a student's potential could drop to zero at any time. While that remained true, Aizawa had the sneaking suspicion that this year's group would only continue to rise. He hoped they would, that they'd fully embody their motto of plus ultra. Overcome every obstacle—even if that obstacle was their own teacher. Aizawa wanted them to *crush* him.
...but they didn’t need to know that.
Two weeks into their first semester Aizawa-sensei came into class with a small, plastic jar. He set it on the edge of his desk while twenty students watched him closely.

“You’re a part of a team now,” he said, eyes drooping. “Whether you want to be or not. Working for agencies, fighting on the streets… it doesn’t matter. Your actions effect other heroes around you and vice versa. Get used to it.” Aizawa paused, running a hand through his hair. “From here on out any unexcused disruptions will result in a marble going into this jar.” He held up a small bag for emphasis. “At the end of the day the whole class will receive ten minutes of detention for every marble.”

There was a beat of silence. Then everyone started yelling at once.

“—you’re fault!” Kirishima could just be heard over the din. He leaned across his desk to jab Bakugo with a hardened finger. “If you hadn’t blown up Midoriya’s desk yesterday—”

“Shut up! The scum deserved it!”

Izuku really wasn’t sure how that could be, considering all he’d done was drop a pencil, but even that was enough to set Kacchan off these last few weeks, ever since he’d discovered that Izuku had been ‘lying’ about his quirk. Now all Izuku could do was slide slowly down into his seat and pray to any amiable gods that Kacchan didn’t turn his temper this way.

“Sensei!” Iida was half out of the chair his hand was so high. “Permission to ask a question?”

Aizawa blinked. “That was a question.”

“I… well…”

“What is it.”

“Yes. Sir! I understand the intent behind this exercise, to encourage our sense of responsibility and teamwork, however, those lessons become moot if one party truly does not care about repercussions,
or how their actions might impact those around him.” Iida’s eyes slide to Bakugo. He only got a sneer for his trouble. “As class rep I must insist that this is grossly unfair.”

“Life isn’t fair,” Aizawa said, leaving Iida with his mouth hanging around his knees. “Next. Tokoyami?”

He slowly lowered his own hand, considering. “But won’t this impact you too, sensei? The more detention you hand out, the longer you’ll have to supervise us…”

Aizawa’s grin, when it came, was slow and a little manic. Those in the front row reared back. “Better, but I’ll just sleep. Anyone else?”

No. No one dared ask another question. Uraraka and Asui exchanged worried glances. Todoroki let out quiet ‘tsk’ in the back of the class.

The silence was broken by the sound of a marble hitting a plastic base.

“For wasting the first ten minutes,” Aizawa said and everyone groaned. “Now, turn to page eighty-five…”

Of course, that marble wasn’t alone for long. Within half an hour Bakugo had secured it a friend by kicking Kaminari’s chair out from under him when he’d been balancing on two legs, too close for Bakugo’s liking apparently, fire and electricity creating a potent mix. By lunch he’d secured them five more, mostly for rude comments and small explosions out of boredom. By mid-afternoon there was a rather impressive collection and everyone’s nerves were on edge.

When Bakugo blew up the jar itself Aizawa just calmly retrieved another he’d had stashed away. He filled it up twice as high.

“I’m going to kill him,” Jiro whispered, shaking so hard that her ear-jacks swayed. “He’s just doing it on purpose now.”

Izuku nodded, head in his hands. “He’s always been like this. Stubborn. Seeking attention. And he takes things so literally—”
Izuku suddenly stopped, his eyes widening. The classmates nearest to him went perfectly still. Because they’d seen that look before. Numerous times since the entrance exam.

“Oh,” Tsu whispered, tapping her mouth. “Midoriya has an idea.”

Izuku shook his head. Paused. Then nodded. He looked at the clock. “Maybe… 20 minutes until class is over. Tsu, do you think you could sneak some of the marbles out when Aizawa-sensei isn’t looking?”

She cocked her head. “Is water wet?”

“…Yes?”

“Then yes.”

“O-okay!”

Some things, at least, were in their favor. Aizawa wasn’t one to call them out on the small stuff, whispers or suspicious movements—not when Bakugo was literally setting fires in his classroom—so passing notes through the class was an easy enough task. As instructed Tsu stole four marbles when Aizawa turned to write on the board, quickly swallowing them so the evidence was gone. A minute later Toru stripped off each piece of her uniform (with Momo restraining Mineta in the back) and snuck a whole handful while Iida distracted Aizawa with a question. The windows were open to accommodate the weather and Koda had a visiting bird steal three more. Uraraka lifted a few on her way to the bathroom. Jiro and Kaminari briefly blew out the lights, giving Tokoyami’s Dark Shadow the chance to grab the rest.

When the bell rang Aizawa snapped his notes shut. He turned, staring blankly down at the jar.

“Ten minutes for every marble,” Izuku whispered. “He didn’t say we couldn’t take the marbles out.”

The class waited with bated breath… until Aizawa grinned again, this one a little softer.

“Teamwork,” he muttered, tracing the rim of the jar. “Yep. However, keep in mind that I won’t be so
easy to ‘fool’ tomorrow. See you.”

Aizawa raised a hand as he left, waving. The class was left staring until the door slid shut behind him.

Once again, everyone began talking at once.

“Was that a test?” Iida cried out. “Or is it meant to be a punishment?”

Uraraka pulled a face. “I guess it’s only punishment if we fail to get them all back?”

“Oh c’mon.” Ashido gripped at her hair. “You heard him! We can’t pull the same tricks tomorrow. How long are we supposed to keep this up?”

As one they all had the sinking feeling that the answer was ‘forever.’ Or at least for as long as they were at U.A. Which honestly amounted to the same thing—or so it felt.

Despondent, the class slowly gathered their things while contemplating their fate. It was only as they began shuffling out that Kirishima scowled.

“Or Bakugo could just quit being a dick all the time.”

“Shut up!”

Really, they had a better chance facing Aizawa.
Thank you so much for all the kudos and lovely responses so far! I'm going to try to carve out time tomorrow to answer comments, but for now have some more tooth-rotting fluff. I really wanted to try my hand at a reverse "Izuku accidentally calls All Might 'dad'" scenario...

There was a small coffee shop almost directly between Toshi's apartment and U.A., a humble place that most eschewed for reasons that honestly escaped him. It was simple. Quiet. An excellent spot to ease into the day, with low lighting that was easy on his eyes and a rich aroma that always helped to settle his stomach. It really was perfect—although, Toshi could admit that he might be a little biased. Considering that he had saved the joint from a Villain just last year.

And he'd been a faithful customer ever since. Not that the employees knew who they were serving.

"Good morning, Yagi!"

He waved at Lilly, shuffling up to the counter with hunched shoulders. She was already pulling a coffee together for him and Toshi knew that it would stay perfectly hot throughout the whole morning. Not everyone's quirk was good for hero work, but everyone's was good for the world.

"Kids treating you well?" she asked, ringing up the order. "I still can't believe you teach a U.A.!"

Toshi found himself chuckling. "It's not nearly as glamorous as the news makes it sound. The students are wonderful though. Of course they are! A handful at times, but..."

"Do you have any kids of your own?"

"Just my boy Izuku."

...Wait.

Toshi froze as his brain caught up with his mouth, breath wheezing out of his one lung. He only moved again when he felt a wave of blood crawling up his throat. He turned to cough into his shoulder, Lilly oblivious to the pure, overwhelming shock that was coursing through his veins. She said something about him seeming like a wonderful father and Toshi nearly swallowed his own tongue.

"I'm not—" he began, but the blood was still coming and Lilly was already turning away, attention on the next customer. Toshi escaped the shop as quick as he could—minus his coffee.

He changed shirts in the staff lounge, hands shaking.

Did he really think of young Midoriya as...?

The word surfaced and then was immediately shoved down, too deep and wild for Toshi to deal with at school, where anyone might walk in and question the utter terror on his face. Because shit! He
could barely handle being a teacher. Let alone a—

"You're getting old," Toshi told himself, smiling at his reflection in the window. Smiling because he was scared. "Old and sentimental. One protege and suddenly it's all this? Ha. You need to sleep more if you're making slip-ups like that."

The only problem was, it wasn't just one slip-up.

Whether it would have happened on its own or whether that moment in the coffee shop started something, Toshi didn't know, but from then on out Midoriya and that word seemed to go hand-in-hand, often when Toshi least expected it. He found himself telling frantic nurses that of course he was immediate family, convincing himself later that it was a logical lie to see how badly his student was injured, not an instinctual, blurted truth. Organizing papers in preparation for the new term and Shouta shoved Midoriya's form in his face, noting that there was only one emergency contact listed and that just wasn't going to fly given their problem child's luck. Toshi couldn't agree more and found himself scribbling his information down before he could question why he was experiencing the same thrill he'd once gotten from signing autographs, or why Shouta had brought the form directly to him.

Saturday afternoon Toshi sat next to a grandmother on the bus, happily nodding and grinning as she told him about her grandkids. When she pulled out pictures he had to still his own hand, lest he pull out the picture of Midoriya in his wallet.

*Why was there a picture of Midoriya in his wallet?*

"All Might? Was that okay?"

Toshi startled, looking down to find Midoriya staring up at him with bright cheeks and worried eyes. They'd been training out on the beach again, focusing on hand-to-hand, and it hadn't escaped Toshi's notice that the push and pull he'd felt for months now was growing with rapid speed: wanting desperately to erase every bump and bruise that appeared on young Midoriya's skin; yet watching his body grow stronger with something more than just teacherly pride.

His mentorship with Gran Torino had never been like this. Toshi had nothing to draw from, certainly not his own childhood, and he couldn't even get teaching right, let alone something as important as—or

Not to a boy... no. A *blessing*, like—

Toshi let his eyes slip shut. Blind, he reached out until he found the top of Midoriya's head, skeletal fingers slipping between the curls and gripping gently. He focused on how the young man instinctively pressed up into his palm; the subtle shift as his shoulders began to relax.

Toshi smiled. Because he was still scared. But a line from his book had just come to him.

*You learn by doing. You can only become a teacher by teaching.*

Perhaps he could apply that advice to other aspects of his life.

Toshi opened his eyes and was blindsided by the love in Midoriya's. He ruffled his curls, smile turning into something more genuine.

"Yes, son. That was perfect."
Motivation

Chapter Notes

For the record I've only seen the anime (though Vol. 1-6 of the manga just arrived on my doorstep :D) so I'm sure there's plenty of character backstory and stuff that I haven't gotten to yet, or just missed in my first run-through. So anything in these drabbles that ends up being wrong... we'll just call AU lol.

"Can I ask you something? Personal, I mean."

Aizawa nearly rolled his eyes. Fifteen minutes now and neither Uraraka nor Yaoyorozu had realized that the low wall they sat on also housed their instructor, propped up on the other side in his sleeping bag. He'd hoped to spend the lunch hour in a quiet, sunny spot catching up on his sleep. Instead he was planning a lesson on spacial awareness and checking one's surroundings, especially before divulging secrets.

He could just make out Yaoyorozu's face as she stared out over U.A.'s campus, expression puzzled. Uraraka was mostly hidden by Yaoyorozu's shoulders, but Aizawa caught movement as she took a huge bite of her sandwich. It read as embarrassment.

"You don't have to answer," she reassured her.

"No, no. I don't mind. What is it?"

"Just... why do you want to be a hero?"

Hmm. A common enough question around these parts, but one that was potentially loaded depending on the individual. Interesting that Uraraka seemed to realize that.

She needn't have worried about Yaoyorozu reacting badly though. She merely tipped her head to the sky, considering.

"I'm not sure," she said. "God, that sounds kind of horrible doesn't it? I mean, there are so many in the class who have these big aspirations, you know? Like Todoroki..."

"Or Deku," Uraraka agreed. "They're so driven."

Aizawa caught the edge of Yaoyorozu's crooked smile. "Right? Drives me up the wall sometimes, if I'm honest. Does everything have to be a calling? There are police officers who do the work because they're good at it and it's also just good thing to do, or doctors, firefighters... why not heroes? I guess I've never really thought of being anything else." Yaoyorozu shrugged, taking a bite of her own rice. "Once we discovered my quirk it seemed pretty obvious what my career path would be. It might not be flashy like Bakugo's, but it's still good in a fight..." She trailed off, watching Uraraka's head bend towards her chest. A few feet away Aizawa slowly, quietly zipped out of his sleeping bag. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, no reason," Uraraka was quick to say. Too quick. "I was just thinking about my own reasons and... I don't know." She toyed with the edge of her shirt. "I guess you're right. Everyone here is so
motivated to be a hero and I'm just...

"In it for the money?" Yaoyorozu finished. "That's not a bad thing."

"Isn't it?"

"No!"

"Says the girl who's always had it." Uraraka smiled to take the sting out of her words. "You'll inherit your parents' fortune right? And even if you didn't, you could just make whatever it is you wanted." Yaoyorozu blinked like the thought had hardly occurred to her. "Clothes, games, books... a quick search to see what it's made of, a little time and you could have almost anything. But you're still here." Uraraka's hands curled into fists at her side, the tupperware shaking in her lap. "You're still here, Momo. If being a hero wasn't such a lucrative career I don't know if I would be."

"Then why don't you leave?"

The shriek the two girls let out was oddly satisfying. As Yaoyorozu lurched up Uraraka slammed her arms down across both their lunches, keeping most of it from spilling. They turned, wide-eyed to stare at Aizawa, rice, sandwich makings, and droplets of milk now floating around them.

"Sensei!" Uraraka squeaked.

"Leave," Aizawa repeated. He dragged his sleeping bag over the wall and brushed some of the grass stains out. "You want money so bad? Here." Reaching into his pocket he tossed his wallet at her. Uraraka let out another squawk as Yaoyorozu stared. "All the cards in there work and you can spend whatever you want. I don't care. Or better yet, get her to give you some." Aizawa's eyes slid to Yaoyorozu and she tensed, automatically sitting up straighter. "Doesn't even need to be some of that fortune. You said it yourself, she can make anything yeah?"

Both girls blinked.

"...what?" Uraraka whispered.

Aizawa rubbed the back of his neck, feigning indifference. "Get her to make you money. Ten-thousand yen bills in one-hundred stacks. Do that for an afternoon and she's set. Hell, you could make Uraraka rich right now and let her get on with her life. Go on." Aizawa made a shooing motion when neither of them moved.

"I..." Yaoyorozu looked to Uraraka before settling on offended. "No! We can't do that."

"Why?"

"I'm going to earn that money—" Uraraka began but Aizawa cut her off with a disgusted look.

"Pride like that is for the weak. If you really wanted to help your parents you'd get them that money however you could, and quickly." He pressed as her expression melted into something devastated. "Wouldn't you? Why make them wait and suffer for years while you go to school? Get your license, go pro, find an agency...you're not getting any cheques for a while, kid."

"Stop it," Uraraka whispered.

"It's the logical decision. Just give her the money, Yaoyorozu."

"No!"
Yaoyorozu was a mirror image of Uraraka, hands clenched as they both shook. "That's just wrong,
Sensei. It feels like, like—"

"Robbing a bank," Uraraka said, sour expression drawing out a nod from Yaoyorozu.

"Yeah. I mean yes, it's my body and yes it's my quirk, but people aren't supposed to use their talents
so selfishly. Heroes aren't supposed to..."

"Heroes don't do that," Uraraka said.

They sat in silence a moment, Aizawa staring them down.

"No they don't," He finally agreed. Aizawa stretched, yawning. "At least the decent ones don't.
Hmph. It's not just about the money then, is it? If it was, you really would have robbed a bank or
something. Instead of devoting three years of your life to becoming a hero. Funny."

The girls were frozen as Aizawa approached, contemplating his words. He snatched his wallet back
and then the second half of Uraraka's sandwich straight out of the air. He inspected the contents.
Tuna. Not bad.

"For interrupting my lunch," he said, taking a bite. "Pay more attention to your surroundings next
time."

"...yes sir."

"Alright."

He wandered off, sandwich in one hand and sleeping bag in the other. Hopefully they'd get over
these worries sooner rather than later. There were heroes out there with shit motives, yeah, but his
kid wasn't one of them.

And right before he passed out of earshot Aizawa heard,

"I would make you some new clothes though, if you wanted."

If the sound of the two girls laughing brought a smile to his face there was no one around to see.
Young Midoriya was late.

Toshi scowled down at the sand, the beautiful sunset, the pier and his own shoes. Midoriya was late and for the last ten minutes Toshi had paced with his hand hovering over the contacts in his cell phone, worrying. With one click he could have the entirety of U.A.'s staff out and on the streets, looking for his wayward pupil; a whole team of pro, protective heroes at his disposal. It was knowledge that helped set Toshi's mind at ease during long nights.

The downside though was that with one click he would, in fact, have a team of pro, very protective heroes out on the street. If Midoriya was delayed for any reason other than a Villain attack, Toshi would never hear the end of it.

And he didn't want to put Shouta through that. The man's nerves were shot as it was.

With a groan Toshi sat—more like collapsed—down onto the sand. He'd give Midoriya another five minutes. Maybe ten. But then, then, he'd be calling someone about this, regardless of the consequences. Because heaven knew his young pupil had never been late to training before.

Can you blame him? What's the rush in coming to 'train' with an old man?

Toshi waved the thought away like a bothersome fly, but he couldn't deny that questions like those had been haunting him more and more lately, creating a huge, fearsome swarm. Each time Midoriya gained a little more control of One For All, each time Toshi lost another minute of his transformation... it became harder to justify his place in the boy's life. Nearly a year ago he'd used his fearsome size and strength to inspire Midoriya to astounding heights in the span of just ten months. Now his 'inspiration' was mostly in the form of sideline encouragement, much of it muddled by coughing fits and spewed blood.

With a sigh Toshi leaned back on his hands, now hyper-aware of his own body: the ache in his wrists, the phlegm in his chest, a constant headache, a slight chill along his arms. No, he wasn't much use to anyone anymore; young Midoriya was just too star struck to realize it. He'd seen the boy's room after all, that day he'd had to carry him home after training, and the troublesome child had more All Might t-shirts than Toshi himself did. That kind of worship went deep and Toshi was just selfish enough to take advantage of it as long as he could. Until Midoriya realized that the frail man standing before him was no longer the facade—the secret identity—but rather all that was left of his mighty hero... well, Toshi could only collect memories for the future. He'd had the whole world stare up at him in awe and none of it compared to Midoriya's devotion. Toshi would hold onto that for as long as he could.

Hell, maybe the boy had already taken the posters down from his wall.

"All Might!"
In surprise Toshi spit another mouthful of blood, staining the sand as he struggled to get up. In his musings he'd very nearly forgotten Midoriya's absence and his sudden cry sent a wave of pure relief running through his body, making it shake in ways that had nothing to do with exhaustion or cold. Midoriya was running towards him with a blinding smile and, according to Toshi's careful eyes, no additional injuries.

He started breathing again.

"Where have you been?" Toshi cried. He dragged Midoriya into a loose headlock that had the kid squirming, calling out apologies indiscriminately. Having that mop of hair beneath his fingers was a balm the likes of which he could never replace. Toshi filed that feeling away too. "And I've told you not to go shouting that name in public, yes?"

"Yes!" Midoriya laughed, breaking the hold. "I'm sorry, really, really sorry, but the bus was late and then there was a line and my card kept not working, and I—"

Toshi cocked his head. "Card? You were shopping?"

"Eh?"

Midoriya suddenly froze, eyes going wide at the question. "Well, yes, b-but um... it's not really—you wouldn't—I mean—"

He spiraled. One of the most powerful heroes and the kid was still an anxious, open book, muttering into his fist like his life depended on the words. With an exasperated grin Toshi slapped a hand down onto Midoriya's shoulder. He thankfully stilled.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to. Boys your age buy all sorts of things—"

"It's not like that!"

"—and I'm just glad you're here now." Toshi grinned wider, the truth of his words sending a bubble of warmth from his chest up into his throat.

He might have choked on it if it wasn't the sole thing keeping him alive these days.

Midoriya's eyes skid to the side though, hesitant. "I kinda want to show you..." he muttered. "But will you promise not to laugh?"

"Of course."

"I mean really promise."

"I swear as a hero, my boy."

Those were probably the only words that could have pulled Midoriya out of his embarrassment long enough for him to dig into his backpack. He produced a box that Toshi immediately recognized as one for an action figure, the contents hidden against his chest. Midoriya stared over the top of his prize with bright red cheeks.

"You promise you won't laugh?"

The urge to make a quip about fanboys was nearly overwhelming. He looked legitimately nervous though so Toshi only nodded.

"No need to be embarrassed," he said. "I already know that you like to collect—"
The words died in Toshi's throat. In fact, for a moment the whole world blotted out in white and he thought for sure that he was going to faint, swaying there in the uneven sand. Midoriya didn't notice, too busy explaining with hurried need how he already had all the All Might action figures but he obviously didn't have this one so he'd had it specially made a few weeks back...

This one. The rest of Midoriya's words turned to static in Toshi's ears. Because he didn't have this one.

Shoved in front of his face was a perfect replica of Toshinori Yagi, right down to the skeleton frame and deep, sunken eyes. Dressed in baggy pants and a shirt three sizes too big, the action figure stood with hands on his hips, looking out into the distance with a confident expression that Toshi couldn't recall ever seeing in the mirror. On the figure's pedestal was engraved two words: True Form.

"—artist doesn't know who you are," Midoriya was babbling, perhaps misinterpreting Toshi's stunned expression for something like anger. "I just gave him your picture and some details, nothing incriminating. I swear, I would never—"

"My dear Midoriya."

Toshi wasn't sure he actually said that, his head swimming as it was, but he was able to stumble forward at least, pulling his young charge to him. All the while he was careful not to harm the precious toy that pressed against both their chests.

His babbling stopped. Midoriya melted into the hug. He gripped tight with fingers around the box and raised his other hand to Toshi's shaking shoulders.

"...All Might?"

Somehow, tears felt thicker than blood. It took a long time before Toshi could actually speak, and when he did the question was too big for the words that contained it.

"You'll put that next to the others?" he whispered.

"Y-yeah!"

He'd never known this boy to lie. Toshi buried his face in Midoriya's hair, picturing his frail figure standing beside the All Mights that lined his desk. They were all equal in Midoriya's eyes.

And Toshi smiled, one of the brightest he'd ever had.
U.A.'s bus was loud, no doubt about that. Throw twenty kids with quirks together and chaos was bound to ensue, but do it right after a very successful training exercise...

"I kicked your ass!" Kaminari yelled, sending a sheet of lighting up into the roof with a triumphant punch. It skittered along a few feet and then petered out, but not before giving everyone below mild, electric shocks. There was a huge roar of displeasure that Iida tried—and failed—to control.

With wicked accuracy Sero shot a piece of tap square over Kaminari's mouth, the force toppling him backwards onto Aoyama and Ashido's seat.

"You didn't kick my ass," he grinned, wagging a finger.

"Or mine," Hagakure pipped up from somewhere in the back. She still hadn't put any clothes on since her stealth maneuver back at the facility and Jiro was forced to send her thumbs up in a vague, hopefully accurate direction.

Tsu cocked her head from one side to the other. "Did Kaminari actually kick anyone's ass?"

"No," came a chorus, despite Kaminari's muffled yells.

"Ribbit! That's what I thought," and Tsu's tongue shot out to snag a stray fly buzzing near Sato's head. The resulting screams of disgust nearly toppled the bus.

An average day then, Uraraka thought. She was so overwhelmed by the noise and the energy around her that she nearly missed the polite tap on her shoulder.

"Hm? Dark Shadow?"

Yes, though he looked a little droopy in the bright afternoon sun. With her eyes Uraraka followed his body under the legs of her peers and over a number of empty seats. Tokoyami was subtly waving her over.

"Deku," Uraraka murmured and he looked up from his notes, nudging Iida in turn. The three of them carefully picked their way through the chaos and up to the front of the bus. When they could see why Tokoyami had hailed Uraraka slapped a hand over her mouth to keep from shouting out a laugh.

Not that noise seemed to be having much of an impact here.

"I... don't know what to do," Tokoyami whispered.

Uraraka remembered that he'd sat next to Aizawa-sensei to discuss his own progress on today's exercise and now here was their teacher, half collapsed over his student's shoulder in a deep, dead sleep. Uraraka could easily understand why Tokoyami looked terrified—back perfectly straight and the rest of his body unnaturally still—but they were just so cute. Aizawa in particular had the slack,
peaceful look of someone who'd be out for a couple more hours yet. Looking closely, Uraraka could see the tiniest bit of drool collecting on Tokoyami's shirt.

"Oh my god," she whispered. Uraraka slowly drew out her phone.

Iida narrowed his eyes. "Don't you dare."

"Oh ho, if you boys think I'm passing off an opportunity like this..."

They backed off at her expression and Uraraka was free to do as she pleased.

As she snapped enough pictures to fill up her storage Izuku and Dark Shadow both leaned closer towards Aizawa. Dark Shadow made to poke at their teacher's cheek and was only stopped by a quick snap of Tokoyami's beak. Izuku hardly blinked though, studying Aizawa intently.

"You need to help me," Tokoyami intoned.

"Mm." Izuku didn't seem to be paying attention.

"I'm surprised he can sleep through all this," Iida said, rubbing at his ears. Someone finally pissed Bakugo off as a small explosion rang through the bus. A hot wave of heat ran over them and the smell of smoke filled the air. "He's always so quick to wake up in class."

"He's faking then."

The four of them turned to Izuku, chin in his hand as he continued to stare intently at Aizawa. With a quick nod to himself he finally stood, pointing with conviction. "In class he's not really sleeping, or if he is it's just a light doze. I've suspected that for a while. You know, catch us off guard and stuff. Make us think he's not paying attention, but..." Iida was already nodding seriously. "I've never heard Aizawa-sensei snore before, have you?"

Indeed, what sounded like a small chainsaw was emanating from Aizawa's slightly open mouth. They all shook their heads and Uraraka switched to video with absolutely no shame.

"He must feel very safe to sleep so deeply here," Iida said, expression softening. "Aizawa-sensei must trust us a great deal. We cannot let him down!"

"We won't," Izuku said, straightening. Uraraka nodded crazily, bumping fists with them both. It was a small cluster of inspirational determination until a slight cough broke the mood.

"Beautiful," Tokoyami drawled. "But none of that is helping me."

"Oh. Right."

Luckily for Aizawa he had a student who cared for him deeply and who just happened to make things weightless with a touch. A happy poke to his shoulder and Aizawa was floating off of Tokoyami—who let out a rather relieved sigh, looking like a bomb had been disabled. Uraraka carefully guided their teacher onto an empty seat as Iida jogged to the back of the bus, muttering about how he'd have Yaoyorozu make a pillow and blanket.

"He's really out of it," Izuku murmured, watching the steady rise and fall of Aizawa's chest. "Maybe Iida's right, but this kind of exhaustion can't be normal, don't you think? Is Aizawa-sensei just so busy that he doesn't have time to sleep—as one would expect of a U.A. teacher and a pro hero working primarily at night, though Present Mic and Thirteen never display this level of exhaustion—or does he not feel safe when he does try to sleep? Stress can severely interfere with REM sleep. I
think. I'll have to look back at my notes. But if that's a factor than maybe we should help out someway, make sure there's another hero nearby at all times so he can rest without being on guard —"

"Deku. You're doing it again."

"Oh-! I'm sorry!!"

It was something to consider though, especially when Iida's small mission started quieting everyone down. One by one the other students heard about the situation climbed over seats until they were all at the front of the bus, watching over their teacher with curiously solemn expressions. Even Bakugo was silent in the background, hands stuffed deep in his pockets. Not a whisper could be heard among the group.

Except for the faint 'ding!' of a message being sent.

"So... I love you?" Kaminari said, flipping through the photos Uraraka had sent. A soft rustle of laughter started up again, everyone pulling out their phones and making various faces at the screens. Tokoyami had a distinctly red hue to his black feathers.

"Holy shit he's adorable."

"Eraser Head! Earth's Cutest and Mightiest Hero!"

"How much do you think we could get for these?"

"What? You mean the press?"

"Yeah."

"Uh... do you want to die?"

"What I want is the new pro hero game..."

"I'm not dying for your gaming addiction."

"No one is dying! We should delete these immediately—"

"HELL NO."

"ARE YOU NUTS?"

"Absolutely not, Iida. Man you've got swiss for brains."

"Fuck Iida."

"Hey!"

"Well seriously, dude."

"...we should send them to Present Mic instead."

That got a better reaction. A yell of pure glee swept through the bus as everyone started typing madly, ensuring that their favorite, gossip-spreading hero got more copies of the photos than he'd know what to do with. Or rather, hopefully, he'd know exactly what to do.
Aizawa slept peacefully through it all.
"There you are, Shouta!"

Toshi saw Aizawa's flinch at his booming voice and barreled through the crowd anyway, sliding to a stop alongside his colleague. They must have looked quite fascinating together: one a hunched figure holding a still-full mug of amazake in his hand; the other, towering, grinning a mega-watt smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. New Year's celebrations were in full swing and the holiday had already demanded too much of All Might's time: soundbites for the news stations, visits to the children's hospital earlier that afternoon, dropping in on Naomasa to both wish him a happy holiday and raise the morale of his officers... and now the second party of the night. He'd done everything in the smallest chunks possible, but even so Toshi was pushing things to their limit tonight. He could feel blood beginning to seep between his teeth. It wouldn't be long now before he had to transform back.

...Aizawa noticed it too.

"Here," he muttered, shoving the mug at him. A little sloshed over the rim and landed between their feet.

"Thank you, thank you."

Toshi took a large gulp to wash the coppery taste away and though he'd pay for this on top of all the food he'd eaten earlier, for now he was just grateful. He loved celebrations like this, Toshi truly did, but maybe he was getting as old as he claimed because he just didn't have the energy for them like he once did. Only a handful of the faces out there were truly familiar to him and the music blasting from somewhere nearby was beginning to give him a headache. He'd told Crazy Eights and Ibis that he had urgent U.A. matters to discuss with Aizawa-sensei, but in truth Toshi just needed a few minutes to collect his thoughts. Breathe. And there was nothing quite like side-lining with the hero community's signature wallflower.

His eyes slid Aizawa's way. "You know," Toshi said, directly from the corner of his mouth. "I don't think I've ever seen you in a suit before..."

"And I've never seen a pro hero cower from a petite, civilian woman before."

Toshi scowled. "Rebecca is American and they have a horrid tradition of kissing on New Year's eve. It was logical to make my escape."

Aizawa grinned. "I know. Hizashi has had a standing bet for six years now: anyone who manages to kiss me tonight wins a prize."

"...what's the prize?"
"Bragging rights that they kissed me, apparently. But no one else knows that."

Toshi was shaking before Aizawa had even finished speaking, hand pressed hard against his mouth to try and stifle the laughter. He could only imagine the kind of attempts people must have made over the years. Heroes of all sorts suspended from the rafters by thin, white strips. Oh yes, Toshi could picture it easily.

That tightness in his chest wasn't just from humor though. Toshi's laughs turned into coughs until he was shaking in an entirely different manner. Aizawa watched him from the corner of his eye, frowning.

"Go to bed," he said shortly, snatching the mug back. "Nezu will understand."

When All Might's smile re-appeared from behind his fist it was a little more genuine; just a little more like Toshi's.

"I have one more errand to run after this, but you'll make my excuses for me?" he clarified, feeling warmed by the offer.

Aizawa made a sound in the back of his throat. "No excuses. It's a necessity. Go."

Before he did though Toshi took one last survey of the party, gaze finally landing on the colleague—friend—beside him. Everyone was so small when he was in this form. Some days Toshi missed that.

And oh yes, this was just too perfect and could only conclude that there had been some sort of warped invitation in Aizawa's words. He never said or did anything without thinking through the consequences after all. So Toshi bent, keeping his movements slow and open... and when his quirk wasn't blasted away by fierce red eyes he bent a little further.

All Might's height provided the perfect position for Toshi to bend and plant a kiss against Aizawa's scalp.

"Happy New Year, Shouta," he whispered and there was the faintest hum in response; a quick press like a smaller man was rising up on the balls of his feet.

"I thought you were leaving."

Ha. Bragging rights, indeed.

Toshi risked a hand on Aizawa's shoulder as well before miraculously leaving with all his limbs intact. The moment he was out of earshot of the music Toshi reverted to his true form, steps slowing and head hanging a little lower. Ah, he was tired, but Toshi hadn't been lying about that ast errand. In the pocket of his now baggy pants were twenty colorful envelops, each containing 5,000 yen.

...well, one envelope contained a little more. But Toshi was sure young Midoriya wouldn't tattle.

He chuckled as he slipped into the dorm, confident that all his students were still out celebrating in their own way, knowing each room now as well as he knew the student themselves. Making use of his master key, it occurred to Toshi that regardless of the night's leniency, Aizawa would no doubt make fun of him for this action. After all, the custom of giving money was meant to be done among family. Between an adult and their child.

Semantics didn't stop Toshi from opening Tsu's door first though. He only paused once at the threshold.
"You softie," Toshi whispered, grinning from ear to ear.

He left his envelop on Tsu's bed—directly beside the other.

Chapter End Notes

For the record I know nothing about Japanese customs except for what google spits out at me, so my sincerest apologies if I've gotten anything really wrong here.

Also, in the nebulous mess that I hesitantly term world building: Crazy Eights is a long-retired pro who previously fought with thin, razor-sharp weapons that look like playing cards from a distance. His quirk is probability (considered one of the most powerful psychology abilities) which allows him to very briefly turn all odds in his favor. It's his quirk that made all his seemingly impossible hits a regular occurrence.

Ibis has a bird's head and bears a striking resemblance to paintings of the Egyptian god Thoth (with a costume to match). They fight with a collapsable staff and their quirk is the ability to manipulate sand. Unlike Todoroki they can't create their element themselves, so Ibis wears a number of bracelets around their wrists: various types of sand constantly held together in a tight, circular shape—a testament to their ability to have their quirk active at all times, even while asleep. Ibis will release the sand into a more malleable form once a fight begins.
"For homework...you'll be writing me an essay."

The whole of 1-A blew out a breath at Aizawa's announcement. "That's so normal," someone whispered and there were nods all around; a few nervous giggles too. As much as they thrived on the excitement inherent in a hero curriculum, sometimes the normal school stuff was just plain refreshing. Comforting.

Iida's hand was already high in the air.

"Sir! What will we be writing on and what is the expected length? Do you require a cover page and if so does that count towards the total? If we utilize outside sources what citation system should we—uh..."

Aizawa's glare cut him off. "You have got to let us tell you these things before you start talking."

Scrubbing at his eyes he fished a juice box out of his sleeping bag and took a long slurp. "And the cover page never counts towards the total, got it?"

"...yes, sir."

"Good. You'll be writing about a pro hero." Shuffling to the blackboard, Aizawa sprung back the projection screen to reveal a messily written list. "Strengths, weaknesses, quirk use, tools, side-kicks... whatever else you can think of. This is an all purpose analysis, a way for you to show me that you're capable of critiquing another hero and identifying places for improvement. Whatever reservations you've got, get rid of them now." Aizawa made a vague motion towards the door. "This isn't the time to be polite and accommodating. If you want to say something, say it. If you can't call out your peers for shitty behavior then you're in the wrong line of work."

A number of students swallowed, looking nervous. They all nodded though.

Aizawa let them stew a moment longer, then sighed. "I don't give a damn how long it is, but Midoriya's can't be more than three pages. You can write about any pro you want, but Midoriya can't write about All Might."

"Why do I have all the stipulations?!" Izuku cried.

"Because you're the idiot who'd give me a twenty-page paper about how perfect our Number One hero is. I'm not reading that shit."

There were snickers all around as Izuku buried his face in his hands, cheeks red enough to put Bakugo's explosions to shame. Ashido leaned forward to pat his back.

"He's not wrong."
"Stop."

"Secondary sources aren't required, but cite anything you do use. No, I don't care what style." Iida's hand went down again. "Type it up—I'm not reading your chicken scratch either. Turn it in before class on Monday..." Aizawa scratched at his chin. "Yeah. That's it. Any actual questions? ... great. Go on, get out of here."

There was the usual calamity as everyone packed up for the weekend, though with a slightly disappointed air as they all dealt with the sudden addition of a new assignment. U.A. wasn't big on homework—not when students needed all their extra time for training and recovery—so more than one person stayed behind to wrack one another's brains, complaining all the while.

And plenty found themselves near Izuku.

"Why are you all coming to me?" he mumbled, trying to inch away from Mineta's horrifying expression. "You heard Aizawa-sensei. He already hates my paper!"

Kirishima laughed. "Nah, he's just pushing you. You've already thought of, like, everything about All Might, right?"

"N-not everything..."

"And you write so much. You probably have a paper right here." Tsu tapped Izuku's latest notebook, causing him to hurriedly stuff it into his backpack. "Can we study together this weekend, ribbit?"

"Please," Uraraka begged. "I'm terrible at papers and though I'd never copy your notes—"

"You certainly won't!" Iida said.

"—maybe we can just take a peak? You've written about Thirteen right?"

Izuku blinked. "Uh, yeah. Lots! They weren't kidding when they said their quirk can easily kill—it's not an easy thing to aim or regulate—but it's particularly suited for disaster relief, which is one of the main reasons I assume they chose that focus. The ability to not just clear rubble but disintegrate it has more than halved the time it takes to reach survivors in a building collapse, saving countless of lives in the process—"

"Midoriya. Stop writing her paper."

Uraraka was already taking notes though. "No, no, let him talk."

"You're shameless."

"Mm hmm."

"I'm surprised you're not doing Thirteen," Kirishima said, pointing at Tsu. "Don't you want to get into search and rescue too?"

She nodded, fingers tapping under her chin. "Yes... but Aizawa-sensei is right. We should try to analyze a hero we're not as comfortable with. I'm thinking of doing Omen."

Mineta's jaw unhinged. "The guy who sees the future? Nu-uh he's creepy. I'm doing Midnight."

"No one's surprised by that," Iida murmured. He suddenly straightened. "Do you think it would be inappropriate if I were to write about my brother?"
"Not at all!" Uraraka did a little dance. "Besides, Aizawa-sensei will probably give you a high grade if you can be critical of a family member. He'd like that."

Iida was nodding, gnawing at his lower lip. "Yes. That will be difficult though..."

"What about you Todoroki?"

He'd been silent the entire conversation, hiding in the back, but he perked up at Izuku's question. Something passed between them that was missed by everyone else. A little spark of worry.

"I'll write about my father," he said, tone not at all like Iida speaking of Tensei. "He'll expect me to."

Four words that only meant something to Izuku; Todoroki's eyes that, while calm, didn't quite line up with everyone else's.

"Yeah," Izuku said slowly. "I was thinking of doing him too. After all, Endeavor is the Number Two hero."

Technically.

***

Three days later Aizawa slammed into the faculty lounge.

"Holy—!" Mic bit off his curse, quickly lowering his voice so he didn't deafen half the school. Thirteen was out of their seat, already poised for a fight, while Toshi nearly lost hold of the cup he'd been drinking from, tea splashing across the table. All three of them stared as Aizawa kicked the door closed with his foot.

He was staring down at a small stack of papers, expression unreadable.

"Uh, Shouta?"

Aizawa planted his hand across Mic's face and shoved him back onto the couch. "Endeavor," he read, voice as blank as his expression. "An Analysis of Why the World's Second Greatest Hero No Longer Deserves His Title."

Two eyebrows rose high into blonde hair. Thirteen sat back down with a 'thump.'

Pleased with the attention, Aizawa cleared his throat before continuing. "Endeavor, civilian name Enji Todoroki, has been hailed as the world's second greatest hero for nearly a decade now, surpassed only by All Might. It's admittedly easy to maintain a position once it has been established; hard to go against the status quo, and there's little doubt that Endeavor's position within our community is rarely, if ever, challenged. Given his power and strong media presence it's easy to see why most would consider Endeavor to be one of the best pros currently on the streets, but this essay will provide a step-by-step, detailed account as to why continuing this thinking is both dangerous and insulting to the entire hero community."

"Oh my goodness," Toshi whispered.

Aizawa held up a hand for silence.

"To begin," he read, "One of the foundational teachings a budding hero learns is to minimize structural damage and do everything possible to keep civilians out of the crossfire—a lesson we've worked hard to practice here at U.A. However, despite the fact that this is easily understood by high
schoolers, Endeavor has proven time and time again that he prizes his own success over the people he's supposedly there to protect. On page seven," Aizawa flapped another sheet at them, which Thirteen quickly snatched up, "is an alphabetized list of complaints filed against Endeavor by police officers, paramedics, and firefighters since his debut. To summarize, Endeavor frequently uses his quirk with reckless abandon, shooting off walls of fire that are wide enough to singe nearby civilians and fellow heroes, as well as harming the structural integrity of buildings by melting them with his lava. One account—which was squashed by the media but helpfully supplied for this paper by Detective Naomasa Tsukauchi—claims that Endeavor's lava caused an apartment building to collapse hours after he left the scene of the fight, killing a father, an old woman, and resulting in numerous injuries... whereas the fight against the actual villain lead to no injuries at all."

Aizawa slowly looked up, taking in their shocked expressions. "It goes on for another two pages and this is point one of six," he said. A smile was growing now, taking up the entirety of Aizawa's face. "One of six and he roasts Endeavor in every one of them." ("Pun intended?" Mic whispered numbly and got another shove for his trouble.) "Best goddamn paper I've ever read. He's getting full marks. I don't care if the brat did write twenty pages like I told him not to. He's getting full marks and I'm half tempted to publish this on one of those ridiculous blogs. People need to see it," Aizawa shook the papers emphatically.

"That sounds like a good way of turning the public against U.A.," Thirteen murmured, though they were still staring down at the list of complaints, the fingertips of their glove lightly touching the paper. "But I had no idea that... god. It's true?"

"Sources look good. A lot of personal accounts, but..."

"I'm a friend of Tsukauchi's," Toshi said absently. He'd snatched the last few pages, turning them over frantically. "Which of the children wrote-?"

Aizawa held out the cover page for him. IZUKU MIDORIYA was typed in huge, proud letters. Mic let out a furious cackle as Toshi gave a grin to match Aizawa's.

"Young Midoriya!"

"Goddamn problem child, yeah."

Toshi still had the last few papers in hand, hopping in place as he wiped blood from his chin and read through the final lines. "Though Second Greatest Hero isn't an official title sanctioned by our or any other government, there's little doubt that it comes with a number of perks, and certainly a large amount of responsibility. I am not a pro hero myself yet, but I nevertheless feel that it's my duty to call for a revocation of Endeavor's title. He is not the Second Greatest Hero—he is barely a hero at all."

"Savage!" Mic crowed, stomping his feet hard enough to make the table shake. Thirteen lifted a hand to their visor like they were attempting to cover a laugh.

"Which still leaves the title open, of course. I personally suggest—" Toshi suddenly cut off, blinking. "Shouta? Have you finished this yet?"

"What? No. It's twenty pages."

Impossibly, Toshi's grin grew bigger. "I personally suggest that it should instead be given to a lesser known hero by the name of Eraser Head—!"

"... and the fucking kid just lost his perfect score."
Izuku did, in fact, receive a ninety-nine out of a hundred on the paper, something hot and satisfying blooming in his chest when the only comments pertained to criticisms that he'd failed to mention. But then, the paper was already seventeen pages over his limit so he could be forgiven for missing a few things.

Aizawa knew. Thirteen, Mic, Toshi, and Izuku knew. It wasn't something they could tell the public—not yet—but maybe... maybe someday when they were all a little stronger and Izuku's words were a little more polished.

When they held more weight.

For now he just made sure to accidentally slip his paper into Todoroki's bag at lunch.

It should make for a good read.
Okay now I told myself, "Katie, you're not allowed to go writing chapters masquerading as drabbles again because we both know how bad you are at finishing things and you don't need another long-ass AU in your life"... but people asked for a follow up and so here we are.

I'll do an Essay Part 3 tomorrow and then close things down. This is the closest my tired brain can get to actual plot atm lol

(Also consistent tone? What's that?? None of THAT here, friends.)

In retrospect, putting his paper where Endeavor could easily find it wasn't Izuku's smartest move. They knew. The moment he passed through U.A.'s security system, they knew.

Just as All Might was capable of changing the atmospheric pressure to cause rain on a sunny day, Endeavor's quirk impacted the environment around him, most notably the temperature. Izuku had noticed it with Todoroki these last few months—a little chilly when you sat on his right side, the perfect heater if you sat on his left—but that had nothing on the spike in temperature that suddenly engulfed 1-A's classroom, causing Tsuyu to shrink uncomfortably and Bakugo to look questioningly at his hands. Izuku wished his friend was just throwing another fit. This was why heroes needed balance in their lives.

Aizawa noticed it too: the sudden change in temperature; a presence that drew them out of their studies. He set the book he'd been reading from carefully back on the table.

"Wait here," he said. It was a tone they'd heard back at USJ and this time everyone obeyed the order, all leaning closer to one another with fists formed and feet planted firmly, ready for a fight.

The door slammed open before Aizawa had reached it though. No, wait... it had partially melted open, the edge curling as lava ate away at it, emanating from a black and silver glove. Izuku watched, mouth open, as the heat climbed up and up their massive doorway until most of it was pouring smoke, hot globs of flaming debris falling back to the floor. And among the flames stood Endeavor, his right hand holding what looked suspiciously like a charred stack of paper.

Izuku swallowed.

Aizawa only surveyed the mess stoically. "You're paying for the repairs. Kids, head into class 1-B. Now."

Izuku never thought he'd get to see someone shoo Endeavor, but that's exactly what Aizawa did, flapping his hand at a hero three times his size until the man finally stepped aside—though his teeth were bared. Under Iida's instructions they quickly picked their way through the mess and came out on the other side, staring as Endeavor shut what was left of the door.

1-B was already outside their classroom, the two groups crowding together as students began fierce whispering back and forth, trying to figure out what had brought the number two hero to U.A. in such a rage. Right before the door had closed Endeavor had looked out over forty kids, seeming to glare at each and every one of them... but Izuku knew that look was aimed at him.

And he knew exactly what this was about.

_Text: Allies_, he thought.

Izuku found Todoroki in the very back, reaching for him with a confidence they hadn't possessed months back; a certain level of tactile understanding. Todoroki grabbed hold of Izuku's forearm with no hesitation and he could feel the ice still coating his skin. He'd been prepping for a fight too.

"You okay?" Izuku whispered. Todoroki gave a short nod.

"I left it in my room." A squeeze through Izuku's uniform. An apology. "I... wanted to re-read it."

There were all sorts of awful details that Izuku's mind picked up on—that his words had brought Todoroki some kind of strange reassurance, that Endeavor had gone through his son's stuff—but there was something else too, the faintest tilt to Todoroki's voice that had Izuku suddenly smiling again. He inched a little closer, the two of them looking out on the small sea of confused peers.

"You, uh, liked it?"

"... it's burned now."

Izuku laughed. "Aw c'mon. I have so many copies."

***

In retrospect, things would have been a whole lot worse if they didn't have Aizawa-sensei on their side.

But oh, they did.

"—teaching as I see fit," he could be heard saying, voice soft and almost-bored. A few of the other students were trying to sneak peaks through the burned parts of the door without getting caught. "If you have a problem with that—"

"I most certainly have a problem with your students spreading slander about me!"

Izuku could easily picture Aizawa running a hand through his hair, wincing at the volume. "Slander implies a damage to your reputation and no one other than the student and myself has seen the essay. Slander also implies falsehood." There was a pause. "Are the accusations false?"

"OF COURSE THEY'RE FALSE."

"Hmm. I'll have to re-check his sources then. They seemed rather persuasive..."

There was a yell of pure, inarticulate rage that shut everyone up fast, most of 1-A rushing forward instinctually. They needn't have bothered. A second later the door flew open again, Endeavor stumbling backwards through the opening. It took Izuku a moment to even recognize him because he'd never seen the man without his flames before. He looked... smaller.

Aizawa stepped out a second later, eyes wide and bright red, his scarf gently floating around his shoulders.
"I told you to stop breaking our stuff," he said, voice cold. "Those desks aren't cheap you know, and as the Class President is so very fond of reminding us, a lot of craftsmanship went into making them." Aizawa tilted his head. "I think it's time you left, Endeavor."

He held his ground though, even flanked by students and face-to-face with Eraser Head. Everyone in the hallway knew that Aizaiwa couldn't hold the fire back for long, that even if he could Endeavor was still impossibly strong on his own... but none of that seemed to matter. No one spoke or even breathed, lest Aizawa turn his gaze on them instead.

"The brat should be expelled," Endeavor said. There wasn't much punch behind his words though. They came out flimsy and frail.

"I don't expel kids with potential. Now get out. You're wasting my class time."

Impossibly, Endeavor went. It wasn't quietly and the look he cast both Izuku and Todoroki left no question about his feelings, but he did leave. Aizawa's eyes traced him all the way down the hallway and they only heard the rush of returning flames when Endeavor rounded the corner.

Aizawa immediately pressed a hand to his face. Hair fell around his shoulders. "What a clusterfuck," he muttered.

There was silence.

"Excuse me, Sensei?"

It was a boy from 1-B, Eiji, with long silver hair and the most delicate hands Izuku had ever seen. They were already reaching. "If... if you'd like I can fix the door for you. My quirk... I return things to their original state." Eiji's fingers stretched like he was just itching to fix this.

Izuku understood the feeling well.

Aizawa shook his head though, eyes still closed. "No. Heroes aren't above the damage they do, even Endeavor. Remember that. Midoriya, Todoroki—you're with me. The rest of you go study or something."

Izuku only noticed the absence of Todoroki's hand when it finally dropped to follow Aizawa down the hall. They left the merged groups behind them, Uraraka and Iida briefly moving like they wanted to follow. When they were out of earshot though Todoroki caught Izuku's gaze and they both nodded as one, speeding up to flank Aizawa rather than keeping behind.

"You can't punish Midoriya for this," Todoroki said. "Everything he said was true."

Izuku bit hard into his lower lip. "I'll admit that proving it is harder. A lot of the accounts are hearsay, but there are no recordings because—"

"Because Endeavor has a bad habit of melting cameras and phones," Aizawa finished. He came to a stop in the deserted hall, scrubbing a hand over his face. He looked more worn out than usual. "I'm not punishing anyone. You two need to talk to the principal though. Be on your guard. Because truth or not, a pro has just violently interrupted a U.A. class to demand your expulsion."

Unexpectedly, Aizawa's hands rose to drop gently on top of both their heads. Izuku blinked up at him while Todoroki swayed a little under the gesture.

"Sensei?"
"Remember today... It's your point seven."

***

In retrospect, that couldn't have been the end of things.

"Present Mic."

"Thirteen."

"Same, Thirteen."

"All Might."

"Omen."

"Mt. Lady."

"Midnight!!"

"Ibis."

"Ingenium."

"Crazy Eights."

"Midnight—but it wasn't for pervy reasons, okay?"

"Present Mic."

"Snipe."

"Best Jeanist."

"Recovery Girl."

"I was All Might too."

"Same."

"...Eraser Head."

Everyone stared at Bakugo who looked like he was very close to smoking around the ears. "What! I thought if I wrote about him he'd give me a good grade!"

"And did he?" Iida asked.

Bakugo's scowl said it all.

Still, the rest of 1-A had gotten what they were after. Out of them all only two had written about Endeavor... and they highly doubted that the competitive pro was trying to expel his own son. Which only left one student to write something "slanderous" enough to warrant this kind of reaction.

Uraraka tapped her fingers together in concentration, unconsciously floating just a few inches off the ground.

"I wonder what Deku wrote in that paper."
Two quick notes:

1. Yeah apparently all of 1-B actually exists in the canon, but I don't know who most of them are so I like making people up. Eiji, as stated, has the ability to revert things back to how they were previously. This is incredibly useful for fixing stuff, be it a melted door or, say, a broken arm. However, his power only works within 20mins of accumulating the damage (so he can't go healing old injuries) and he has to be VERY careful of when to stop the reversal. You want the door back to being an un-broken door... not a pile of lumber or a freaking tree.

2. Yep, Aizawa straight up lied to Endeavor's face about him and Izuku being the only ones who'd seen the paper (besides, obviously, Todoroki and Endeavor himself). I picture Aizawa as someone who normally detests lying... but there are times when it's logical. Like right now. I tried to work his explanation of that into the fic but the conversation just wasn't having it. Ah well.
"I knew that something like this would happen."

Toshi smiled behind his mug of tea. No, Nedzu hadn't changed at all in the years he'd known him. Happy-go-lucky he might seem, but there was a distinct undercurrent of smugness in his tone, contrasting that smile. Nedzu never wasted an opportunity to demonstrate how much smarter he was than all of humanity and frankly Toshi couldn't blame him.

Mic finally took the bait. A simple "Oh?" was enough to broaden Nedzu's smile and have him jumping down from the lounge's couch. After running to the small kitchenette came back with a paw-full of uncooked spaghetti.

"What the hell," Aizawa muttered.

Toshi hesitantly raised a hand to say that the pasta he was currently getting fur all over was meant to be his lunch... and then thought better of it.

"I'll treat you to something better," Nedzu chirped and Toshi hung his head.

"...Thanks?"

"Mm."

Food crisis averted, Nedzu began laying each piece of spaghetti on the low table, occasionally pausing, considering, and then pushing one strand closer to another, or widening two groups just a bit. He seemed particularly interested in the spaces he created, going so far as to measure them with the tips of his paws. A few minutes later he was done and Mic elbowed Aizawa in the ribs to wake him up again.

"These are timelines," Nedzu said, pointing to the pasta. "Of course, there's far, far more than what's shown here, but for the sake of simplicity let's say that this encompasses every possible outcome; that this is somehow a representation of infinity." He spread his arms wide over the display. It looked a little like a crudely drawn sun. "Now yes, there's an infinite number of results to every situation, but should we care about them all? No! Because most of these vary only slightly in their details. There are, for example, countless universes where our dear Toshi attended this meeting with different colored socks."

"Socks?" Toshi blinked.

"Yes, socks. There's the universe where you wore black, or green, or pink, or blue—countless more where they're light blue, stripped, with polkadots, or stars—"
"I don't own blue polkadot socks."

"You should, you should!"

"Why are we talking about socks," Aizawa grumbled. He squirmed a little further into the couch cushions.

Nedzu clapped his paws together. "We're not. Because we don't care about all the universes where Toshi wore different socks to this meeting—we only care about the universes where he shows up at all." Nedzu bent, slowly making the space between groups of pasta a little bigger. "That's what I see with my quirk: the noticeable deviations; the final results, even if all the details are still a surprise. These," he pointed to three small groups of just a few strands each, "represent timelines where our dear Midoriya moves on from his little tiff with Endeavor and is dealt no further consequences. But these," Nedzu's paw strayed to a much larger, fuller group. "These are the timelines where he doesn't."

Mic poked at the table. "You needed pasta to tell us that the Midoriya kid is stubborn?"

"Visual metaphors are an excellent learning tool. You should incorporate them into your teaching more."

"Ehhhhhh."

"...Is it wrong of me to be proud?"

Toshi said it to the hands in his lap, but he didn't miss the other teachers' reactions: Mic frantically shaking his head in his peripheral vision, Aizawa's snort of amusement, a small paw on his shoulder. Young Midoriya's essay had been a bright spot of amusement just a few days before. After Endeavor's visit though...

Well. Toshi was no longer convinced that mere conversation was the way to handle that man.

Nedzu was still all smiles though as he hopped up onto the table, scattering the pasta to the floor. "No one is at fault here," he said kindkly. "Shouta set an assignment and Midoriya fulfilled it to the best of his ability. Nothing more, nothing less." A shifty look said he knew exactly what else had gone down surrounding these events, but Nedzu was letting them slide. "There are many factors at work now. Endeavor is quite displeased, of course, and he will not let go of that anger easily. Midoriya has a gift in his writing and analysis—a gift that I think we should nurture, especially if he is to replace you as our Symbol of Peace." Nedzu turned to face Toshi, paws clasped to his chest. "And I'm afraid that most of the school already knows about the essay, so it actually matters little what we decide here today. The wheels are already turning, so to speak."

Aizawa muttered something unflattering under his breath. "So you just dragged us here to tell us that you've already done whatever the hell it is you wanted to do?"

"In part." Nedzu hopped down. Now, his smile was just a touch unsettling. "I told Midoriya to start his own blog."

***

Uraraka and Iida had cornered him the moment Izuku had returned from the principal's office and demanded to see the essay. Despite his best efforts ("You're a terrible liar, Deku.") he'd caved in under five minutes, emailing them both a copy while sending a new one to Todoroki. The subject title on each was innocuous—not that it would matter in the long run.
Because Iida first showed Yaoyorozu, only because as Class Presidents they should both be informed of the situation.

And Uraraka showed Tsuyu, but only because she was such a tight part of their group now; she'd know if they were keeping secrets.

Tsuyu told Tokoyami and Yaoyorozu told Ojiro. The paper spread to Jiro, Sero, Kaminari and Kirishima. And if so many in 1-A knew, shouldn't they all? 1-B had seen the fallout... shouldn't they see the cause? The paper swept through General Studies and the Support Group, surviving everything from Bakugo's flames to the overall skepticism—had skittish Midoriya really written this?

Nedzu didn't know that the whole school had read the paper. It was just common sense.

"I can't do this," Izuku whispered.

"Of course you can," Uraraka said. She pumped the air with her fist. "That's your name now, yeah? You're gonna do your best! Plus ultra!"

Iida pushed up his glasses. They slid down his nose. He pushed them up again. "It is rather intimidating."

"Hmm." Tsuyu laid long fingers across Izuku's shoulder in a show of comfort. "Think of it this way. You already have a large audience. Everyone here. And it was well received by us."

"Well received!" Aoyama cried. "That is an insult to Midoriya's masterpiece." Behind him Koda nodded.

Yaoyorozu pursed her lips. "If it makes you feel any better, people might not read it at all. I just mean," she said quickly, raising her hands at Kirishima and Ashido's looks. "There are already so many hero blogs out there! We can't expect Midoriya's to get noticed right off the bat. So... that's sort of comforting?"

"Just fucking do it already, you nerd." Bakugo slipped off his desk and wandered away.

Nothing for it then. Izuku looked to Jiro and got a thumbs up in return. She'd been the one to design and startup the website, a simple green and yellow layout that read Deku: Musings of a Hero in Training across the top. With her approval Izuku looked to Todoroki next.

"Just promise me something," he said and Izuku blinked, nodding quickly. "Tell the truth, whether people want to hear it or not."

He could do that.

Taking a deep breath, Izuku hit 'submit' and published his first post.

***

In the end Yaoyorozu was right. No one noticed another blog among thousands. It gave Izuku time to come to terms with the whole idea, of putting the things he scribbled into his journals out for the public's consumption—revised or not. They divided his essay into six posts, one for every section, and each was heavily edited by Iida, Yaoyorozu, and Todoroki to keep him from rambling. They solidified the information Izuku had already collected and got permission from eye-witnesses to quote them in full. Tokoyami had been smart enough to snap pictures of their doorway before it was replaced and those were uploaded along with post number seven.
By the time a week had passed Izuku was used to the shape of his new blog—the pale green for him, the yellow trim for All Might—and he found that it was actually fun to write for an audience, even if they never wrote back. He had so much to say about all the heroes and Izuku said it, feeling like something had slotted into place. Really, this was just Notebook #14, new and improved. Things were... settling.

It didn't last, of course. Izuku had forgotten that Tsuyu was right too.

He already had an audience: the entirety of U.A., students and teachers alike checking his blog with a rather unprofessional kind of glee. It landed him more hits than any other new blog could hope to achieve, and more hits meant more recognition.

Izuku didn't take into consideration that after a week Jiro added an 'about' page that included his picture; that people would recognize him as the young boy who tried to take on the sludge monster even before he'd entered U.A., who'd won the first leg of the Sports Festival without using his quirk, who—people said—was so earnest and warm when they saw him on the street that he barely managed to say anything at all. Izuku just blushed, smiling like the sun.

Now that he was given the chance to speak, who wouldn't believe a boy like that?

Very few, apparently.

"Midoriya!"

Present Mic slid into the cafeteria almost a month later, landing in a pose by their table that had most of 1-A laughing and Aoyama taking notes. He pointed dramatically at Izuku, causing him to rear back in his seat.

"Um... yes?"

"You are never going to guess who I landed for my show this weekend. An extra special, extra cool, totally influential dude who is going to bring the house down!"

"Oh." Izuku suddenly leaned forward again, nearly sticking his elbow in his chicken. "Not All Might?!"

"What? No. He's been on, like, twenty times."

Izuku nodded. He knew. He'd listened to each and every interview. "Mt. Lady then? As the newcomer?"

"...no."

"Wait! Wait! It's Omen isn't it? I just heard that he saved a whole preschool from—"

"NO! That guy gives me the creeps." Mic rubbed at his arms, looking severely put out. "Jeez you're dense. It's you, kid."

The whole cafeteria was listening in at this point. No one spoke. There wasn't even the sound of a utensil scraping a plate. When Izuku found the strength to answer he nearly brought the whole building down around them.

"WHAT?!"

Jiro snorted into her rice. "You haven't been looking at your hit counter, have you?"
Saturday night. It was normally the height of criminal activity, but between All Might's move to the city and the League of Villains staking their claim, things had slowed down considerably, enough that Aizawa only felt slightly guilty about catching up on his grading. A stack of practice exams, a mug of tea, and Ashes winding around his ankles. This was the closest he came to peace nowadays.

He also had the radio tuned to Hizashi's station. Not because Aizawa was a ~Listener~. He was just too lazy to get up and change it.

"HELLO, MY WONDERFUL LISTENERS! ARE YOU OUT ON THE TOWN? COZY IN BED? DOESN'T MATTER, DOESN'T MATTER BECAUSE YOU'RE ALL TUNING IN! I'VE GOT A REAL TREAT FOR YOU TONIGHT. A PINT-SIZED SPROUT YOU'D ALL BE COOING OVER IF YOU COULD JUST SEE HIS FACE, BUT I GUESS YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO SETTLE FOR HIS... eh, sort of flimsy voice if I'm honest. BUT THAT'S FINE. TOTALLY COOL. LET'S GET THIS PARTY STAAAAAARTED!!"

"So stupid," Aizawa muttered. He made another mark on Shoji's exam, took a sip of his tea—

"I'VE GOT LITTLE MIDORIYA IZUKU HERE."

—and promptly spit it out.

"Ah... h-hello, everyone. It's such an honor to be on the show. Really!"

"YOU'RE A DEVOTED LISTENER TOO, RIGHT MIDORIYA?"

"Of course!"

"YEAH YOU ARE! NOT TOO SHABBY YOURSELF THOUGH, HUH? FOR THOSE OF YOU JUST TUNING IN—OR WHO HAVE SOMEHOW BEEN LIVING UNDER AN ALL MIGHT SIZED ROCK —THIS LITTLE DUDE HAS BEEN MAKING QUITE THE NAME FOR HIMSELF IN THE BLOG SPHERE THE LAST FEW WEEKS. A NUMBER OF... CONTROVERSIAL POSTS CHALLENGING THE STATUS OF OUR 'NUMBER TWO HERO.' AND YES, LISTENERS, I'VE GOT MY AIR QUOTES GOING. YOU'RE TURNING ALL SORTS OF HEADS WITH THOSE CLAIMS, MIDORIYA!"

"Well I wouldn't say that I—I'd never intended to—"

"AHHHHH HE'S BLUSHING, FOLKS! WATER'S RIGHT THERE, KID. TAKE YOUR TIME, TAKE YOUR TIME. WE'VE GOT AAAALLL NIGHT. NOW! I KNOW OUR FAITHFUL LISTENERS ARE JUST DYING TO HEAR MORE ABOUT YOUR THOUGHTS ON ENDEAVOR—THE RECENT RISE OF QUIRK VIGILANTES TOO, BASED ON THOSE BLOG COMMENTS—BUT. INDULGE YOUR HOST A LITTLE BIT FIRST."

"Y-yes. Absolutely! What about?"

"DO TELL US MORE ABOUT WHY THE MYSTERIOUS ERASER HEAD SHOULD BE OUR NUMBER TWO INSTEAD."

Aizawa didn't notice that he'd shattered the mug in his hand, tea running off the table and onto the floor where Ashes happily licked it up. He was staring at the small radio on his kitchen counter, quirk entirely useless here, but active nonetheless.

"Monday I'm killing them both."
Funny, how miracles happen.

What Izuku didn't realize when he first started his paper was that knowledge spirals, and truth, once spoken, is powerful indeed.

Toshi understood it. Even more than Aizawa. It was why he posed and smiled for the cameras, kissed every baby and signed every piece of paper, even before the fans could ask. Because they were heroes, yes, but they were only granted that title from the people they helped. They couldn't give it to themselves. And a hero, above all, made people feel safe.

Safety wasn't just punching out sludge monsters or pulling kids from burning buildings. There had to be trust too.

And the people trusted Izuku; trusted him enough to start questioning their trust in others.

He had a bad habit of ignoring the comments on his blog. As much as Izuku wanted to chat about, well, everything, a part of him was still too nervous to act as the authority; to face whatever judgement his readers had for him. It meant that Izuku missed the first wave when it came. The comments that, while emerging from many hands, all boiled down to the same message:

"fuck Endevor, holy SHIT. and eraser head?? nah. Why isn't this kid our Number Two?"

By the way, he forgot to mention that this is the story of how Izuku became a great and beloved hero.
Shampoo

Chapter Notes

It's been a heavy focus on dadzawa lately (not necessarily a bad thing??) so here, have some dad bonding instead

Concepts of beauty had changed drastically since the arrival of quirks. Where once humanity had obsessed over nose sizes and thigh gaps, the texture of a person's hair or just how symmetrical their face was, now, generations later, the concept of attraction had broadened considerably. How could it not, when so many people didn't even look human anymore? Most considered that growth to be one of their greatest advancements, well worth the loss of things like space travel.

Still. That wasn't to say that the concept of ugliness had been eradicated. Far from it, and Toshi was well aware that neither he nor Aizawa quite fit the concept of 'handsome.'

For a long time it was one of the few similarities he could find between them.

This though...

"Goodness, Shouta. When was the last time you took a bath?"

It slipped out. One of those quick, thoughtless comments that got easier when you were running on three hours of sleep and a constant stream of high-stress situations—which was exactly Toshi's life now. The sky outside U.A. had darkened considerably and they were, to his knowledge, the only two teachers left on campus. Toshi had passed through the lounge with the intent of just retrieving his lunchbox and had been unsurprised to find Aizawa still hard at work on the couch, a small mountain of papers spread out over crossed legs. It would have been a common enough scene if not for the smell.

Toshi was well familiar with the rank stench of bodies gone stale; both others' and his own after a particularly gruesome fight, where sweat and blood and even urine would combine into an assault on the senses. It wasn't anything to be ashamed of, just a little surprising to find in these hallowed halls on a calm, Tuesday afternoon. Aizawa smelled like a battlefield and it was just startling enough for Toshi to slip in his manners.
He tried to apologize a second later, only succeeding in coughing into his fist as embarrassment crawled up his throat. Luckily, Aizawa wasn't one to take offense for truthful statements. He shifted, just a sliver of eyes peering up at Toshi.

"Almost a week," he said, the truth startling Toshi enough that his coughing ceased. Slowly, Aizawa looked out through the window with a focus that would have read as self-conscious on anyone else. "Recovery Girl won't remove the bandages for another three days."

Ah.

Yes, Toshi could see how that would be a bit of a problem. Most seemed to believe that those with healing quirks provided cure-alls for the hero community, but as his reckless Midoriya had learned first hand, Recovery Girl only sped up a natural process, relying on the person's stamina to do the rest of the job. Aizawa didn't have any stamina, not after the beating he'd taken at USJ. He had to rely on good, old fashioned time.

And a fully bandaged head and torso didn't lend themselves to long soaks. Hell, Aizawa didn't even have use of his hands right now. Whatever work he thought he was doing in here—all alone, in a quickly darkening lounge—that had to be more for show than anything else. Aizawa wasn't the type to slack off, even if he had to 'work' simply by staring at the papers he couldn't mark yet.

Toshi found himself inching forward. It was stupid, but he got the same feeling as when he'd approached unstable villains in the past—those he could possibly talk down from a fight... but only if he was very, very careful. Toshi kept his shoulders loose and his hands visible at his sides. He focused in on the lank hair falling around Aizawa's shoulders.

"I could help with that," he said.

Oh, one of these days Toshi's mouth was really going to get him into trouble.

And that day was today.

Because in what goddamn universe was that an appropriate thing to say to a colleague? Help Aizawa with what, exactly? Bathing him? Putting it that way had a hysterical laugh bubbling up Toshi's throat and it took a Herculean effort to shove it back down. Yes, yes, yes he was sleep deprived and no doubt a little addled in his old age. Perhaps losing One for All had weakened his mind as well as his body, because Toshi couldn't think of any other reason why he'd go suggest
"Okay."

Okay?

"Okay," Toshi whispered. He held up a finger, pausing because dammit, the man was impossible to read on a normal day, let alone with his face entirely swathed in bandages. Toshi ending up standing there stupidly until Aizawa grunted in annoyance.

"...Right! I'll be back. Just—just don't move. Okay? I promise I'll be right back."

"Idiot," Toshi thought he heard, but by then he was already out the door.

U.A.'s campus really was too large, especially when one was trying to get off campus and over to the corner store two blocks away. Luckily, Toshi wasn't so frail yet that he couldn't indulge in an all-out sprint and long, lanky legs were good for this at least. Within twenty minutes he was back in the doorway of the lounge, a bag with shampoo and conditioner in one hand, his other trying to keep his remaining lung from exploding out of his chest.

"Sink," Toshi panted and Aizawa nodded, shuffling and using one arm to drag a chair with him.

They fell into silence after that, but it wasn't a silence that Toshi felt comfortable in just yet. Too new. Too...flimsy. He puttered over to his laptop and booted up some music, keeping it low and glancing frequently to make sure Aizawa didn't mind. If he did he wouldn't say. There were strains of the latest pop trend as Toshi made sure the sink was as clean as it ever was and got the water as hot as it would go. Aizawa settled in the chair with his head resting on the counter.

Toshi's lips twitched. "That can't be comfortable."

"It's fine."

"Nonsense. Here," and when Toshi slipped off his jacket to use as a cushion Aizawa didn't refuse it.
"I've done this before," he continued. Like the music, speaking just made things easier. It distracted him enough to actually touch Aizawa's hair, fanning it out under the water, spidery fingers being careful of the bandages up around his forehead and ears. "Tessa. Hero name Foxglove. She let me wash her hair too."

Aizawa made a humming sound in the back of his throat. His eyes had slipped shut. "Don't know her."

"Oh no, you wouldn't. An American hero, before your time... and like most she died young." Toshi's hands tightened a moment. They shook a little as he poured out the shampoo. "Most referred to her quirk as 'poison,' but it was more complicated than that. She was a flower, and like many she had her thorns. Every few weeks her hands would secrete a toxin—not unlike young Bakugo's nitroglycerin—and though her mentor crafted special gloves to protect others, they were rather cumbersome. Poor girl would get so frustrated..." Toshi trailed off into chuckles, eyes straying to Aizawa's own bandaged hands. "How... how have you been eating?"

Another grunt. "Straws."

"Ah."

The things they did as heroes. Everyone knew about what happened out on the streets, praised and often revered them for it... but few bothered to think through the aftermath, what came about once the villains were captured and the debris cleared away. Only someone who'd been there understood. How demeaning it could become.

One needed friends.

As such, Toshi was hyper-aware of the strands between his fingers. He took his time untangling them, gently rubbing conditioner in and keeping the water comfortably warm. When the coughing started up again Toshi did it as quietly as he could, mouth hard pressed into his shoulder, because as the minutes passed he could swear that...

"Shouta?"

Yes. The only response he got was deep breathing behind the bandages. What a liar. Aizawa spent so much time criticizing U.A. and the pros and especially All Might in particular, yet it was only here
that he continually slept. For the men who tensed at every bang and kept knives beneath their pillows, that said a great deal.

Toshi slowed his movements; remembering the past; overly grateful for this future, so much so that he had to close his own eyes as something fierce raced through his chest. This was rare. Worth treasuring. He'd spend as long as he could untangling the mess Aizawa had made of his hair, washing and re-washing it until the water went cold. Anything that would give them both an excuse to stay in this peaceful pocket just a little while longer.

After all, heroes needed their rest to heal.
Hello all! A few quick notes:

1. I decided to break this drabble up into two parts, just because I don't have time to write it all tonight. I figured I had dragged this poor OC enough in the other drabbles that I should probably introduce him!

2. I LOVE YOU ALL (this should have been point #1) and am working to catch up on answering beautiful comments. Apologies that I'm slow af, but I will respond to everyone in time :)

3. Speaking of being slow, chapters will slow considerably from here on out. Considering that I nearly died finishing six Secret Santas this holiday, I'm actually rather proud that I kept my goal of doing a drabble every day up through the 5th (woo!) Sadly though I'm traveling tomorrow, in meetings Sunday, school kicks into high gear Monday... and I've been seriously neglecting all my other fandoms. So all of this is just to say that I am by NO means abandoning this collection, but updates really will be random now, depending on time and energy lol.

Anyway - enjoy! <3

"Just as a heads up, Omen will be on campus later today."

The response was immediate and Aizawa waited for all the reactions to die down. A little dramatic for his taste, but perhaps not entirely unwarranted. When the kids were mostly done whispering and gasping he raised his hand for total silence. For once he actually got it.

"He's meeting with Nedzu and the other hero professors at 4:00, so he'll be passing through the main hall starting at 3:45. Or hell, maybe a little earlier. I don't know. The guy is still human." Aizawa flapped another hand at the outcry that got. "I'll be attending the meeting so the day will end early at 3:00. If you don't want to get caught up in his quirk then don't stay here. It's as simple as that. But I won't have any of you treating him like some sideshow attraction either. Conduct yourself in a manner befitting U.A. Got it?"

They got it. It wasn't just Iida taking things seriously; even Bakugo nodded his understanding and Aizawa took a moment to appreciate the utter solemnity that had befallen his class. He'd sure as hell never experience this again.

"Alright. If anyone needs to talk about it further... I'm not going anywhere."

It was the closest thing to comfort that Aizawa knew how to give and his kids ate it up, a few of them going so far as to melt back into their seats, relief washing over their faces. It shouldn't come to that though. He had every expectation that by 3:15 they'd all be long gone.

If they were smart, anyway.

"English next. Yamada will be here in a minute."
"Do you think Present Mic will let us out early?" Yaoyorozu asked, voice carrying high above the others'. When she glanced at the clock everyone else followed her lead, like they were afraid it had suddenly jumped ahead an hour without them realizing. "I don't want to get caught up in..." A vague gesture finished her thought. "You know."

Kaminari was already nodding. "Tell me about it. I got a cousin, lives outside the city—used to anyway. He met Omen and...well..." Like Yaoyorozu he twisted a finger around his temple, letting gestures convey what words could not. "He lost it when I was about two. Never the same after that, I swear."

It was Tokoyami who leaned forward, his eyes narrowed. "If you were only two when they met how do you know your cousin changed so drastically? What if he's simply always been that way?"

"Because my mom said so!"

"Your mother sounds gullible."

"You—!"

"Hey, hey, hey!" Iida got between the two of them, arms raised high above his head. He waited until Dark Shadow had closed his beak and the static electricity had died down. "Fighting among ourselves is not appropriate behavior! Actions befitting this institution, remember? Besides," Iida took his glasses off to wipe them on his shirt. He only succeeded in leaving sweat stains. "I too think it best that we leave as soon as class is finished. As a group." A number of other students concurred.

Tokoyami scowled. "It just don't think it's befitting to assume that another hero's quirk is evil." None of them missed the hand he drew down Dark Shadow's flank. "Fear like this is..." Tokoyami shook his head.

"Natural?" Kirishima snapped. Behind him Mineta yelled out his agreement. "I'm not saying the dude is evil, but I sure as hell don't want him near me!"

"Why?" Tokoyami challenged.

"You know why!"

"So you wouldn't want someone else with a similar quirk near you either? How is that okay?"

"There isn't anyone."

Those who'd been leaning too close together finally pulled back, turning to face Izuku instead. He'd muttered the soft comment almost to himself, staring hard down at his latest journal, only lifting his gaze when he realized that the rest of the class was waiting for more. Izuku gently touched the pages. "There isn't anyone else like Omen out there," he clarified. "It's not just what he does, but how he does it." Izuku ran a hand through his hair, trying to explain. "It's... passive."

"Passive?" Uraraka whispered.

"Uh huh. I mean, you decide when to use your quirk, right?" He waited as a number of his classmates thought that through, eventually nodding. "Uraraka, you decide when to make something float. Or Todoroki, you choose when to create ice... or fire." Todoroki slid a little down in his seat, but he didn't refute Izuku's point. "That control is really important, right? It's what has kept our
society from descending into chaos with quirks and, I think at least, what separates the heroes from the villains. Not the kind of quirk you end up with, but what you choose to do with it."

Izuku stared down at his own hands. He could feel One for All thrumming through his veins, even now. Untapped power that was still too much for his body the handle, but for him control could be learned.

"There's differences, I guess," he said. "Like, Tsuyu, Shoji, Ashido, you guys can't help how you look. Just because you can, say, control when you use your acid doesn't mean you can suddenly turn your skin a color other than pink."

"Why would I want to?" Ashido grinned. The joke fell flat though.

"Endeavor can't turn his flames off, but he decides whether to wield them as a weapon. Present Mic can't change his voice, but he can stop himself from yelling. Things like that. All our quirks are active skills in one manner or another, except—" Izuku's eyes suddenly widened. He whipped his head until he found the floating uniform behind Iida. "Hagakure! Your quirk might actually be the closest to Omen's."

The jacket and tie reared backwards. "Me?" she squeaked.

"Mm hmm. At least structurally. You can't make yourself visible, can you?"

"N-no."

"So you have less control over your quirk than we do," Izuku said it slowly, testing the hypothesis on the tip of his tongue. "In some ways it's more a part of you than ours' are. Sure, our quirks are always there, but we get to decide whether they'll be a part of our lives each and every day. You don't... and neither does Omen. For him it's there whether he wants it or not."

Everyone chewed on that. Even Tokoyami deflated.

"That sounds rough," Uraraka murmured. "But... isn't anyone at least a little bit interested? I can't be the only one who's curious. Right?" She gnawed at her lip, shrugging.

They could hear footsteps faintly down the hall as Yamada approached. No one answered her, but in the last moments before class started Bakugo let out a huff, slamming his chair down and startling them all.

"Not me," he said, crackles going off within closed fists.

Uraraka blinked. "Oh? Um, why?"

"Because I already know my future."

And really, no one could argue with that.
Omen (2)

Chapter Notes

Hello, all! A number of useful notes about this drabble are at the bottom <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Hizashi’s not coming?"

"No. Wasn't up for it."

"Thirteen?"

Aizawa shook his head and there wasn't anything judgmental in his gaze, just a calm acceptance of the situation and his friends' decisions. Yagi traced fingers over the back of his chair before finally pulling it out, noticing the tremble. He'd be a liar if he said he hadn't thought about skipping this meeting as well. From a practical standpoint Nedzu didn't need them here—he could relay any pertinent information later—but he'd given it thought and come to the staggering conclusion that he was overthinking things. When push came to shove the Symbol of Peace should be there for every decision; each move they made in their little chess game against All for One.

And, perhaps, Yagi still felt like he had something to prove.

"Here you are," Nedzu murmured, sliding a hot mug of tea his way. Still the same chipper tone and smile, but Yagi caught a tension in his boss' frame that wasn't normally there, something unexpected in the dip of his shoulders. The three of them were the only ones taking up space in the vast conference room. When Yagi raised the cup to drink his movements were overly loud.

"Thank you, Nedz—oh."

And all at once it began. Aizawa had seen it too. Throwing back his chair with hands already pulling at his scarf, his eyes flashed momentarily red... but then everything stilled. Because what could they do? Still, Yagi found himself surging forward as well, breath coming to a stuttering halt. The hand he waved in front of Nedzu's face wasn't acknowledged. His eyes had gone blank and milky white. Unseeing.
Though of course, that wasn't accurate either.

"How long does this normally last?" Aizawa bit out. His voice was ragged in the silence and Yagi could only shake his head.

"Not long in my experience. I hope. He must be close by then..."

No sooner had Yagi said it then the door slid open, giving Aizawa his first glimpse of Omen in person. Yagi was glad that he and Nedzu both had briefed him beforehand because even having met the man a number of times over the years, Yagi still felt his insides bottoming out each time he did, never quite growing used to that face. Or the lack of one, really.

Omen stood at nearly seven feet and wore a simple, gray suit, a small clipping of fresh reseda always sticking out of the buttonhole. Like Yagi, Omen's limbs were long and gangly, giving him the awkward look of someone who'd never quite grown into their body. Bald, with angular, almost sunken cheeks. All of it would have made Omen someone fascinating to look at if the rest of him had simply been there.

Rumors said that the man had blue eyes at birth, but they were long gone now. There was nothing but smooth flesh down past his forehead, no nose either... only a slim mouth that was stitched together with what looked like a thread made of skin. No one had ever seen Omen eat or drink, nor did he seem to breathe. Yagi watched the man's chest carefully, but if there was a rise and fall there, he couldn't detect it. Even without eyes he moved through the world like he knew what it held for him.

For hours now Yagi had been gearing up to shake a fellow hero's hand. Now, when it came down to it his arm wouldn't move.

Pathetic.

Nedzu's gasp saved him the embarrassment. He had two moods in Yagi's experience—unfailingly kind, or gleefully maniacal—so the distressed look crossing his features was something new that Yagi filed away for later study. Nedzu was bent over the table now, one paw shooting up when Aizawa made to move closer.

"I'm fine," he told them, whispering it. "That... was rather awful, though sadly not anything useful
for this meeting. Omen.” When Nedzu looked up the smile had returned, even if it was a little sickly. “It’s good to see you again.” No one really believed the words.

Omen inclined his head though and moved to take a seat.

Yagi followed, fairly collapsing back into his own chair. There were so many quirks in the world, things that deviated and contradicted and baffled scientist at every turn, but nothing was quite like this. In morbid moments such as these Yagi sometimes wondered what it must have been like for Omen’s parents, a child who lost their features and then beginning to emit... this. Visions of the future. None of them good. Despite the word’s dual meaning, it was clear that whoever had given Omen his hero name was well aware of the common usage: a foreboding glimpse of what was to come. Ill intent on the horizon.

It might have been a powerful tool had Omen been able to control when and for who he prophesied, or even if he had a sense of when the visions would occur. As it was, what he and the target saw might happen in a day, a month, a year... maybe never at all, depending on the choices people made. That, more than anything was what seemed to unnerve people. The ambiguity. Could they avoid whatever fate they’d seen? When would they know if they had?

Yagi’s hands dug into the material of his pants. It was information without context, a power that could cripple other heroes as easily as villains. No, the only one Omen’s power was useful to was Nedzu, the sole person who could see all the threads and, just maybe, make use of a single puzzle piece.

Even a horrible one.

By now Omen had drawn out a leather journal, the same one he’d used to communicate when Yagi had seen him briefly a year before. He’d only caught sight of the cover then and now, looking down at lists of half conversations, Yagi was struck by how beautiful his handwriting was.

"You wrote in your letter that you think some of your recent visions might connect to the League of Villains?” Nedzu prompted, voice sweet as honey once more. Omen nodded, bending slowly over his journal to scribble something out. Yagi leaned forward to try and make out the words and he—

—was sprawled out on the ground somewhere, dirt and small scrapes littering his forearms. Yagi’s body ached and what little breath he had was gone, like he’d just taken a hit to the stomach, a shove, a push... he managed to look up and there was young Midoriya in front of him, his body shielding Yagi from whatever was ahead. He couldn’t see his student’s arms, or his right leg—only his left because it was bent backwards towards Yagi at an unnatural angle. They were a hair’s breadth from
one another. The green of Midoriya's costume filled Yagi's vision. He caught the exact moment the boy began to turn, glancing over his shoulder.

Oh god, but he'd never seen Midoriya smile like that before—

With a gasp Yagi was dumped back into the conference room, still feeling the phantom pain; the cold mud coating his arms and the stunning warmth of Midoriya's back. Choking, he scrambled a moment, latching onto the familiar faces and the weight of being here. Aizawa was once more out of his chair, this time with his eyes fully trained on Omen. Yagi saw the glint of red there and knew he couldn't have been in the vision for more than a few seconds.

Yet it had felt much, much longer.

"You okay?" Aizawa muttered. Yagi nodded hurriedly, gesturing for him to release their guest. It was rather apparent now why he'd insisted on attending this meeting.

Omen only sat hunched in his seat. Carefully—as if knowing how his own, quick movements might be interpreted—he raised a fist to his chest and circled it twice.

Sorry.

Yagi mustered up a smile.

“It’s fine, Omen. Really.”

It was fine, of course. After all, it wasn’t as if he hadn’t seen young Midoriya with a broken leg before. They’d weathered worse and they’d get through that moment too—if it came at all.

"Perhaps we should hurry this along," Nedzu said.

Sensible. Nothing to worry over.

Yet Yagi didn't hear much for the rest of the meeting.
Escaping outside was more of a relief than he would have admitted aloud.

Late afternoon and the sun was still shining overhead. Yagi staggered out to the fields behind U.A.'s main building, coughing blood into his hand and trying to remember how to breathe. Nedzu had kept the rest of the meeting short and curt, though Aizawa had still seen something as well, a horrible two minutes where none of them could bring him out of it. Omen's head had been bowed the whole time, reliving whatever it was Aizawa saw, and when it was finished he signed something that Yagi's basic knowledge didn't have a translation for. It didn't do much good. Logic and intent didn't matter after a while. Things became too claustrophobic, everyone just waiting until Aizawa constantly had his hands around his weapon and Yagi found himself biting at his nails, a habit he thought he'd dropped decades ago.

The sky was... a relief.

Apparently for others too.

Leaning against the building's wall, turning to continue his walk, Yagi froze in place as he caught sight of Omen, now seated on one of the benches beside the training field. He'd left before the rest of them—creating space—and clearly felt the same joy in being out in the open now. From this distance Yagi could just make out that how his head was titled back, blank face raised towards the sun.

Go talk to him, you coward.

Maybe Omen wanted to be left alone. Yagi didn't know much sign language. He had nothing to write with. Omen might not take kindly to someone else scribbling in his journal... the excuses were numerous and flimsy, but they bought just enough time for someone else to beat Yagi to it.

He squinted at the sudden form approaching from the other side, surprised that any student was still on campus. It took a moment for the sun's glare to pass by and for Yagi to recognize—

"Koda?"
Yes, he was unmistakable now. Yagi's first urge was to rush out, but by then Omen was already doing that for him. He raised a pale hand to halt the young student's progress, no doubt wanting him to stay out of whatever his quirk's range was. Koda indeed hesitated. His large form shrank, curling around a sketchbook and pencil case. That’s right. The boy liked to draw the animals around U.A.’s boarders, didn't he? He did have a talent for getting perfect models.

Omen signed something Yagi didn't understand, though his body language made it clear he was shooing Koda away. Far from deterring the boy though Koda's face positively lit up at the gestures. He scrambled to tuck his sketchbook under one arm, signing something back.

Omen went still.

Koda continued signing, approaching once more, and though Omen's language became more frantic the young man didn't lessen his pace. He was almost to the bench when his body suddenly went still in a manner that Yagi was beginning to recognize. Omen immediately dropped his hands, shoulders slumping. Koda was lost in some vision for roughly a minute before he stumbled out of it.

He moved forward again.

Yagi didn't know who was more shocked, himself or Omen, but the man was expressing a hell of a lot of disbelief for someone without eyes or a moving mouth to do so. From this angle Koda looked shaken, but he still plopped himself down onto the bench nonetheless, signing something that had Omen rearing back. He made a curt gesture; Koda shook his head. Another, the same. More forceful refusal. From a distance there were parallels shown only to Yagi: two heroes sharing the same space, legs crossed, a journal on each lap... shy and tentative in their own ways.

Then Koda did what Yagi had been unable to do. Koda held out his hand for a shake.

And Omen took it. Slow and hesitant, yes... but out of all the things people had called him, 'coward' wasn't one of them.

Yagi watch with his mouth hanging open. He observed the one gesture in all this that he truly understood and felt a kind of peace settling in the center of his chest. Moving backwards, careful not to be seen, Yagi left them with a smile on his face—the first in hours.

And they dared to call him the greatest hero.
Chapter End Notes

1. Yes, we're trying out "Yagi" this time around :)
2. I don't know anything about Japanese Sign Language, so what little is described here derives from ASL instead.
3. According to my very cursory research reseda (the plant) can mean "worth."
4. Canonically I don't know if mutations are always present at birth, but I like the idea that you could have a 'normal' child and then watch their physique suddenly change around age four.
5. The vision Yagi sees is 100% AU, a thoroughly self-indulgent idea that I may or may not write sometime.
6. I will refrain from dumping lost of OCs on you all in the future (I know that's not why people come to read fic) and I'll absolutely be writing fluff next!
"Okay, okay, here's one: what's the worst shit you ever pulled as a kid? With your quirk I mean."
Kirishima grinned down the lunch table, raising a hand and hardening it from fingers to wrist. "See, I was a bit crazy back then—"

"Then?" Jiro said, sipping at her juice.

"—and I figured, 'Hey wow! I'm hard as a rock! I am a rock. Basically. That must mean I'm indestructible, yeah?'"

"...rocks aren't indestructible," Izuku murmured. No one seemed to hear him though except Koda who realized where this was going first, frantically shaking his head before ducking down under one arm. Kirishima just grinned all the wider.

"So yeah I'm five, dumb, and I like to test things. Great combination. My dad, he's super into crafts and stuff, right? And he has this ancient paper press down in his workshop, one with these super heavy boards that you can crank together with a lever..."

"I've heard enough," Yaoyorozu snapped. She slapped a hand over Kirishima's mouth to keep him from saying anymore. What managed to escape was a delighted laugh. "Honestly, didn't you pay any attention in kindergarten? Our quirks develop with age, just like the rest of us!"

Tsuyu smiled though. She leaned forward, a little overly eager. "So how many fingers did you break, Kirishima?"

He escaped Yaoyorozu long enough to say over her arm, "All of them! Crushed like fine powder, they had to take me to a special healer—"

"Enough!"

As Yaoyorozu worked on beating Kirishima with her bread Iida gave a delicate cough, pushing his
glasses back into place. "Though it seems foolish now, I suppose we were all like that as children. I too had many moments where I used my quirk irresponsibly. Why, I recall one time where I hadn't quite figured out how to stop yet and... well. Mrs. Izumi's flowerbeds were never the same after that. And I, uh, eventually stopped with the help of a wall..."

Uraraka was giggling madly into her hands as Ojiro cast Iida an unimpressed look. "So what you're saying is the worst thing you ever did was stuff every kid does?"

"Certainly not!"

"Destroying flowerbeds and running into things? C'mon, Iida."

Ashido had a whole bunch of greens sticking out of her mouth, but she was pointing madly at Iida and nodding. When she managed to swallow the mouthful she reached up to clap him on the shoulder.

"You're a goody-goody," she said happily. "I used my acid to skate off the roof once, fell through a hole I made during a temper tantrum, burned holes in my mom's clothes when I was mad at her, slipped a little acid into this asshole girl's soup..."

Most of the class was looking at her with horror. ("That's not legal!?" Izuku cried), but Tsuyu seemed rather pleased.

"I had an asshole boy," she said, tapping at her chin. "One day I regurgitated my stomach into his lap at recess. He wasn't an asshole anymore."

There was silence around the table.


Just as slowly Koda fingerspelled and when they caught it half the table groaned.

"Cockroaches," Yaoyorozu threw down her napkin. "Yuck! And I've officially lost my appetite. Aren't you afraid of bugs?"

Koda's shrug said it all: desperate times, desperate measures.

Ojiro shook his head. "I'm actually a compete hypocrite. I was a goody-goody too. Worst thing I ever did...?" He stared down at his lunch, considering. "I mean, I smacked a few people with my tail, sure, but beyond that? Worst thing was the embarrassment." Ojiro suddenly grinned, a sloppy thing that was half sheepish, half fond. "Mom and Dad couldn't always afford altered clothes, so I usually just kept my tail tucked down one side of my pant leg. It grew pretty fast though and had a tendency to... put strain on the garment."

"Please tell me there's a picture of baby you out there with his pants split," Sero whispered.

"There are multiple pictures, I'm sure."

Uraraka held up a finger. "Don't mind me. I'm just going to make a note to check up on that later..."

"You're shameless!" Iida cried.

"You already knew that?"
"If she's shameless then I'm shameless too," Jiro said, quite literally writing a reminder down in her planner. Yaoyorozu stared at her in utter defeat.

"Hardly. I was a good girl," she sniffed. "I went to school, studied chemical composition, and never made anything I wasn't supposed to."

Hagakure leaned forward for the first time. A floating spoon pointed sharply at Yaoyorozu. "Liar. You told me you made jewelry for a whole month once."

"That— they were gifts!"

"Was it though? Was it really? I mean, I snuck into all sorts of places! I don't think it's anything to be ashamed of. It's a part of learning, and growing up, and..." The spoon waved a bit. "Something, something meaningful, I guess."

"You guess?" Ashido asked, but Hagakure was already distracted by Tsuyu's untended dessert.

Jiro lifted her glass. "Here, here. We should have some fun every once in a while. I used to eavesdrop on conversations all the time. Didn't hurt anyone in the long run, and a bit of gossip is good for the soul." She smirked, downing her drink. "You can catch me listening in, twenty-four seven."

Tokoyami shook his head. "I'm with Yaoyorozu on this one. Our quirks should be handled responsibly. What we did as children can't be undone, but now, as U.A. students, we are looked upon as role models—and we should behave accordingly."

Iida's karate chop down on the table made all the silverware rattle. He nodded furiously.

"Are you crying?" Uraraka whispered.

"You only say that because your quirk isn't good for mischief," Kaminari said, shaking a fist. "I should know. Only thing I managed to do was blow out my block's electricity for three days. That's not fun, that's boring."

"You're boring no matter what you do," Jiro said and had to dodge the crackers Kaminari threw at her face.

"Well, I have faith in Todoroki and Uraraka at least," Yaoyorozu said primly. She straightened a little in her seat. "You two never did anything awful, right?"

There was silence on both ends of the table.

"Oh god, what did you do."

They both opened their mouths to speak, spotted the other, went quiet again. After another awkward few seconds Uraraka shooed at Todoroki to go first. He shrugged.

"The blizzard five years ago," He said. That seemed to be all he was willing to offer. Kirishima leaned forward, poking him in the arm.

"Dude. The one that shut down the city for, like, a week?"

Todoroki shrugged again. "I was... dealing with a lot that winter." The pokes turned into surprisingly kind pats.

"You gave us so many snow days," Ashido said reverently. There were considering nods all around.
Uraraka was the only one not staring at Todoroki with either fear or awe in their eyes. She'd buried her face in her hands instead, cheeks a cherry red.

Izuku chuckled. He tried to peak between her fingers. "What did you do?"

"... I don't want to say."

"C'mon. It can't be as bad as the stuff Bakugo pulled when we were kids. He blew up the gym once."

That seemed to comfort her a bit. Uraraka gave a weary sigh, reappearing to stare down at her plate instead. The first thing she muttered was so soft none of them caught it.

"What was that?"

"I said I sent our neighbor's cat into space." Uraraka snapped her mouth shut, managing to go even redder in the cheeks. "Accidentally!" she hurried to clarify. "I was petting him and made him weightless and I didn't know how to release yet and—" she flapped her hands, returning to hide behind them as her feet stomped instead. A very faint, "I'm so sorry," could be heard.

"Holy hell, Infinity Girl," Kirishima whispered and Tokoyami jabbed him in the ribs.

"What about you, Midoriya?" Iida asked. He was casting Uraraka worried looks, clearing trying to move the conversation away from childhood traumas. "Surely with your incredible strength you got into all sorts of mischief."

"Yeah," Kaminari said slowly. "You're such a mess every time you fight, I'm surprised you didn't die as a kid! How many bones did you break anyway? Way more than Kirishima I bet."

Tsuyu was nodding. "That couldn't have been easy, Midoriya. Though I suspect that your similar quirks increased your respect for All Might, yes?"

"Hey, I bet that's why you latched onto him! Besides being the Number One Hero, of course."

Half the table voiced their opinions as Izuku slid down in his seat. There wasn't anywhere to hide though and within seconds his friends were turning back to him, demanding the kind of story from his childhood that he just didn't have. What was he supposed to tell them? That he'd once jumped off the jungle-gym thinking he might fly? Or nearly drowned seeing if he could breathe underwater? For a long time Izuku had been unable—flat out incapable—of taking the doctor at his word, and that had lead to a long period of rather dangerous experimentation, trying desperately to find his hidden quirk; something that he just knew needed the right environment to become apparent. It didn't happen, of course. Within three years his mom was a nervous wreck and all Izuku had were his journals and a small collection of scars.

His friends though... Their stories were funny because they were normal; the kind of mistakes that quirk kids really did make, the things you looked back on with glee once it was over. Despite having a quirk now, Izuku wasn't so sure that his memories had suddenly become joyous.

He slid even further down in his seat, bowing under all the stares. Though he hated to do it, Izuku had resigned himself to coming up with a little white lie... when a heavy hand fell on his shoulder.

"Strength? Ha! I had that beat from day one. My poor mom and dad had permanent hearing loss by the time I was two."

Izuku looked up. Mic and Aizawa had suddenly appeared to hover over their group, books tucked
under one arm while their right hands hung free. It had become standard procedure since USJ for the teachers to make rounds throughout the day, crossing students' paths out on the grounds, in the halls or the cafeteria. This was the first time Izuku had seen them join a conversation though. Present Mic’s smiling face was directly above his head and the hand on his shoulder, solid and a little tight, conveyed that everything—even the small things—were all right now. He reminded Izuku strongly of All Might in that moment.

Or perhaps it was the other way around?

Regardless, his friends were instantly enthralled. Iida leaned forward over the table, his eyes a little buggy behind his glasses.

"You were born with your quirk, Sensei? That's rare! And perhaps, ah..."

"Unfortunate?" Mic finished. He finger-gunned at the lot of them, nodding. "Sure it was! Course, I was just a little tyke who couldn't help myself, all babies cry, am I right? But ooooh boy. All that screaming... I brought the house down even as a babe—literally!"

Mic posed for them, causing a handful of giggles to ripple over the group. Aizawa just stared at him with distaste.

"You never stopped screaming," he muttered.

"Nope! Hey, at least I'm honest about it. This guy pulled all sorts of shit in school, not that he'll admit to it now."

Aizawa's eye twitched as Mic threw an arm over his shoulders. "Lies."

"Ooooh? So you're saying you didn't convince half our classmates that they were somehow losing their quirks? Or, what was it..." Mic stared up at the ceiling, considering. "...ah, that's right. I recall a certain curious second-year trying his quirk out on himself with the help of a mirror. How long did the migraines last again? Two weeks?"

Aizawa's expression was mostly unreadable, though Izuku thought he caught the slightest upturn to his lips. "There were no migraines."

"Course there weren't."

It was the final boost he needed. Hagakure seemed to be standing up now, her uniform floating over Sero's head as she tried to get Mic's attention, babbling that she'd been born with her quirk too and her parents had lost her a bunch, isn't that funny? The girls' voices rose as they demanded more of that story while Tokoyami lead the boys in trying to interrogate Aizawa... without making it seem like that was exactly what they were doing. Eventually Mic just pulled up a chair—shoving Aizawa into another—and Izuku finally felt himself relaxing again.

And near the end of the lunch hour there a moment, a small one, where Aizawa caught his eye. This time there was definitely a smile.

Thanks.
Surprise chapter! I 100% should not have procrastinated with writing today, but I had this sudden image last night and it wouldn't leave me alone. So here. Enjoy the short stupidity.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

This was getting out of hand.

For once Aizawa seemed to be in total agreement with him, scowling out over the small sea of reporters, his hands twitching like they wanted to grab hold of his scarf. Granted, he always looked like he was on the negative end of the emotional spectrum, but Yagi had known the man long enough to spot the subtle differences: lanker hair, a restlessness in his legs. He'd heard the jokes going around that Yamada had wanted to treat the last pack of journalists like trespassing villains. Give Aizawa another five minutes and he might just do it.

Yagi held up placating hands. If it also allowed him to act as a barrier between the reporters and his exhausted colleague, all the better.

"Please," he said. "The school day will be starting any moment. This really isn't the time to be—"

"It's never the time with you lot," a woman accused. She just toed the line of U.A.'s barrier, her microphone held high like a weapon, ready to snatch up any wayward comments they might drop. "You wouldn't let us speak with All Might when he first began teaching here and now that he's fought on school grounds you're still denying us a comment?" She planted her heels. "The public has a right to know what happened in the USJ facility. Who exactly is this League? What are their motives? Are you pleased with your decision to hire All Might? You sir, were those injuries sustained during the battle?"

Yagi felt Aizawa twitching behind him. He tried to fully block his friend from the cameras.

"All Might will give a statement later," he said firmly. "Not while school is in session."

Or rather, he'd give a statement when he was capable of appearing. If Yagi had been able he would
have left and returned within moments, allowing All Might to field any questions while Aizawa escaped to class, but a late night villain—too close to his apartment for Yagi to ignore—had ate up his time for today. The irony, of course, was inescapable. Here these people were clamoring for All Might, completely unaware that he was right in front of them—the rail-thin man who they passed their gaze over, dismissive. None of them had even asked his name or what Yagi supposedly taught here.

He wasn't sure if he was grateful.

"Ah—! You there, students!"

One reporter's cry was picked up by the others and this time Yagi had to physically restrain Aizawa as he surged forward, a rather insulting string of words emanating from under his breath. Hand on his arm, Yagi could feel how tired he was—how much pain he must still be in—and this, more than anything, had the ability to rile him up. Aizawa had always looked upon the media frenzy with distaste. Like hell would he let it descend upon his students.

Yagi couldn't agree more. Someday soon there would be training for situations just like these... but not today. The kids didn't need this right now.

"Take them to class," he murmured. "I'll handle this. I'll handle it..."

It was the sort of phrase that normally would have had Aizawa side-eyeing him in a manner capable of causing Yagi to cower. Now though he just seemed too grateful to care whether he could, in fact, handle a mob of reporters as Toshinori. Maybe Yagi should have been insulted. Or at least a little annoyed.

He just felt relief though, watching Aizawa quickly herd most of 1-A away from the main entrance. Yagi briefly caught Izuku's eye and gave him a wave. The one he got back sent warmth blazing through his chest.

"Oh c'mon." The woman who'd been accosting them finally lowered her microphone. "At least let us talk to the survivors."

Yagi focused a sharp look her way. She actually took a step back. "I don't appreciate your word choice. You should all leave. Your presence isn't helping the students recover from what, I can only imagine, was a rather traumatizing event."
The woman had the gall to actually scoff at him. She gestured at 1-A in the distance. "I don't see any of them crying about it. They can answer a few questions. It won't kill them."

Which was when the delicate cough sounded behind him.

U.A.'s barrier ensured that there was always a few feet between the teachers and the media, and the barrier extended just enough that a person could stand behind the edge on the inside, hidden from view. When Yagi slid his gaze over there was, sure enough, one straggler hiding in the barrier's shadow.

Young Ashido?

She was leaning casually, examining her nails and looking for all the world like she was just out for a laid-back stroll. It made her next, whispered words all the stranger; entirely disconnected from her appearance.

"Hey...did you know that I can cry on command?"

What?

And before Yagi could even begin processing that Ashido began to howl.

The reporters stumbled back en masse as she rounded the corner, voice pitched high and loud as her eyes immediately welled up with tears. Yagi was equally stunned, trying to follow this turn of events as Ashido gripped at her hair. She swayed a little, quite literally shrieking, big, fat tears rolling off her cheeks in waves.

"Why are you all so mean?" she cried, causing the woman to gap unbecomingly. "We j-just got back and it was s-s-so scary and we thought we were gonna die and now you—you—"

She cut off with a particularly awful wail, throwing herself into Yagi's arms. He dug his legs in to keep standing—goodness the girl was sturdy—and instinctually moved to pat her head, the other curling around her shoulders. Yagi could feel Ashido soaking the front of his shirt, long, hiccuping sobs echoing in the morning air. It didn't escape his or the reporters' notice how young she appeared
in this moment. Tiny legs trembled and she curled closer like he was the only thing left to protect her.

Yagi had just enough brain power left to glare over the top of her head. It wasn't hard.

"As I said: I think you should leave."

And thank Mina Ashido, they actually did.

The second they were out of range Ashido lifted her head, sniffing loudly and wiping carefully at her eyes. Amazingly her makeup still seemed to be in order. She beamed at his expression. "Told you! Crying is easy. Did it all the time as a kid. Hey wait... who are you again? I've seen you around here, but..."

"Yagi," Yagi said dumbly.

"Cool! Nice to meet you, Yagi-sensei. You ever need me to scare off some more reporters just let me know. You looked a little out of your depth there, and I'm training to be a hero, aren't I?" The light punch she aimed at his arm brought a smile back to his face.

"Indeed. Thank you, Ashido. If there's anything I can do—"

"Yeeehah. How about a note? Aizawa is gonna kick my ass for being late."

That he could most assuredly provide, and if in the note Yagi invited Aizawa to have lunch with him in the lounge today, that was only because he suddenly had a story to share.

Chapter End Notes

For the record: Yagi on campus is kind of hilarious to me? Because who is he?? I imagine that the students just see this random, sickly guy around who hangs with the staff but never seems to teach any classes... how strange and mysterious.
A knock on his door at 8:00pm was a rare occurrence. So rare, in fact, that Aizawa grabbed his scarf and goggles from the couch before approaching the door.

There were, total, perhaps six people who knew where he lived, none of which were in the habit of making unexpected house calls. If there was an emergency of some kind Aizawa would have gotten an alert on his phone. If the power was out or the lines down, Nedzu would use one of his many contacts with an electrical quirk to push through it. If that wasn't possible he'd call Akemi instead—a quick burst of telepathy to draw all heroes to a central location. There was no family to show up on his doorstep, he'd never spoken with the neighbors, there were certainly no packages this late in the day... By the time Aizawa had his hand on the door he'd convinced himself that there was nothing good waiting for him behind the wood.

In a way he was right. And wrong.

"...Thirteen," he muttered. Aizawa let his quirk drop. "What the hell."

It was hard to tell with the helmet, but Thirteen kind of looked like they too would like to know what the hell. They hunched protectively over a small box in their arms, the suit's gloves hiding the contents from view, and at Aizawa's words Thirteen began shifting from foot to foot, agitated.

"I'm so very sorry to bother you at home," they said. "Truly I am, but Ishiyama doesn't have the, ah... softest touch and I love the man, truly, but I wouldn't trust Yamada with this as far as I can throw him, and poor Yagi is still just getting settled in I couldn't possibly impose—"

A dim part of Aizawa's mind noted that he, apparently, could be imposed upon, but he was more interested in the fact that Thirteen was rambling. They'd always been long-winded, but he'd never
heard them run their mouth without context before. It was a waste of time and he finally just raised a hand for silence, leaning forward to peer into the box.

The most bedraggled kitten he'd ever seen looked back at him.

As light blue eyes tried staring him down Aizawa remembered that inviting someone in was usually customary. Especially when it was freezing as fuck outside.

He pointed. "Can you safely take off your boots?"

"...Yes."

"Then do it," and Aizawa marched back inside, leaving the door wide open.

***

It made a strange sort of sense once Thirteen explained. In fact, the logic was so simple that Aizawa kicked himself for not realizing it sooner.

Thirteen was a rescue hero.

Not everyone survived the disasters they appeared at, despite their best intentions.

And the dead left behind plenty of pets.

"It's always chaos," Thirteen said, sitting primly on Aizawa's couch. They fiddled with one of the flips on their fingers in a manner that was both endearing and rather...unnerving. "Of course, everyone is worried about human lives first—I hardly blame them for that—and many of the pets run off if they manage to escape, poor things scared out of their minds... if they come back and if there are relatives willing to take them in, well, that's alright then. So many of the owners live alone though. I'd take the dears in myself, but..." Thirteen extended a hand into the box and the ball of matted fur immediately hissed, a tiny claw coming out for an attack. They sighed. "Animals have never taken to me much. At all, if I'm frank. It's as if they know that I..." Thirteen made a vague motion at their body. Wary of insulting them, Aizawa deliberately didn't look down at their feet. "I
Quite envy Koda at times."

Aizawa listened to all this with an indifferent expression. "Pound," he said.

Odd. He wasn't sure how he knew, but Thirteen was definitely scowling now. "Oh, I sent the dears there for years. Plenty of different ones throughout the city too, just so none would get overbooked. You know what they do to the poor ones that don't find homes?"

He wasn't stupid. Aizawa could take a wild guess. People wanted pedigree pets and pounds wanted their resources. Neither of these things worked well together.

Aizawa crossed the room to peer into the box again. He didn't need to ask what kind of disaster it had been tonight. 'Fire' was written all over the runt's face—literally in ash and smoke stains, and to be frank Thirteen still smelled strongly of smoke themselves. The kitten's actual physique was lost under all the grime and Aizawa felt a familiar urge to clean. Himself he didn't care about much. Everything else though...

"A young cat should be popular, yeah?" Thirteen was already nodding.

"Yes. I actually found this little one in the alley behind the blaze, caught among some of the smaller fires that broke out. He seems to be in good health from what I can tell and his paws don't appear burned. I should be able to find a home for him fairly quickly. I just need—he just needs a temporary pace to stay."

Aizawa blinked. "I don't have any food. Toys and shit."

"I can provide you with some."

"What if he dies while I'm out on patrol?"

"Cats are remarkably self-sufficient."

"I'm allergic."
"Ah." Thirteen paused. "I didn't realize." They reached for the box when Aizawa's hand shot out.

"Didn't say I wouldn't take him," he muttered. "Besides, my eyes are already shit."

Technically Aizawa couldn't tell when Thirteen was scowling, or glancing away, pursing their lips... None of that was available to him, and normally Aizawa hated people he couldn't read. Yet somehow, once again, he knew exactly what they were doing behind that mask.

Thirteen left his apartment with a smile on their face.

***

"Quit squirming."

"Huh?"

Aizawa scowled at his cell. "Not you, Hizashi. Ashes."

"...you named the fire cat Ashes."

"He's fucking covered in them, of course I'm naming him Ashes."

"Have you ever named something before? No wait. I forgot which handsome, gorgeous, incredibly talented man gave you your hero name. My mistake!"

Aizawa felt like he should respond to that, but he was a little busy wrestling Ashes back into the sink, soap suds flying across his previously clean countertops. The little beast was a menace alright, howling like Aizawa was torturing him rather than just trying to give the asshole a goddamn bath. Fifteen minutes in and all he'd managed to accomplish was scaring up his hands even worse than they already were. Aizawa scowled at the thin run of blood threading through the water.
Hizashi had gone uncharacteristically quiet. When his voice came again it was shaking with amusement. "Are you killing the thing, Shouta?"

"Nearly," Aizawa growled and shoved Ashes back into the water. "I need you to pick up some stuff."

"Me?!"

"Yeah you. There was a building collapse. Thirteen is busy."

He'd heard it on the news not an hour after Thirteen had left, knowing damn well they wouldn't be getting back anytime tonight, and maybe not tomorrow. Aizawa sure wasn't leaving this cat unsupervised. Also he'd already changed into his pajamas.

"—things I do for you, not all of us are hermits on a Saturday night! I was on my way out, thank you, not to a pet store—are they even open right now? Ugh, I guess some of the supermarket chains go until ten; you will be paying me back though, right? Because I'm not dropping a fortune just because you've taken in a reflection of your soul. Which I mean is black, mean, creepy—"

"Are you still talking?"

There was some indistinct grumbling over the line before it finally went dead. In the sudden silence Aizawa could more clearly hear the low, distasteful sounds that Ashes was making. He'd finally settled down though—smart enough to realize that Aizawa was bigger, stronger, and far more stubborn—so he was able to wash the rest of the grime away without too much fuss, revealing soft fur beneath his hands.

Ashes was entirely gray, with light spots that Aizawa thought would become more prominent once he was dry. He still had those clear blue eyes and an expression that said he'd very much like to eat his new caretaker.

Aizawa smirked. "Try it," he said and got a furious yowl for his trouble. Still, some sort of understanding seemed to pass between them.

It was when the fighting broke out again that Aizawa discovered that Ashes was, in fact, a girl.
Hizashi dumped the essentials on Aizawa's doorstep two hours later, making it his busiest social night since high school. Thirteen returned on Sunday in a slight panic, bearing duplicates, apologies... and a hamster.

Aizawa just stared a little dumbly at the brown blob in his wood-chip home. Ashes was splayed across his boot, devoting her entire attention to massacring his ankle. Aizawa shifted weight, shook his leg a little, and she made a sound like a small motorbike about to crash.

"This isn't a menagerie," Aizawa said, but he took the hamster in and placed him near the old radiator so he wouldn't get cold.

This, he realized, was what happened when you were a Good Person. He should have kept his door shut that night, because after that Thirteen kept bringing him animals: more cats, a few dogs, turtles, snakes, rabbits, and one other 'cat' that was definitely a feral fox. True to their word they always found homes for the little menaces and Aizawa only spent a slight fortune on allergy meds alongside his eye drops. He supposed it wasn't the worst arrangement in the world. Maybe. There was just one tiny catch.

Thirteen never found a home for Ashes.

Or if they did they shut that shit down fast.

"I didn't know you had pets, Sensei!"

Uraraka gushed it, hanging over the back of the bus seat with the rest of 1-A crowded around her, trying to get a look at the small screen. Kirishima had lifted his cellphone a few minutes before and Aizawa was too tired to stop him. Plus it hadn't been a bad pickpocketing attempt for his first try. If looking at his photo gallery kept them busy for the rest of the ride back to U.A., he'd be lucky indeed.

Ugh. Or maybe not. If Ashido would just stop shrieking...
"They're not mine," Aizawa muttered, sliding further down in his seat. "I just keep them until Thirteen finds new homes. It's temporary."

"Aww."

The normal chatter started back up again and for just a moment Aizawa thought he was free... until his damn problem child put that analytical mind of his to work.

His cell was dropped back in front of his face, Izuku pointing to a pic of Ashes balanced up on his shoulders, claws embedded into his hair. Right. That had been taken right after she'd attempted to shred his scarf and nearly broken her nails instead. Any fool could see that those devil eyes weren't just a byproduct of the camera's flash.

"What about this one, sir? He has a collar...?"

"Ashes," he muttered, causing a wave of happy gasps to ripple through the class. "No one has taken her yet. She's too much trouble."

And too stubborn to understand the word 'temporary.' Huh. Kinda like the idiot children at his back.

Funny, how Aizawa didn't seem to mind either as much as he should have.

Chapter End Notes

Gotta admit I'm a little on the fence about my headcanons regarding Thirteen's body. Their suit looked pretty empty after USJ, but I doubt they're invisible like Hagakure. Right now I'm imagining something similar to Kurogiri, except Thirteen doesn't have the physical body parts that he does. They're more like the embodiment of a black hole, sort of possessing their suit rather than truly *wearing* it...

Anyway, and I obviously hc them as nonbinary ^_^
Letter

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dear All Might,

I hope you don't mind me writing you. I'll admit that it's forward of me, but I have my doubts that you'll ever even see this. Principal Nedzu swore that he would pass this letter on and maybe he will—he seems like a nice enough fellow—or maybe he was just humoring another worried mom. So I'll be sorry if you don't see this and I'll be sorry if you do. I'm sorry I'm not much of a writer (a rambler, my father always said) and I'm sorry that I'm already taking up too much of your time. Sometimes it feels like I'm made up of nothing but apologies. One caused a lot of trouble years back and I've been thinking about it lately. Consequences, I mean. I'd never realized before just how awful an "I'm sorry" could be.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

My name is Inko Midoriya and my son is now one of your students at U.A. Do you know him? Maybe not. I'm sure there are lots of fantastic, inspiring children in those halls; more than enough to catch your eye. But maybe you remember the green-haired boy you saved a few months back from a sludge villain in the downtown shopping district? I wouldn't fault you if you don't. You've saved so many lives there's no way you could remember them all... but that was my Izuku. You saved him, All Might, and no matter how many times you've heard it said by others, even if it seems stupid receiving it now, I need you to hear it from me too.

Thank you. Thank you for bringing him home.

I said I'm not good at words and I'm really not. Literature was never a talent of mine and I honestly can't remember the last time I wrote a letter. I don't know how to express the things I'm feeling on paper so frankly I won't even try. I'll just be blunt with you. I want to say thank you for my son's life... and I want to ask you for one more thing. Because I'm selfish, All Might. Maybe all mothers are, I don't know. But I'm going to ask you for more anyway. Because I have to.

Please learn who my Izuku is.

I'm not asking that you give him the world—except maybe I am, because from you even a single glance would be the world, the whole galaxy, really. Do you have any idea how much he looks up to you? Yes, I'm sure everyone says that about their children. Who doesn't love All Might? He's the world's favorite hero and everyone is his biggest fan. I'm sure there are thousands just like my Izuku who poured love onto your websites, collected all your toys, vowed to be just like you someday. Maybe there are even others who had you as a father figure in their household... and you didn't know that, did you? Of course you didn't, how could you? But my husband has been gone a long time, All Might, and I couldn't have asked for a better substitute in helping to raise my boy. Eat your vegetables, Izuku! Don't you want to grow up strong like your hero? Be kind to others, Izuku! What would All Might do? All I ever needed was your name and Izuku would morph into a perfect little angel. Maybe that really was due to your influence, or maybe it's just his nature... I don't claim to know that either. All I do know is that despite all the other kids out there who watched All Might interviews and wore All Might onesies to bed, my boy is different... and I guess every mother says that too. But I swear it's the truth. So if you're willing to believe me then please—please—give him something. Give him anything at all.
Call on him in class and praise his answer. Greet him in the hall and remember his name. A pat on the shoulder, a wink, a smile... You'll give him plenty of smiles, won't you, All Might? I know you will, but I'm scared that it won't be enough. Because you see, my Izuku is fragile. He might not seem it when that spirit of his takes hold, but he's the sort of sensitive boy who's worn down by things over time. Slowly. He'll shrug off every insult, push through every obstacle, but with each challenge he gains a tiny wound that he won't acknowledge, that just eats at him until, I'm afraid, it will one day tear him apart. I worry because I gave him a wound of my own years ago. I didn't mean to, but I did, and I've come to realize that you, All Might, are the only person left in his life who hasn't hurt him.

Silly, right? How can you hurt a boy you don't even know? But you could. Easily. Because you smile for everyone, everywhere, and when a gift is shared that widely... well, it doesn't seem very special anymore, does it? You could brush off my boy's worship, treat him like all the other fans, and though you would be entirely justified in doing so I'm afraid of the consequences that might have. Izuku wants nothing more in this world than to be a hero like you—to be a hero for you—but so many people have been against him that he needs... a salve maybe. A special something that's all his own.

You could give him that. Frankly, right now you're the only one who could. It might not be fair to provide my boy with any special treatment, but frankly I don't give a damn about fair anymore. Pretend for just a moment that Izuku's devotion is unique. Be a father to a son you never asked for, even if it's only while passing him in the hall. Give Izuku a smile that's for him and him alone. Do something, because just thirty seconds of your time could mean a whole boy's life. Surely that's not too much for one mother to ask for?

Or maybe it is. If so please accept my most humble apologies. And if it's not... then thank you. Thank you again.

And I'm sorry.

Sincerely,
Inko Midoriya

Chapter End Notes

(Figuring out how to write new characters... hmmm...
Dear Ms. Midoriya,

I've started this letter seven times now. To avoid an eighth I've decided to simply copy your format by offering an introduction, a story, and an apology. Though I'll start with that last one first.

I'm not the man you wrote to and I'm not who you wanted to hear back from, so for that I am truly, exceedingly sorry. My name is Toshinori Yagi and I am an assistant of All Might's. No, you wouldn't have heard of me. I handle the more mundane aspects of All Might's media persona, the sort of stuff befitting a simple, quirkless man. But my one claim to fame is, perhaps, that I do know him better than most, well enough that I'm writing in his stead. It's because I know him well that I've asked for this task. Ma'am, with all due respect, All Might is not someone you should put your faith in, especially not when something as precious as your boy is at stake. You have no reason to take the word of a stranger, but please believe me when I say that he doesn't deserve that kind of trust.

Ha. Perhaps we're a little alike? If I don't insult you by saying so. Because I'm also getting ahead of myself. The story I promised you.

Once upon a time—or really, just about eleven months ago—your Izuku encountered a Villain on his way home from school. What I suspect you don't know though is that poor, brave Izuku encountered him twice. The first time was under a bridge a few miles east of where the documented attack took place. I won't give you a play-by-play (no mother should read such things) but in short All Might saved your boy and they were given the chance to talk. It's something right out of a comic book, yes? The young man face-to-face with his idol, given a chance to finally express his awe and, I believe, ask for validation. Because isn't that what you said? That Izuku's only dream was to be a hero like All Might? To gain his approval? And here All Might stood. It's what we would expect of any good story: the young man gains encouragement from the mentor and rises to new heights, quirk or no quirk. He'd let pure determination pave the way.

Except this isn't a comic book and often people are far crueler than characters. All Might told me later that he'd said no. No, Izuku, you can't be a hero without a quirk. It's not possible. Give it up.

Are you making excuses for him? I know I did. I told myself that All Might was just thinking of the boy's safety, that the world needs police officers or paramedics as much it does heroes—all sorts of justifications to cover up the fact that he broke that boy in the span of a few words. I need you to understand this, Ms. Midoriya, completely. Izuku's hero stood in front of him and said he could not achieve his dream. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that this was the worst moment in your son's life, the exact sort of thing you fear he'd never come back from.

And he charged that Villain anyway.
Reeling, thinking he's quirkless, shut down by the one person he'd always thought he could believe in... and Izuku was still a hero that day, regardless of what anyone said—even the great All Might. I'm telling you this not to give you more nightmares (I hope that's not the case) but because I hope it offers you some strange form of comfort. I know it does for me, knowing that Izuku has already faced his worst fear and come out the better for it. Your boy is like kintsukuroi, Ms. Izuku, more beautiful for having been broken.

Do you hate All Might now? I wouldn't blame you if you did. I've given his callous words a lot of thought the past few months and yes, I think I hate him too. At least a little. Because All Might has become exactly what this world needs, a symbol of peace... but symbols can't take care of children. They need more than just a smile and a glittering thumbs up. At least, I'm beginning to think so.

You're forward? Forgive me, Ms. Midoriya, but not at all... at least not compared to me. Because I'd like to ask you a favor in return. Perhaps, just maybe, you'd consider allowing me to watch over your boy in All Might's stead? I know we don't know one another and in a better world I'd have more to offer you than my own inadequacies, a frail body, a quirkless existence, a teaching job that I'm learning as I go... but perhaps those things will resonate with Izuku. At least, I'm desperate enough to hope that they would. Because I already love him, Ms. Midoriya. I'm not at all the father figure you gave him in his youth, but then I never planned to have a son of my own. Who plans for such a glorious prince of nonsense to drop straight into an old man's life anyway? He's taken up that position whether you or I or even Izuku himself wants it, so I figure I might as well make the best of an impossible situation. I'll look out for him. For whatever it's worth, he has my protection.

And as a further reassurance, it's not just me. My goodness, but wouldn't our children be in trouble if they could only count on us! If he hasn't spoken of them already you should ask Izuku about young Uraraka and Iida, two other students in his class. They've guarded your son's heart since day one, with a devotion that us adults can only hope to follow. Let them carry some of the weight. Izuku will be happier and stronger with them at his side.

That's how you're meant to end letters, right? With peace and optimism? Maybe. I'm not any better at this than you are, but perhaps... we can muddle through it together.

Izuku had extra training today. I cancelled it and sent him home early with this letter instead. Please enjoy your night together.

With the deepest respect and fondness for you both,

Toshinori Yagi

P.S. I've left the blood and tear stains on version number seven. It's unsightly, but they might say more than my words ever could. At least I hope they do.

- Yagi.
A whistle sounded and then there was chaos across U.A.'s field.

The game was a simple one of Aizawa's design: fight until you couldn't fight anymore. There were no flimsy strings of capture tape, or arbitrary boundaries like the Sports Festival had. Oh, they all had to stay on the massive field, but that was more of a safety measure than anything else. Aizawa had brought in an old colleague of his—a bubbly woman with multi-colored hair and a laugh that sounded downright wrong next to their sour-faced teacher—whose quirk allowed her to produce incredible defensive shields around the field's perimeter. Today there were no civilians to watch out for, no buildings to try and keep standing, no missions, no teams... and above all no rules. No escape either. Victory was granted to the last student standing. If you passed beyond the field you simply hit a jello-like wall and were thrown in again. Back into the game.

Izuku loved it.

He'd started on the left side of the field's edge next to Sero, Hagakure, Iida, and Tokoyami, the rest of his classmates scattered into five groups on the other three sides. Directly across from him were Todoroki and Bakugo, their hands already glowing with fire and ice. Izuku knew who his real competition was... and he also knew not to underestimate anyone else.

This was going to be fun.

"Begin!" he'd heard, the screech of Aizawa's whistle—and then everything around him exploded.

Luckily, Izuku was already in the air.

"Holy shit—" Sero said, but by then Izuku was halfway across the field, grinning all the while.

*Keep calm, keep steady. Stay at 5%. Watch your footing and dodge.*

It was easier than he'd first thought it would be. Gran Torino's training really had been perfect for these new exercises, except that now Izuku actually had the space he needed to make use of One for
All. The combination of strength rushing through his limbs; the after-image of Gran Torino's nimble, shockingly fast movements; and a whole field to make use of sent a heady rush through Izuku's head, the likes of which he wasn't sure he'd experienced before. He felt like he could leap a hundred feet right now, farther even than All Might maybe, and Izuku hoped he was watching closely. Because he wanted to impress him. If he could.

"Deku!"

No time for thoughts like those though. He'd already reached his classmates.

Sorry, Izuku mouthed and jumped left just as Bakugo's familiar right hook put a small, burning crater into the grass. It was the sort of move that normally would have put him off balance... if he hadn't pushed directly off Ashido's shoulder when he landed. She was a lot thinner than a building's wall—a moving step-stone too—but Izuku stuck it and grinned with abandon as she face-planted with a shriek, Kirishima taking the opportunity to knock her out cold. For a brief moment her still form sent a sick feeling shooting through Izuku's stomach... but he pushed it firmly away. Aizawa had warned them about this. All Might had too. There was a time and place for practicing teamwork among heroes, but this wasn't that kind of fight. Everyone should do their absolute best and hold back only when it came to doing permanent damage. Recovery Girl would take care of the rest.

So Izuku grit his teeth, landed, pivoted, and made a beeline in the opposite direction.

Behind him he could hear Kacchan's screams of rage, tempered only by the fact that he had Kirishima, Tsuyu, and Ojiro, ganging up on him now. It seemed that everyone had the same thought about which two should be taken out of the fight first. Half his classmates had converged on Bakugo in an instant, while the other half had surrounded Todoroki.

And Todoroki was coming for him.

Smile, Izuku thought and kept his grin in place even as a wall of ice shot his way. It was easy enough to dodge (he'd certainly had enough practice) but Izuku wasn't blind to the fact that Todoroki was trying to close him in. Behind him Sato and Koda both attempted to make use of Todoroki's distraction to get into close range, punches raised, faces grim... and quickly found themselves frozen top to bottom. No. That wasn't the way to fight him. Aoyama had better sense, letting off a long-rang blast that took the tops off of Todoroki's walls and had them all wincing as wicked shards rained down.

Izuku was shielding his head with his hands when he felt the slightest tingle along the back of his neck; a raising of the hair on his arms.
Ice is a bad conductor his brain said and Izuku leapt onto the now flat surface of the wall just as Kaminari's electricity shot across the whole field. Jiro convulsed, her ear-jack jammed into the ground and only halfway out. Next to her, limbs grabbing her shoulders for a throw, Shoji jerked as well.

Yaoyorozu had almost succeeded in making another of her blankets. Almost.

Izuku caught a glimpse of Kaminari's now slack face before everything set into motion again.

Facing Izuku's blindspot, Todoroki hadn't been at all surprised by Kaminari's attack and he'd used that brief moment between his own escape and everyone else's to build two more walls of ice, a third shooting across and out from where Izuku currently crouched, forcing him back down down lest he get caught in the cold. Now there was a near perfect square surrounding him, Izuku caught between Todoroki and the field's barrier.

He'd counted on this.

Todoroki had a bad habit of just entrapping his opponents. And Bakugo had an equally bad habit of hunting him down. Izuku revved up One for All enough that the electricity could be seen even through layers of ice, got his back against the barrier on his left, egged Todoroki just a little closer—

Izuku saw that he saw what was about to happen a moment before it did. With an explosion that shook their bones fire blasted through ice as Bakugo tried to take him out by breaking down the wall with a single kick, shrieking something about Izuku ignoring him. He wasn't, of course. Far from it. Izuku had held still just so Bakugo would come to this very spot and create an opening. But of course, he'd never promised to stay still.

He laughed as he got out of their way, Bakugo's kick taking him directly into Todoroki's punch. Neither had time to pull back and the resulting power crash sent a shockwave over the field, hitting Izuku in midair and slamming him back to the other side. He could easily hear Bakugo's screams of rage—they sounded a little shivery—but now there were new things to worry about.

"Hey Uraraka," Izuku said. She gave him a thumbs up.

And then Uraraka tried to drop a ridiculous amount of dirt on his head.
It might have just been what she had to work with, Bakugo's earlier hits kicking up clumps of grass instead of dealing boulders like at the Sports Festival, but a dim part of Izuku's brain reminded him that she was way smarter than that.

Smart enough for this to be a distraction rather than an attack.

There were times, rare ones, when Izuku felt like everything was slowing down; like the universe had descended to a crawl just to give him enough time to think. This was one of those times, where he had the sense that a God, if such a being actually existed, had pushed a slow-motion button on all their lives, allowing Izuku to angle until he saw past the mess of dirt to find Uraraka charging at him... Kirishima coming in from his right... a faint explosion in his ears that was far fainter than Bakugo's, so... Iida? Yes. Iida's engines... and the patter of small feet... the smallest in their class...

The timing had to be perfect. Izuku grit his teeth and pivoted, making as if to meet Kirishima's punch head-on—feinting at the very last second. It meant that Iida didn't have time to stop his own attack from behind.

Ploughing into solid, sentient rock must hurt.

*Note to self: All of us need practice in stopping momentum.*

Uraraka tripping into the mess of balls Mineta had laid out for him was just an added bonus. Her shriek of rage when she instinctually put her hands out to break her fall, thus rendering them useless...

*Second note to self: Have Uraraka practice her quirk using other parts of her body.*

The battle had thinned considerably now. Jiro, Shoji, Sero, Ojiro, Kaminari, Krishima, Sato, Koda, Iida, Ashido, Aoyama, and Yaoyorozu all down for the count. Across the field Bakugo and Todoroki still had their sights set on each other, a terrible clash of technique and pure, brute force. Izuku heard a familiar high-pitched scream and turned just in time to spot Tsuyu slamming Mineta into the ground with her tongue, Tokoyami just a step behind her as Dark Shadow finished taking out Uraraka. For just a moment he looked posed to attack Tsuyu next... and then hesitated. They both trained eyes on him instead.

"We're not allowed to team up," Izuku reminded them and Tsuyu tilted her head consideringly.
"We're not," she said even as she, Tokoyami, and Dark Shadow all rushed him head on.

Fine.

Take a moment.

Breathe.

Think.

...Smile.

The field was now strewn with all manner of things, from Mineta's remaining balls to a host of small objects that Yaoyorozu had managed to summon in the first few minutes. Hardly knowing why he did it, Izuku bent and took hold of a long strip of Sero's tape, left on the grass after an unsuccessful binding attempt. He didn't know what he intended to do with it until it was already happening, his body following a series of movements he'd only seen once before and without his conscious mind making the decision to do so. It was for the best actually. If he had been able to think he would have just panicked and not done it at all.

Especially with Aizawa watching.

Because though Sero's tape didn't have the same weight as a capture weapon, it still had enough heft to soar through the air. And though Izuku didn't have his teacher's training, he could jump a whole lot higher. Which meant that when all three of them were in the air there was a just a little bit of USJ history repeating itself. Izuku got one half of the tape wrapped around Tokoyami's waist, the other around Tsuyu's extended tongue, criss-crossed the section in the middle, and pulled as he hurdled them back towards the ground.

The crunch of bodies slamming together was oddly satisfying. Even if it was his friends.

Two more down. Two to go.
"Midoriya!"

It was Todoroki calling him now, Bakugo hot on his heels. Literally. Izuku didn't know how long they'd been fighting. It felt long though and he knew, without a doubt, that he couldn't sustain One for All much longer. If those two hadn't worn each other out enough he didn't stand a chance.

As if to challenge the very notion that he'd ever wear down Bakugo blasted ahead with a manic look in his eyes. He landed yards closer and began sprinting the rest of the way. Todoroki's expression hardened and he raised his hand to send out another coating of ice—

— that suddenly lifted off the ground —

Izuku didn't have time to contemplate when Torodoki had started shooting ice projectiles because the next second he was pulling an Uraraka and tripping over something he couldn't see. Later while reviewing the tapes it would be so obvious that they'd both tumbled over an unconscious Hagakure, but right then all he could do was let out an undignified squawk. Luckily, his fall was the only thing that kept Todoroki's ice from impaling his shoulder, from getting blasted away by Bakugo's fire.

_Luck is as much a part of battle as skill, Aizawa had said. Use it._

So Izuku used it.

On the ground now with 1-A's most powerful fighters bearing down on him. Seconds until they were here. Izuku knew based on those attacks alone that he couldn't take them... but perhaps he didn't need to. His fall had skid him to the very edge of the field's barrier, that malleable shield that would literally push someone back into the game because it had a soft, gelatinous texture. One could just sink their fingers into it, grab a handful and hold on...

With one hand Izuku did just that. With the other he let what was left of One for All flow down into his middle finger and thumb. He pressed them hard against the dirt—and flicked.

The resulting tremor was far more than what had occurred when Bakugo and Todoroki first clashed. Later he'd here that the rest of U.A.'s campus had thought that it was an earthquake. As it was, Izuku just had time to catch the wonderful look on Todoroki's face before he fell, him and Bakugo both lost among the debris as an entire field crumbled beneath their feet.
The fight ended with Izuku hanging on by just a thread.

But then, sometimes a thread was all you needed.

***

“Points for creativity.”

“Yes, Sensei!”

“Minus points for breaking your fingers again.”

“…yes, Sensei.”

“Don’t ever try one of my moves until I’ve shown it to you properly you could have broken your neck. Or theirs. More likely theirs.”

“Oh! Yes, Sensei!!”

“Quit saying, ‘Yes, Sensei’ you’re giving me a headache.”

“Yes—mmmm.”

The rest of 1-A laughed as Izuku slapped a hand over his mouth, cowering under Aizawa’s glare. They were in high spirits considering they’d just lost and now sported various, varying injuries. In fact, for once Izuku was the least injured out of them all and that produced a strangely... good feeling inside him.

Not quite as good as the happy thumbs up All Might flashed him as he passed by the classroom, grinning ear-to-ear and doing some dorky victory dance…
…but close.

Chapter End Notes

I wrote this because I'm an absolute SUCKER for Midoriya using his smarts and kicking ass through strategy. Of course, his strategy is only as good as my strategy, which is to say, Not Good At All... but you know :)
I spent about a week doing absolutely nothing except reading Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality because I needed to finish it by the end of January, and now I come back and my brain goes, "Writing? What's that again? I only know how to read..." So here's a shitty, reflective, warm up drabble to try and kick things back into high gear.

ALSO. 1k kudos. 10k hits. FRIENDS you're so good and kind and you're making me cry over here I love you all :____;

What's in a name?

If asked Izuku would have said he'd given it more thought than the average middle schooler, the proof in all the scribblings he'd done in past journals. Because even as a toddler it hadn't escaped his notice just how important a name was to a hero's identity, and how many aspects there were to consider. It had to be catchy, of course, something that was easily remembered and tumbled nicely off the tongue... but that was just the tip of a rather massive iceberg, wasn't it? Did your name fit well into the established agencies? Did it remind civilians of any previous heroes—or worse, their villains? It had to be something you'd never want to change and something the rest of the world was willing to accept. More than once Izuku had watched new heroes announce who they were only to find the next day that the media had other plans. It always made him a little sad. Surely they should be able to choose their names, of all things?

Then again, it wasn't like Izuku had chosen his. That had been a gift from his mom.

Then again, maybe hero names were the perfect, second chance; a privilege for doing the impossible.

...how close was your hero name to your real name, anyway?

When did your hero name become your real name?

It was a question that only occurred to Izuku ten months into his own delve into the impossible, when he stood on a beach and accidentally yelled the words 'All Might' for half the world to hear. In his mind the skinny man with sunken eyes and a rather different kind of smile was All Might, just like the massive man with sparkling teeth and a booming voice was also All Might. It made sense to
Izuku in a way that it couldn't—perhaps wouldn't—make sense to everyone else, yet that was the day he realized that names could also be something dangerous, wielded as unwitting weapons.

The man's eyes had been extra kind an hour later. "You should just call me Yagi, my boy. Or Toshinori, if you prefer."

Too much, too much, SO much until Izuku felt like his brain was overloading, heat rising high on his cheeks and the man coughing blood in shock, waving a desperate hand to try and comfort him. Good luck with that, because even if he could get over the shock of a true name gifted alongside a true form (something Izuku had often imagined as a child: the image of All Might leaning close to whisper such secrets into his ear), the logistics were already racing through his mind. That danger again.

All Might could mistakenly become 'Yagi' on Izuku's lips, said in some moment of panic.

Or Yagi could become 'All Might' in the peace of U.A.'s halls, drawing the sort of attention that neither of them needed.

And in the end separating the two just seemed...cruel. All Might was Yagi and Yagi was All Might. How was Izuku supposed to choose between them?

He settled on a generic 'Sir' that brought a blush to the man's cheeks, not dissimilar to his own.

After that Izuku hadn't expected names to follow him into U.A., a surprisingly relevant concern as he learned one after another after another. Iida and Uraraka and Ashido made things nice and simple for a while, until Tsuyu decided that the best time for intimacy was minutes before they all died. (Although, if not then... when?) He'd struggled with that, firmly ignoring Uraraka's teasing that he could call her Ochaco if he really wanted, and instead set his sights on the drama caused by his own name, moving from Izuku to Deku and worrying about when he'd know that he'd actually succeeded in reclaiming something. If he ever would.

It meant that Izuku yelled "Kacchan!" across the classroom not as some sort of revenge, but because that's just what kept pouring out of his mouth. Ten-year-old habits were very hard to break.

And it took Izuku another three months to realize that of course it would be the same for Kacchan himself. The way he said "Deku" now was not necessarily the same voice as the one from their youth.
So Izuku put that word on his whiteboard, confident that this hero name was his own and no one could take that from him. Not easily. Gran Torino's smile when he heard it was enough to solidify his resolve and kickstart his adrenaline to boot.

Nearly a year in then and Izuku was older—maybe wiser—certainly smart enough now to realize that names were a messy, complicated part of his life that was never going to quite make sense. Koda's name wasn't a sound but rather a unassuming gesture up near his heart. Momo hated hers, so the use of 'Yaoyorozu' became something else entirely, more gentle and kind. Iida had pride and Shoji indifference, and for a long while Izuku wondered who 'Mike' was on campus until he realized that Yamada Sensei was working through this just like the rest of them.

Aizawa was something else, helping Izuku drag boxes into the dorm.

"I appreciate the respect," he'd said, not looking his way. "But we've fought together. You can drop the 'Sensei' if you want."

It took a while, but he had. Aizawa never did drop 'problem child' though. Just like another teacher refused to give up 'Prince of Nonsense,' and Izuku realized that sometimes you just had to resign yourself to the names that made other people happy.

A strange ride all round. The sort of thing that a younger Izuku would have never considered. Then again, he never thought he'd be All Might's successor either. So. Funny that.

"Midoriya," Todoroki had said, previously a stranger and a rival, now out grocery shopping with him on a Saturday afternoon.

Izuku made a happy hum to show he was listening. Behind him Todoroki was oddly quiet. Even for him. When he finally spoke his voice could hardly be heard over the din of the other shoppers.

"...call me Shoto."

Huh.
It was a question disguised as an order. Maybe even a plea. Izuku was grateful for his semi-privacy, smile falling as he considered names and choices, why Todoroki in particular might not want the world to know him by his last name.

When he turned Izuku's smile would have rivaled a man with two names of his own.

"Sure, Shoto! And if you want you can use 'Izuku.'"

He did want, and he did. In time. Names changed after all, messy and complicated and sometimes a little silly...

But the good thing was, people changed along with them.
I felt bad that I haven't written much lately, so I threw together some quick, experimental stupidity. Enjoy <3
U.A. High School, Class 1-A's Dorm Room Rules by Tenya Iida family, Class 1-A Representative, Hereby Enacted From

1. No running in the hall.
2. No lights on after 11:00pm.
3. No loud music.
4. Students are to remember their room keys and refrain from copies. You are allowed ONE (1) spare that can be placed in sensei.
5. Laundry should be dealt with in an organized fashion. If finished please put it in the dryer—NOT on the floor—and if NEATLY and set aside on the windowsill. Students should pick up at the earliest convenience.
6. (Students will stop complaining about having to touch some underwear because they are mature heroes in training who example for the rest of society.)
7. Bakugo will refrain from setting anything else on fire or I disciplinary action as promised.

With Kind Regards,

Iida
+8 Iida will remember that he's not 1-A's only class rep.

My sincerest apologies, Yaoyorozu!!

It's all good~

Oh hey, if we're adding rules can we put up that Kirishima isn't allowed anywhere n would be great - Jiro

AND AFTER I MADE YOU UNGRATEFUL ASSHOLES

You poisoned us ungrateful assholes. You've gotta accept this, dude. Poor Aoyama

+9 Student will refrain from using profanity on the publi anywhere else, for that matter.

fuck u

Uraraka!!
LOL sorry couldn’t resist. oh hey, not really a rule but has anyone seen the others? I left them out in the common room last night. pink tupperware? ch

...hey, Uraraka. It's my fault your cookies are gone and I'm

Deko! Oh, if you wanted some cookies that’s fine!! I don’t mind

I... kind of didn't? It's just that All Might came over to see how we were doing. He gave me lunch which was so sweet and so unexpected, but I didn't have a chance to say thank you. I couldn't just let him leave empty-handed on all of us, but I couldn't think of what he might want so I ended up taking the first thing nearby, which just happened to be your cookies, and I might have said something about baking them myself I really don't remember and I don't even...

Holy shit, dude, how did your hand not cramp?

NO PROFANITY

so what you’re saying is that all might ate my cookies?

Maybe?
fine. but i’m not talking to you.

:o

Except you are talking to him?

i’m writing to him. that’s totally different.

Ah.

+10 Everyone should use the freezer to keep their stuff cool and li
+11 Koda isn’t allowed to bring in any more strays. Hagaku
unsettling to suddenly hear violent sneezing when you thou
+12 No more borrowing laptops without asking. Or if you do ju
you might see...
+13 Mineta isn’t allowed near any of the girl’s roc
+14 Kaminari is no longer allowed to rappel out of his dorm
bedsheets tied to the radiator for midnight snack runs because I’d
died last night
(+15 Kirishima should go instead? He’s mostly invuln
- Ribbit
Whatever. But +16 Tsuyu needs to stop flooding “accidentally” so she has a “pond” to play in... eat FLIES AT THE DINNER TABLE WTF TSU...

...can I keep flooding the bathroom if Todoroki agrees to freeze its rink?

What happened to leaving “poor Todoroki: I’m fine with it.

Oh. Cool. (Pun!!) Ice skating tonight AFTER my shower please!! And omg, girls, please clean up your

Same to the boys, honestly.

Says the guy dropping feathers every

Honestly, all of you! I don’t know what this message board ought to be ashamed of yourselves! +18 students will on relating to serious and respectful concur
Hey, everyone. Not a new rule (sorry, Iida!), but has anyone seen my been missing two days now.

really? wow. that’s horrible, deku. i can’t believe it. who would do that. i have hope it turns up soon. really i do. even though that seems

Uraraka please give me my sweatshirt. I’m sor

I’m afraid there’s not much chance of that, mon ami. She is too ena

pillow :)

AOYAMA!!! I DO NOT!!!!!!!! HOW WOULD YOU EVEN K
A gentleman doesn’t reveal his secrets :) :) .

That’s creepy, dude.

And I’m fairly certain it deserves an update to rule #13! As for +15 whatever it is they’re doing that’s causing that horrible burning smell—

+20 BAKUGO IS NO LONGER ALLOWED NEAR THE KITCHEN SUPPLIES OR ANYTHING EVEN REMOTELY FLAMMABLE. BELIEVE THE LOOK ON THOSE FIRE FIGHTERS’ FACES HAVE OUR ASSES.

Idiot children will remember that there’s only one rule around here.

...yes, sensei.

Yes, sensei.

Sorry, sensei.
Er...what are your in

Everything a
Got it.
IT IS DONE. I rise from the ashes of tiredness with another drabble. After all, what collection would be complete without a 5&1? ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

1.

With his knuckles brushing the back of young Midoriya's neck, Yagi wondered dimly if this child would ever teach him something without the accompanying heart attack.

Because really. Bad enough he had to re-learn the ethics of heroism from the kid charging a villain head on, unarmed, and with all the grace of a stoned bull, but at least that had been an instinctual response. This was pure stupidity, and Yagi made sure Midoriya realized as much as he dumped his head onto the boy's shoulder.

"Didn't your mother teach you to look both ways?" he said, heart still pounding up into his throat. With his back pressed to Yagi's chest Midoriya's frantic breathing was easily felt. As was his nod.

"I got excited," he whispered.

Well that much was obvious. Two weeks into their training and Yagi had realized that keeping his charge cooped up on the beach really couldn't be good for him. Too much isolation; too much focus on muscle mass, considering that for all his dreams of becoming a hero Midoriya hadn't done much to prepare for the job's physical demands. He hadn't done anything at all, to be frank, something that had thoroughly surprised Yagi until he'd bothered to think about it for more than two seconds. Being a pro hero for so long had a tendency to obscure one's youth, making old men forget how hard it had once been to be a kid. A quirkless kid.

Before meeting Nana had Yagi done anything to prepare? No. Definitely not. Dreams like that were better left safe in his imagination. At least Midoriya had been brave enough to start his journals.

He'd always be braver than Yagi. To the point of recklessness.
Because *apparently* telling the kid that he needed to start a running regiment before they did any more weights—and that a route of concrete would be far easier than sand—had gotten the fool so riled up that he had nearly *run straight into traffic*.

No, not nearly. He *had* run out. Still sprawled on the ground Yagi let his shaking hands drop to Midoriya's legs, skimming for anything that felt like a break. For a split moment there it has just been Midoriya alone in the street, but with a rather large truck barreling in from the left, Yagi paces behind with what felt like a spear twisting through his heart. He wasn't sure how he'd moved that fast without transforming... but he had. An image of a fragile, quirkless body hitting metal at sixty miles an hour had spurred him on. He'd managed to snag Midoriya's collar at the last possible second, lifting him straight off his feet as his legs kicked out, one sneaker just skimming the truck's side.

Yagi thought that sneaker looked scuffed.

"I'm fine. Really I'm fine..."

Midoriya didn't sound fine, his voice about as shaky as Yagi's knees. Still, he let his mentor pull him back to his feet, a number of onlookers clapping or putting cell phones away when it became clear that an ambulance wasn’t needed.

Yagi started saying something about how training could wait, they should rest, regroup, get lunch, and babbling felt good in his throat right now so he kept at it. Young Midoriya didn't seem to mind. He just nodded at everything Yagi said and kept one hand latched onto the side of his jacket.

Adrenaline could mask a lot of things...and not just pain. It was only after he and Midoriya had parted ways that Yagi noticed the tingling in his palms. He looked down, half expecting to see some scrape he'd picked up from their fall, but there was nothing except smooth skin. Deceptively so given the utterly foreign sensation running along his nerves.

The feeling persisted through dinner and well into the night, long after Yagi's fear over the near-accident had dissipated. He lay in bed with his tingling hands laid atop an excruciatingly heavy chest. Odd, but it occurred to him that those where the two parts of him that had cradled Midoriya.

It was only when the lights were out and the city was quiet that Yagi had the presence of mind to think,
When was the last time I touched someone?

Oh no.

***

2.

It was as foolish a question now as it had been a week before.

Honestly. Yagi was a tactile man by nature. Certainly his job required it. How many times had he scooped victims close to his chest, soothed frightened children, draped arms over the shoulders of adoring fans? The concept that his hands would burn from the simple act of holding Midoriya was so stupid it was almost funny. Strange though that he hadn't felt like laughing today.

Instead Yagi gave his protégé a healthy dose of space. Midoriya hardly seemed to mind, as star-struck to just be in the same city as All Might, never mind the same junkyard.

That was definitely funny though: bright-eyed Midoriya nearly glowing alongside all the trash and discarded material, an unpolished gem among waste. The contrast hadn't escaped him and the part of Yagi that still loved a good story—that still had a thick stack of comic books hidden beneath his bed—preened that he'd managed to craft such a good origin story. Quirkless boy rising to prominence in a garbage dump. It was just the right amount of humbling.

Now if only he could teach the kid how to throw a decent punch.

"C'mon now!" Yagi called. His voice startled Midoriya, causing him to nearly topple into the makeshift bag they'd set up. "How many times do I need to say it?"

Midoriya ducked his head. Yagi didn't need to be beside the boy to know what he was muttering now. Wrist straight, thumb on the outside of your hand, keep your weight balanced on your toes. Yagi didn't know how Midoriya had picked up such a backwards way of forming a fist, but he was going to break something if he didn't change those habits soon. A hot mess is what Nana would have called him, but at least Midoriya took direction well. A moment later his head rose again and his gaze settled on the mattress. He yanked his fist back and plowed it into the cushions with a yell.
A single feather fluttered to the ground.

"Oh dear..."

Yagi shook his head, making sure he was smiling to take the sting out of failure. Because though Midoriya had remembered his thumb this time, his wrist was still bent when he made contact, more likely to snap itself than do any real damage to that fluffy, faux villain. Even more of an issue was his stance. Though he doubted the boy noticed anything now, continually twisting his body like that was going to leave one hell of an ache in his shoulders, the kind of thing that would come back to haunt him in a fight. Before Yagi was even aware of his choice he was jogging across the dirt to Midoriya's side. Warm hands settled on his arms.

"Like this," he said, gently turning Midoriya so he was at a better angle. Yagi gave a gentle push downwards until he finally bent his knees. "You're not going to be any help at all if you lose your balance."

Midoriya gave a rather choked laugh. "Tripping isn't very heroic, huh?"

"I don't know about that." Yagi grinned, remembering his own epic trip that resulted in him ploughing into a villain's left side—his one, small weak point in an otherwise armored body. "But right now I'm more concerned about the damage you're doing." Sobering, Yagi placed a firm hand against Midoriya's back and pressed hard until he straightened. "Bad form will do just as much harm as a battle. Don't believe me? Well, I didn't either at your age. It's a subtle thing, my boy. Cuts and breaks we can heal up in a jiffy, but if you don't take proper care in your training you'll wake up one day with more pain than you know what to do with." Yagi stretched his neck, wincing in example. "Trust me."

"Yes, sir!"

As if he really needed to ask for Midoriya’s trust.

It continued on like that for another hour: Midoriya throwing mediocre punches against discarded trash; Yagi keeping their bodies safely aligned, teaching his young charge the muscle memory that together they would build into something great. And just like in the aftermath of the near accident days before, Yagi didn't notice the warm tingle until it had already settled into his limbs, unrepentant.
He stilled. Grounding himself with a hand on either of Midoriya's shoulders, Yagi took a moment to marvel at the fact that he was very nearly hugging this boy, the two of them closer than anyone had been to this body in... an age, really. Since long before All for One had ruined him. Longer than he cared to remember anymore. People might have taken notice of All Might, Yagi realized, but few had bothered to get close to him.

And the kid wasn't running away.

"What are my hips supposed to do again?" Midoriya asked, twisting comically back and forth with his lip between his teeth. Yagi immediately shot out hands to still him and neither of them winced.

"Twist this way. Just a little, my boy."

Midoriya did as he was told, the two of them moving together, perfectly in-synch, and as they did the depths of Yagi's mind conjured up two, shell-shocked words:

Oh shit.

***

3.

At some point between his first touch in years and the midway point of their training, 'Midoriya' became 'Izuku' in Yagi's thoughts.

At some point between 'Izuku' and the first time he landed a punch hard enough to crack wood, 'boy' changed to 'son' and refused to go back, despite all his logical panic.

That was definitely only in thought though. Which made having his secrets parroted back at him shocking enough to nearly send Yagi to his knees.

Not something he wanted to do given the weight in his arms.

"He's not—I'm not—" Yagi gestured a little desperately between the kindly man and Izuku, dead
weight as he drooled slightly on Yagi's shoulder. He'd wanted to say that he wasn't Izuku's father as the stranger had just assumed, but all that emerged was a spluttering reminiscent of a dying tea kettle.

"New to the job, huh?" The man laid a withered hand on Yagi's arm and that touch combined with Izuku turning to nuzzle into his chest nearly undid him. This was how the great All Might finally perished: death by kindness.

"Yes," Yagi managed to croak. It wasn't a lie exactly. He was new to all this, everything from training a young boy to be his predecessor to having said boy fall asleep in the middle of their lunch, resulting in twenty minutes of holding stock-still lest he wake the precious creature resting against his shoulder, ten more minutes trying to decipher how to carry someone who wasn't bleeding or flailing in terror, and then another half hour trying to remember where Izuku lived.

He'd ended up here, walking in circles and running into inquisitive old men.

Yagi's new friend was nodding sagely. Like any of this could possibly make sense. "My wife and I adopted. Years ago, you understand. Yours is a fair bit older than our Shina was when she arrived, but I suspect the terror is just the same, yes?" He gave a dry, thoroughly amused chuckle that suddenly reminded Yagi of Gran Torino. "Not to worry, young man, not to worry. It looks to me like you're doing just fine," and with another pat to his arm the man hobbled away, leaving Yagi to stand dumbly in the middle of the street.

No one had called him 'young man' in a very long time.

...He wondered if he should call Gran Torino.

Izuku muttering something indistinct and shifting even closer made the decision for him. Yagi couldn't fish his cellphone out of his back pocket without risking the boy waking up and that, it seemed, was the worst thing he could possibly do. He still wasn't sure where Izuku lived either, so Yagi drew in a deep breath, pressed a hand to the back of his head, and just continued walking. Oh, his frail arms were beginning to shake alright and there was an awful ache in his lower back; Yagi didn't have the strength right now to transform... but he wouldn't drop Izuku. Never. He'd just keep walking until he decided to wake.

In the end that is exactly what he did and when Izuku stirred Yagi claimed he'd only been walking a few minutes—rather than those long, precious hours.
Sometime after Yagi learned Izuku's address he bought the kid an ice cream and got a whole bunch of insults for his trouble.

"I don't believe you," Izuku hissed, not for the first time. His spoon dripped chocolate melty-ness as he waved it about. "I just don't believe you!"

"Well you're certainly entitled to those beliefs. Just so long as you believe me about training..."

Yagi hid a smile behind his hand, watching Izuku mindlessly consume his treat with knitted brow and a frown on his face. A part of him was thrilled that his charge was talking back to him; simple, playful banter that felt so much more real than the blind hero worship from months before. A larger part of Yagi wished the kid could just enjoy his first dessert in weeks without overthinking everything.

"Prince of Nonsense," he muttered and that finally seemed to snap Izuku out of his thoughts.

He shrugged, smiling crookedly. "It just doesn't make sense," he said. "You're All Might. You must have been friends with EVERYONE in school."

Ah. Yagi had gleaned bits and pieces of Izuku's own social life—not hard to do when he wrote in a water damaged journal and sometimes sported bruises that hadn't come from his training—so it made a certain amount of sense that Izuku's idol, now aged and well established in his publicity, would look as if he'd always been this way. Yagi didn't have the heart to tell him about his own bullying throughout school, the particular viciousness that came with being the awkward, quirkless kid in class. Then again, Izuku was the one person Yagi knew who could truly understand that.

A conversation for another day then.

"I just never learned that game," he hedged, smiling as Izuku made another dramatic exclamation and finally pushed his ice cream aside. Before Yagi knew what was happening he'd scooted across the table and grabbed hold of both of Yagi's hands.
"Blessed, ran through the back of his mind.

"It's easy," Izuku insisted, maneuvering his palms so that one faced up and the other down. He mimicked Yagi's pose in reverse. "We clap like this and sing 'Concentration, sixty-four—'

"Why sixty-four?"

Izuku scowled so hard that Yagi coughed up blood as he laughed. He quickly neatened his lips with a napkin before returning to the game. Izuku nodded, pleased. “Okay...

"Concentration
Sixty-four
No repeats
Or hesitations
I'll start—you'll finish
Category...
Heroes."

There was a clear challenge in the boy's eyes as he said that last bit and Yagi straightened in his seat. As Izuku said "All Might"—holding back a laugh of his own now—Yagi caught the beat and blurted "Eraserhead" before time was up.

And so it continued.

A fascinating game. Izuku might have a fanboy's knowledge, but it paled in comparison to decades of work in the career. It was a piece of cake for Yagi to win... or at least, it would have been if he hadn't decided on "Young Midoriya" as his 38th answer.

Izuku promptly shrieked and denied it, waving his hands wildly about, segueing into an accusation of cheating. Yagi was torn between teasing the boy and telling him seriously that he'd spoken true. You didn't need to graduate U.A. to be a hero.
And all the while Yagi's palms tingled like they hadn't in months. He gripped tight to the table and rode the high that was Izuku's smile.

***

5.

The small sound of pain drew Yagi's attention like a moth to the flame.

In the last nine months he'd become hyper-attuned to every aspect of Izuku's voice: the timber and various intricacies, details that would tell him whether the child was embarrassed (always), pleased (often), tired (common), or lying (enough of a rarity that Yagi sometimes stared and wondered if the kid was even human). That tiny sound might have escaped the average person's notice, but to Yagi it provided a whole wealth of information.

"What hurts?"

Izuku froze in the act of stretching, arms poised comically over his head. He blinked a few times before registering what Yagi had said and when he did those arms came flying down, hands waving as a blush began to stain his cheeks.

The movement also caused him to wince.

"I'm fine! Really! Tip-top shape for training, I—"

"What hurts?"

It was rare for Yagi to become stern with Izuku heaven knew he didn't have the heart to do it often—but if there was one thing he needed a firm hand in, it was self-care. Luckily it looked as if Izuku had become just as attuned to his own voice because he immediately dropped his hands and his head. He peaked up with a half sheepish, half disgruntled expression.

"My back."
"Let me see."

Yagi's first instinct was to take him directly to Recovery Girl, but he stamped down on that impulse, recognizing it as a familiar overreaction. He'd seen Izuku split his skin, go purple with bruising, vomit from strain, collapse in sheer exhaustion—yet for all Yagi's taunts to keep the kid working hard, it never got any easier to witness. Now even a simple muscle strain was enough to set his stomach roiling.

_He's going to inherit One for All and you know first hand what that does to a person's body. At least at first. He's going to experience far worse than some pulled muscles._

No doubt, but that didn't mean Yagi had to like it.

This though... this he could fix.

"Better?" he asked. The moment Izuku had gotten close enough Yagi had begun kneading his shoulders, gently coaxing out any strain. He hardly needed to ask though. Within seconds Izuku had puddled into his hands, all but purring as knotted muscles loosened and relaxed.

"Mmm hmm."

Oh dear. Yagi bit hard into his lower lip, loath to startle the boy with a loud laugh. He sounded positively *drugged* though. When Izuku swayed a little on his feet Yagi applied pressure downward until he got the message, collapsing to sit right there in the dirt. All the while Yagi kept up steady, soothing strokes until Izuku was heavy in his hands.

"You're good at this," he murmured, speech a little slurred.

Yagi huffed. "I should hope so. My old teacher demanded massages _all the time._" He rolled his eyes fondly, remembering days when disobeying Gran Torino was unthinkable and the man used Yagi's fear to his advantage. Happily.

Actually, it was still those days.
Yagi shivered.

Izuku hardly seemed to notice. When he spoke again it was like Yagi hadn't said anything at all.

"You're good at everything, All Might."

Well... well. Not true of course, but he could only hope that he was good at taking care of his apprentice at least. It was a hope that filled him with strength just as much as it kept him up at night, worrying.

"Am I...?" Yagi said, not entirely sure what he was really asking. There was an indistinct murmur of agreement and Izuku nodding his head. That was worth something, even if Yagi wasn't sure what.

"...Thank you, my boy."

Yagi continued the massage far longer than he needed to. After all, he had to wait for the blush to die down from his cheeks.

***

+1

"This is too different from what I expected..."

The complaint didn't stop Izuku from swallowing the hair though, going a little cross-eyed as his throat jumped and he choked a bit. Yagi immediately reverted back to his true form and stepped forward, instinctually pulling Izuku into his arms and giving his back a few firm pats. After a moment Yagi felt him calming down, his power successfully passed on...

Izuku didn't pull back though.
Instead his arms snaked up to wrap around Yagi's waist—hesitant at first, but then settling there when no reprimand came. Yagi left his hands where they were around the boy's shoulders. Shock had rooted him in place.

Because he'd carried Izuku, given him pats on the back, massages, gentle guidance, comfort and care... but he'd never actually hugged him.

"I'm going to U.A." Izuku murmured, sounding rather stunned about it. "I'm going to apply and I'm going to get in."

Yagi's arms tightened just a fraction. There might have been a slight dampness soaking into his shirt. "Yes you are, my boy... but you're also going to be late."

Pushing Izuku away was by far one of the hardest things he'd ever done. But it was bearable because Yagi knew he'd come right back. And the next time they hugged his boy would be one step closer to his goal.

The greatest hero the world had ever seen.

"Plus ultra, Midoriya."

Yagi sent his hero off with a quick ruffle of his hair and all the love he had to give. Izuku responded with a clasp of his hand and a smile brighter than the sun.

Yagi smiled back and tucked that hand—tingling—up around his heart.

Chapter End Notes

For the record I'm pretty sure Japan doesn't play Concentration? But it's the only clapping game I know and what little I found on Google about Japanese hand games was hard to understand in terms of translation. So we're fudging things a bit.
This one is ACTUALLY drabble length, surprise, surprise. I’ve got about four Big and Important writing projects going on atm, so there hasn’t been much time for fic, but at the very least I wanted to write out this stupid headcanon I had last night lol

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"He's dreamy isn't he? I mean, don't you just want to—"

Uraraka was suddenly grateful for the blaring car horn, someone getting cut off outside the cafe where she stood in line. She just wanted to grab an extra-large coffee with an extra shot and an extra boost of patience if they were selling that nowadays. It had been a long afternoon all around—hero work always was—and Uraraka wasn't sure she was up to hearing exactly what two high school girls wanted to do with the hero they were gushing over.

She could imagine though. Oh so easily.

"He's just so cool!" The second girl squealed, bouncing on her toes with enough force to jostle Uraraka's shoulder. It should have been another annoyance, but instead Uraraka felt a grin beginning to split her lips. Something warm settled in the center of her chest. The kid just sounded so happy. So yeah, alright... hero worship she could get behind. Uraraka would be one hell of a hypocrite if she didn't. The girls' chatter reminded her of her own days at U.A., back when it was still socially acceptable to gush over your colleagues.

Not that she still didn’t do that, mind.

Uraraka titled her head just a little to the left, trying to catch the rest of their conversation. The first girl was making affirmative noises and slapping her friend frantically on the arm. The movement was just there in her peripheral vision.

"Right, right, right? Deku is easily the COOLEST pro."

Wait.
...Deku?

Uraraka sighed and turned around.

She'd been right about their age—the girls were young high schoolers, maybe even middle schoolers on the cusp of graduation—and they were so immersed in their phones that they didn't notice the woman turning in line to face them. Uraraka had to forcefully clear her throat to get their attention. Pulling a small packet from her back pocket, she extended a photo under the first girl's nose.

"He's not cool," Uraraka said sadly. "At all."

The girls blinked down at the photo. They looked up at the stranger; back to the photo. Gapping a bit like fish out of water they finally snatched it from her hands, pouring over the image with even more obsessive intent.

"Is that...?" one girl breathed.

"Number One Hero Deku," Uraraka confirmed. "He's... sixteen here? About that. And yes, he's getting his ass kicked by a very mean duck."

The second girl slapped a hand over her mouth and Uraraka wasn't sure if she was going to laugh or cry. Rather than worrying over such silly details she handed her another photo instead.

"Here he is after Chargbolt got a good shock into him. Great hair, right? Here he's asleep in class. I'm a big fan of that drool puddle. Oh, here's Deku crying over a kitten that, in his exact words was, 'Too small and pure for this Earth...'"

The girls took one photo after another, numbly, and when Uraraka handed over her own cell they watched the video with open mouths: a twenty-year-old Izuku skipping arm in arm with former pro-hero All Might, the two of them entirely unaware that they were being filmed. The girls made desperate squeaks as the two men began an impromptu waltz and Uraraka shook her head at the memory. She'd bet her license and all her savings that they'd been drunk that night, even if neither of them would admit it.
"He's not cool," Uraraka reaffirmed, swiping to show them a video of Izuku geeking out over All Might merch instead. "I mean don't get me wrong, he's the coolest guy you're ever gonna meet, but he's not cool. Do you understand? It's important to me that you understand."

The girls nodded dumbly. One peeked up with a rather awed expression gracing her features.

"Do you just carry this around with you? All the time?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

Uraraka wasn't surprised by the question. She'd become a hero for the financial security and, she'd realized later, the sheer need to make a difference in this world. Not notoriety. Years back she'd taken to wearing a pink wig to accompany her costume, a darkened visor, and light padding that made her appear larger than she actually was (a bonus when fighting nervous villains). No one looked at the cute, brown-haired woman and thought 'Uravity.'

So Uraraka was able to bend a little closer, grinning down at the kids. "I'm someone who knows that Deku still sleeps with an All Might plushie."

"Oh my god," the girl on the right whispered. She looked like she was about to faint. "Please let us keep these," and she gripped tight to the photos.

"Sorry. Incriminating evidence stays with me, girls. Hmm? Oh, sorry!"

Uraraka waved apologetically to the cashier, hurrying forward to place her order. After she had she could feel the stares of the girls' on her back until, five minutes later with drink in hand, just as Uraraka was preparing to leave...

"He's such a dork," one of them whispered, sounding rather stunned.

"Right?"
There was a pause.

"I fucking LOVE HIM."

"RIGHT?"

Nice. Today might not have been the best, but it had certainly ended well.

And if later the one girl found the picture of Izuku and the duck that Uraraka has slipped back into her bag? If they flailed a lot and posted it on social media for all their friends to see? Well, Uraraka certainly didn't know how embarrassing photos of Izuku kept turning up online...

Uraraka smiled, taking a sip of her coffee. Her work here was done.

Chapter End Notes

Casual life ruiner Uraraka is my favorite Uraraka
Chapter Notes

Well this didn't end up as the hilariously epic chapter I'd hoped for but at least it's a prompt fill of some kind??

Also might write a very different from of cryptid!Yagi in the future that my friend and I were coming up with... <3

Five minutes before class began the door slammed open, Ashido all but tripping into the room as she entered at a dead run. Within half a second hands were raised as weapons and the students with quirks more suited for battle had stepped in front of the others, protective almost to a fault. None of it was necessary though. Ashido was bent over her knees, heaving, and when she raised her head there wasn't fear but a manicacal gleam in her eye.

"He's here," she said.

A beat of silence. "HE’S HERE?" Kirishima yelled and with a strangely wondrous gasp from Jiro everyone rushed for the door.

Or at least, two thirds of the class did. Todoroki, Yaoyorozu, Tokoyami, Shoji, Iida, and Izuku were left standing around their desks exchanging confused glances. Never one to leave their peers unattended for long, Iida and Yaoyorozu's expressions morphed into something only recognizable by parents with too many kids and as one they rushed off after the others. Izuku shouted for them to wait for him. Tokoyami and Shoji stood because they might as well tag along. Todoroki followed.

They found their class crowded around the window directly across from 1-B. It was a tight squeeze, but with Uraraka floating a few friends and Mineta climbing on Koda's shoulders they all managed to claim a space of their own, staring intently at something across from the main building. Izuku didn't know what was so fascinating though. It was just the cafeteria, grass, and Ectoplasm-Sensei talking with—

"Iida, Iida, Iida," Ashido was one of the ones Uraraka was floating. She held tight to the window with one hand while her other reached to slap blindly at Iida's shoulder. "You know everyone and everything about U.A., right?"

"I—" Iida clamped his mouth shut, seeming unwilling to confirm or deny that embarrassing
accusation. Ashido hardly seemed to care though. She just pointed excitedly out the window.

"Who is he?"

'He' was none other than Yagi Toshinori, still speaking animatedly—and obliviously—to Ectoplasm. He looked his normal self from this distance as far as Izuku could tell: thin frame hidden under an oversized suit, windswept hair, one hand raising to rub at the back of his head. Izuku could easily picture the bashful expression crossing his features and a fond smile snuck onto his own.

Izuku certainly found the man fascinating, but that was for reasons his classmates knew absolutely nothing about. Besides, even if they'd known that Yagi was All Might, that wouldn't explain the reactions he was seeing now.

Had he missed something?

"You don't know who he is," Uraraka said, caressing the words in a sly voice that Izuku had never heard from her before. "Wow, Iida."

Iida drew himself up to his full height. "I'm not sure what you're insinuating—"

"Not insinuating anything." Uraraka calmly examined her nails.

"You most certainly are!"

"Focus people," Ashido insisted, reaching to smack at Uraraka's head now. "Who do we think he is, huh?"

Tokoyami shrugged. "Maybe he's just a new teacher here."

"BORING, bird-brain. It's like you guys aren't taking this at all seriously! Besides, I checked the schedules: there's no other teachers listed, none that we haven't had before, and he's definitely not new. He was trying to get the reporters to back off weeks ago. I know. I was there. I cried on him."
Yaoyorozu stared. "You did what?"

"Maybe he's like, some sort of threat," Jiro breathed, standing on tip-toe to get a better look. "See how twitchy he is? Maybe he’s someone with a quirk so dangerous he can only be confined within U.A.’s walls."

"That's what I'm talking about!" Ashido leaned across Koda to give her a high-five. "Societal liability placed in the hands of the world's finest heroes for everyone’s protection. I like it."

"He does look sick," Mineta agreed. "Pale, thin..."

"You can't tell his pallor from here," Yaoyorozu said, but no one was listening to her. Bakugo made a fiery fist as he talked big about how weak the guy looked. Hagakure chimed in that she could definitely take him. The running commentary seemed to invigorate Kaminari. He motioned all the heads near him even closer.

"Or maybe it's the opposite," he whispered. "Think about it. Maybe this guy only looks weak but he’s actually a badass in disguise." All those heads turned to stare out the window. "Hardly seems human, right? Maybe he's not something U.A. is just housing; maybe he's something they created."

"A lot of us don't look like a standard human," Tokoyami said, entirely dry, but no one was listening to him either. Uraraka was busy giggling into her hand.

“Maybe,” she said, “He’s one of those heroes that follows the comic books and keeps their real identity a secret. You know, like Nightwave.”

“Maybe he’s The General.”

“Maybe he’s All Might!”

The last suggestion caused an absolute uproar of hysteria among the group. No one heard the pained choking sound Izuku made at the back. Worse, it kept going. Invigorated by the absurdity, theories were rattled off the tongue as quickly as they were thought up, each one more absurd than the last.
"A weapon!"

"A redeemed villain!"

"Wasn't the government experimenting with manipulating quirk abilities? Like, twenty years ago or something?"

"They were. Maybe he's one of the subjects!"

"He's way older than twenty."

"Maybe he only looks older. You know, because of the awful experiments and stuff."

"Oooh. Right."

"That makes sense."

"It doesn't make sense!" Was anyone listening to Shoji? Of course not.

"Foolishness," Iida announced. He put hands on his hips as he puffed up his chest. "This is all just speculation and frankly such speculation is beneath U.A. students. I will find out the truth for us all. I will discover who this mystery man is."

Yaoyorozu had her head in her hands. "Of course you will."

"He's leaving," Aoyama whispered, and as Yagi indeed turned to walk towards the cafeteria, waving goodbye to Ectoplasm as he went, another familiar face came into view. The entirety of 1-A froze as Aizawa made his way across the grass—moving surprisingly fast for an exhausted man shuffling in on just half a cup of coffee. He'd be here any second.

"SCATTER."
"That's an illogical command!" Iida cried as they all ran in the same direction: the safety of their classroom. He was yelled into submission though as nineteen bodies tried to push through the door at once, falling over each other in a rush to return to their desks. Bruises were accumulated and limbs were nearly lost, but they all managed to be seated with hands folded primly by the time Aizawa staggered through the door.

All but one anyway.

"Where the hell is the problem child?" he said.

Izuku was still standing by the window, eyes the size of saucers as he contemplated how very difficult his life had just become.

***

Operation Cornstalk Spotting began in earnest at lunch.

"Cornstalk?" Izuku squeaked, choking on his drink. Uraraka just nodded excitedly.

"Well we don't know his name yet, right? Ashido wanted to call him green bean—because he's so thin like one—but I said his yellow hair makes him look more like a cornstalk. Either one works, I guess."

"This is why I'm hungry all the time," Jiro muttered as Izuku tried to get his throat to stop making dying sounds.

Actually, it had been like this for a couple hours and he was no more used to it now than he'd been that morning. After Aizawa had given him a bored lecture for loitering in the hall Izuku found himself in the midst of a familiar note-passing pattern, only this time the rule breaking involved a subject he was intimately familiar with. All through class Ashido had orchestrated assignments to be carried out just as soon as they gained their freedom: Hagakure would try to find the mysterious man and follow him for info, Aoyama—the only one with actual talent in photography—would try to get some pictures they could examine. Kirishima would speak with Ectoplasm while Ashido herself interrogated Present Mic (Aizawa and Nedzu both were deemed too terrifying to question). It wasn’t an awful plan. After all, if anyone knew the gossip and would be willing to blab it, it was definitely their favorite radio host.
She'd wanted Tokoyami to spy with Dark Shadow and Todoroki to check if any of his family's hero connections had ever heard of this guy (considering that Iida had already texted his brother and come up short), but both had just stared at her with narrowed eyes until she’d giggled and backed away.

"Success," Uraraka said, pointing to the doorway where Ashido had shuffled through. Not much success though as they soon realized. Hagakure had found nothing, Mic claimed to know nothing (though with a strangely nervous air that made them all suspicious), and Ectoplasm had merely stared with unblinking eyes and said, "That's Yagi."

"Yagi." Now seated with the rest of them Ashido was in the midst of gripping at her hair. "Dammit! I already knew that! He told me! And I forgot!"

"You forgot?" Iida asked.

"Look, this was right before exams so excuse me if one random dude's name slipped my mind."

"...of course."

"Yagi spotting," Jiro said, nodding as she shoved a bun into her mouth. The rest of her words came out garbled. "Got a good ring to it. But who the hell is he? I mean, what is up with the scrawny cornstalk scarecrow having access to U.A.'s campus? This place is restricted as hell since the League busted in. They don’t let just anyone wander about."

No one had an answer. Nothing that wasn’t substitute (boring), sci-fi prisoner (absurd), or miscellaneous staff they’d never heard of (unlikely). They picked at their food with a vaguely glum air until Izuku dared to hope that maybe the strange craze had passed.

"Maybe we should just ask Nedzu," Uraraka said, poking at her plate. "I think he takes lunch in his office. We could go ask him right now."

Ashido threw her head back on the chair. "Lame. Okay look, is he probably a normal nobody that's not interesting at all? Absolutely. Could we answer this beautiful riddle before next period starts? Of course. But my fellow classmates, I ask you: should we?"

"...Yes?" Izuku ventured. Ashido flicked him until he yelped.
"No, Midoriya. We're better than this! What kind of heroes will we become if we can't even solve something this simple?"

"The kind that don't solve mysteries? Because that's not what we do?"

Izuku suddenly found a fork pointed square between his eyes. Iida was on the other end looking stern as ever. "Ashido is right," he said, three words that might not ever be repeated. "We might not be aiming for the prestigious career of detectives, but heroes draw on much of the same skill set. What are we if we cannot determine for ourselves what kind of man this Yagi is? If we cannot prove resourceful and determined in the face of a challenge?"

Ashido grinned. "Yeah. What he said."

"You just don't like admitting that you've been beat, but I'm in." Jiro went back to her buns. It was Uraraka who clapped her hands together loud enough to startle them all.

"But we haven't been beat," she said. "I mean, it's only been a few hours. How about we see what we can dig up about this guy in a week."

"Oh yes!" Ashido cried.

Oh no, Izuku thought.

***

It ended up being both milder and more insane than Izuku had imagined (which was honestly quite common among 1-A); a combination of the need to break the school year’s monotony and the sheer determination that had landed his friends here in the first place. The morning Izuku walked in to find a Yagi Board propped in the back of their classroom was the day an irrevocable part of him shriveled and died. Izuku found himself pointing at the display with a shaking finger, his other hand twisting in his shirt.

"You're not really going to allow this, right?"
At his feet Aizawa cracked one eye open and slid so that his sleeping bag clad feet knocked against Izuku's leg. With a sigh he flopped all the way down and curled up on the linoleum.

"If it's not illegal or on fire or disturbing my nap... then I don't care. I realize I'm asking the impossible, but do me a favor and at least try to keep your idiot classmates out of trouble." Aizawa paused, staring. "...Never mind I just realized who I was talking to. Go study, Midoriya," and with that pronouncement Aizawa went straight back to sleep.

Great.

The thing about setting nineteen heroes in training on an unsuspecting target was that they were creative in their efforts, but ultimately, horrendously bad at it. As the days passed Izuku watched in horror as sloppy cellphone pics and printouts from Aoyama's camera slowly filled up the board. Most were long distance, blurry shots of Yagi with big circles and question marks drawn on them in pen, but a few were actually up close and personal. In all of those Yagi had the same fond, bemused expression on his face. Like he didn't know if he should be posing for them or backing away. In one pic he was caught hesitantly waving at whoever had taken it. In another he gave the most awkward thumbs up.

(Izuku saved a copy of that one for himself.)

Interspersed among the pictures were comments like, "Does this guy ever eat?" and "RARE CORNSTALK SMILE" and "Nocturnal??" The day they'd caught a glimpse of Yagi mid attack was the day Uraraka had firmly plastered a sheet with "Protection" on it between "Yagi" and "Board," the bright red splash of red across his hands a sobering image. Well, that was just a new kind of motivation, wasn't it? Totally fine. At the top Iida had taped a printed list of actual facts they'd finally caved and gathered from the teachers. It was still pretty sparse. Yagi Toshinori. Employed by U.A. Assistant. Quirkless.

They'd mourned that last fact only because it meant the death of so many crazy theories. The easy way they moved on from it though--still invested in the project, still invested in Yagi—made Izuku feel light on his feet for the rest of the day. Like Uraraka had lifted him unknowingly. It made him stop for just a moment and think, “Why?”

"No one will say what he's an assistant of though," Ashido said, tipped back in her chair as Sero carefully balanced another pen on her horns. "Is he administration? With the infirmary? No wait, sick dude needs the infirmary, right? Maybe he does PR stuff? That could be why he was dealing with the reporters..."
Yaoyorozu shrugged, no more interested now than she'd been a week before. "You could try studying instead of obsessing over this stupidity."

"Nah."

"Or you could just ask Midoriya."

...They could what now?

The rest of the class was wondering the same thing, slowly turning on Tsuyu with the posture of wolves turning on sheep. She'd been oddly subdued in their latest venture, appearing content to just watch them all from the sidelines. Until now at least.

Tsuyu was staring across the room at Izuku. Her finger tapped at her lips and Izuku would swear there was a smirk growing there. His mouth unhinged as hers twitched.

"He has a picture of that Yagi fellow on his phone. It's his background."

“It’s his what?”

There were things to consider in that statement. Most notably when or how Tsuyu had ever gotten a close look at his phone and why she’d waited a week to mention as much, but none of that was on the table right now. It simply wasn't important.

Izuku's guilt? *Definitely* important.

There was enough time for Izuku to begin a scream; just enough for Todoroki to calmly move out of the way, because in the three seconds following Tsuyu's words Ashido had launched herself straight at his face.

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"I'm sorry, young Midoriya, but I'm still not sure I understand how you received that wound to your cheek..."

Yagi leaned closer, trying to inspect that blooming bruise that (to be fair) Izuku had gotten by toppling off his desk when Ashido had slammed into him, too far gone with shock and speed to stop. (She'd apologized profusely afterwards. While yelling at him.) He wasn't sure how to concisely explain what exactly she'd been mad about, not without making his friends sound completely mad in a very different sort of way. What was the takeaway here anyway? Warn Yagi that his friends were sort of stalking him? That's he's spouted a bunch of random lies to explain the lock screen of them in a hug? That there was a chance—no matter how slim—that one would stumble on something linking him to All Might?

...no.

"Midoriya?"

Yagi was staring at him now; mostly confused, irrevocably fond. He started to smile at whatever he saw in Izuku's eyes and Izuku found himself instinctually smiling back. He laughed and shook all the strangeness from his head.

"It's nothing," Izuku said. "Just... I think my class really likes you."

"They—? Excellent! I'm glad that my teaching has been satisfactory. You kids are—"

"No. No, I mean you. Just you," and Izuku lightly bumped shoulder to skinny shoulder to demonstrate.

"...Ah."

That was some other kind of smile now, one Izuku had never seen on All Might, but he decided that he'd decipher it later. For now he was happy to just sit here on the low wall after school, shoulder-to-shoulder with his hero, feeling the sting in his cheek, wondering what in the world his friends would think up for tomorrow.

Peaceful.
("Oh! But I think Ashido is going to try and steal a blood sample at some point so... watch out for that I guess?"

"What.")

Almost, anyway.
Chapter Notes

Not a continuation of last chapter (sorry to all of you who wanted more of that. I might come back to it later!), but rather a very different kind of cryptid! Yagi scenario that a friend and I were discussing.

Apologies that I haven't gotten around to answering comments. I adore them all (as always!!) and will carve out time to start in on that tomorrow :)

Finally, check out the notes at the bottom regarding a favor!

Beneath his dormitory bed and stacked carefully in a waterproof storage container, Izuku now had fourteen notebooks covered back to front in his Hero observations, just waiting for the day he'd put them to good use. He blushed whenever someone found the box and demanded a closer look. He blushed whenever someone found the box and demanded a closer look. Because yeah, it was definitely embarrassing, but Izuku also might have played it up just a bit so that no one went snooping for the box he kept in his closet instead.

That one contained his Yagi journals.

Started the day they met, it was a careful, reverent record of every personal interaction he'd had with the Number One Hero. Well, not every interaction. Not since it had sunk in that Izuku was really going to be seeing Yagi every. Single. Day. He might have actually attempted the entries regardless if training hadn't exhausted him. The only reason there wasn't a record of every word Yagi had ever said to him was due to Yagi's own, intense work ethic.

But there was still a lot there, scribbled on weekends and in class when Izuku wasn't sneaking naps behind his books: the first time Yagi had laid a hand on his shoulder. Their conversation about morality. That day he'd said he was proud of him. It was the closest thing that Izuku had to a diary and he hoarded those journals accordingly. They contained his most intimate thoughts.

Which was why that particular entry puzzled him. The one that Izuku thought about the most. Out of all those precious memories it was the one page going soft from flipping to it again and again and again—and it really wasn't anything at all.

The day he and Yagi had discussed quirks.
No, not a conversation about what it was like being quirkless. Not an explanation of One for All or even talk of how they could improve it. Izuku had simply noted that scientists still didn't have any real clue for what caused quirks and Yagi... well. He'd agreed...

He'd agreed, but there had been something about his expression that rose all the hairs on the back of Izuku's neck. The expression that had briefly crossed his features—caught, unbeknownst, only in the reflection of one of U.A.'s windows—had been something like amusement; an exasperated acceptance the likes of which he'd never seen on Yagi's face before or since. It was a look that clearly said, "He's just a child" and "But how can you not get it?" all rolled up one.

Izuku had opened his mouth to ask if Yagi knew where quirks came from...and had promptly shut it.

The stupidity of the question hadn't crossed his mind. He just shouldn't ask.

Izuku didn't know why, but he shouldn't.

So he'd had slipped them into a conversation about that afternoon's training instead and that night he'd written about everything in a much sloppier hand than he normally gave to his journals. Izuku had realized with a growing frustration that each sentence just took him farther away from what he was trying to convey. He was used to recording in abbreviated notes and all caps excitement. He didn't have the words to describe the feelings that expression had pulled from him.

Fear, but not fear at all. Curiosity? But with hesitance. It was the like the embodiment of standing at a precipice and having no idea what was lying in wait at the bottom. Maybe it was just the shock of learning that there was more to Yagi than he knew? The crush of his stupid, fanboy status?

...but no. He'd watched the man change. Izuku had been privy to his hero's ultimate secret, the existence of a true form, and he wasn't naive enough to think there weren't others. It's just that this secret rankled.

Izuku kept turning back to that entry on nights he knew he wouldn't be disturbed. Again and again until the paper went translucent with sweat.

And after that day Izuku began to notice more things to record.
It started with a double Ian's shoelace knot and simply grew from there.

"Can't say I know who Ian is," Yagi said cheerfully. He was bent over Hagakure's shoes, doing something complicated with both his hands. They were large and bony, obstructing Izuku’s view of the process, and it seemed to him that one moment there was simply a mess of string and the next a perfectly tied bow. Like magic. "It's an excellent little knot though. Much more secure—and the last thing you want is to trip while out fighting villains! I'll teach it to you when we have more time. Go on now..." and with that Yagi clapped the sleeve of Hagakure's shirt and gently nudged her back towards training. Izuku had watched the whole process with a warm little bubble of happiness blooming in his chest. All Might was just so talented.

The World's previously Number One Hero. Number One Mentor too (as far as Izuku was concerned), and well on his way to being a fantastically well-rounded teacher. Just that morning Izuku had spotted him making an elaborate breakfast for 1-A and offering to repair the hole in Jiro's skirt. Apparently, Yagi knew how to sew too.

In fact, Yagi knew how to do a lot of things... more than anyone would rightfully assume given his schedule. When did he have time to learn it all? Who'd he learn it from?

Izuku ended up doing what he always did when something confused him. He started a list:

Yagi...

- Could cook, sew, clean, babysit, jumpstart a car, do almost anything domestic that 1-A asked of him and practiced woodwork of all things, as they quickly found out when Iida unassumingly bemoaned his small desk and found a larger one in his room two weeks later.
- He spoke at least three languages. Probably more.
- Yagi knew CPR, but that's wasn’t weird for a hero, right? Surely they’d all undergo that training. Eventually.
- He was caught writing with his left hand once and when Ashido squealed over his ambidexterity Yagi explained that no, it was just something he'd taught himself years ago. Pretty handy (ha) don't you think? Would you like some simple exercises? Would you like to learn?
- (Yagi was always eager to teach.)
- He could pick a lock (according to Aizawa).
- Practiced gorgeous calligraphy (according to Nedzu).
- Knew at least five social dances and could lead or follow on demand (though that was probably just gossip coming out of the staff lounge).
- It was not gossip, according to Mic.
- He was caught singing once by Koda.
Caught sketching by Aoyama.

Yagi had more books crammed into his small dormitory apartment than Izuku had ever seen outside of a store and he’d once claimed—in a distracted, offhand manner—that of course he’d read them all. Izuku had stared at the stacks climbing up to the ceiling and thought, “Impossible.”

He possessed "some modest talent" in coding. Enough to keep up with Sato anyway. It flowed easily from his fingers and built new, virtual worlds.

Yagi could kill and prepare a chicken. ("You’re children I’m not telling you that story.")

He could walk in heels. (A forced, practical demonstration).

Once they’d seen him give a eulogy for a fallen hero so poised and eloquent that Yagi hardly seemed himself or All Might in that moment. Izuku wasn’t sure what name to give to the man who’d stood on the podium.

He had once cursed, quietly, in a language that Izuku still couldn’t name...

These were just the tip of something larger. It wasn’t simply the collection of obscure talents or the knowing—now more frequent—gleam that would come into Yagi's eyes when he thought that no one was looking. Izuku supposedly knew everything about All Might, and yet he obviously didn't know enough to put any real pieces together. To highlight the obvious when it stared him in the face.

Like how Yagi never once spoke of parents or family or even his place of birth.

(Lots of people were private.)

Or that yes, he'd attended U.A., but the old pictures Izuku found of him showed a man who looked exactly as he did now. The only change was in his smile. The only aging, it seemed, a result of his injury.

(Lots of people looked younger than they were. Or older.)

None of this was concrete. It wasn't as if Izuku sat down one day and it all came to him in some brilliant flash of thought. They were just stray worries in the back of his mind. Questions. Confusions. Izuku copied them all into his notebooks and let them age in his closet like wine. He didn't dare try and come up with any conclusions.

Besides, they'd all sound mad.
(So Izuku whispered them instead. Sometimes on nights when he was particularly exhausted and the moon shone bright into his room, he'd tell the ceiling about all the impossible things he was considering. It helped that Yagi lived in the apartment above him. Maybe someday he'd hear him and admit—without mockery—that Izuku was onto something.)

***

Yagi had enough books crammed into that small apartment to rival a store and one day he did, in fact, hear him. One Saturday he was running late and he texted Izuku to make himself at home until he arrived. Easy enough. Izuku loved books almost as much as Yagi obviously did and had long been curious about the collection. From hallway to living room there were shelves lined with paperbacks and far, far too many choices for an easy decision.

Thus, Izuku followed the blood trail.

He'd grown used to the stains on the collars of Yagi's shirts, the once-white handkerchief he always carried in his back pocket, but it was rare to see such a grisly display out in the open like this. The blood on the floor was fresh and Izuku wondered what could have triggered such a severe attack as he wound his way out into the kitchen. There, the blood stopped beside the table. Like gruesome breadcrumbs they had led Izuku to a single, open book.

It wouldn't be until years later that he saw the contrived nature of it all. That Yagi had left out just the right story at just the right time, making sure his own concern would take Izuku directly to it. Fairy tales had grown in popularity since the beginning of quirks. People had to look for new kinds of fantasies to escape into and Izuku had grown up on his own fair share of myths. Nothing quite like this one though.

Yagi stumbled in with grocery bags and an apology forty-five minutes later—the exact amount of time Izuku needed to finish the tale. The words now sat heavy in his mind. They left him slightly out of breath. Izuku had read of a god with a talent for war, eventually passing down his power to a young pupil and becoming a guardian of children instead. The pages were old—deckled and trimmed with gold—but the ink itself looked fresh. A hand shot out before Izuku could turn to the earlier stories.

"It's one of my favorites," Yagi announced, tucking the volume safely under one arm. "Why, it actually reminds me a bit of you and me! Heh, though maybe that's just my arrogance talking..."

With stars in his eyes Izuku raced to deny that All Might could ever be arrogant and thus missed the contrived nature of that as well.
Mentors led after all, and the most effective lessons occurred when the pupil didn’t realize they were being taught.

***

Six months later and Izuku had filled a new notebook with talents and ambiguous words. He’d seen the shades of those who’d come before them during the tournament and had commented, hesitantly, on the strange gold glow around their eyes. (A glow identical to the book he’d once held in his hands.) How they'd been glorious, but not scary (Yagi's own jokes aside). Izuku had even found the courage to mention that sometimes, while using One For All, he felt almost like.. a little like he was

"There he is! We're living in a mad world, Izuku my boy." Yagi chuckled it into his ear, pulling Izuku in for a one-armed hug that still sent happiness flooding through his veins. "Look at this little weakling scoring in the top of his class."

Izuku playfully shoved him back. "I'm not a weakling anymore."

"No. No you're not."

It was in the space between one breath and the next that something about Yagi changed. If pressed Izuku still couldn't say exactly what it was, only that things suddenly felt heavy between them. Yagi's smile was still there, his arms were still warm, but his next question had a new and significant weight to it.

"How long do you plan to be a hero, Midoriya?"

Izuku considered. "Forever."

"Yes?"

"Yes."
"Good."

No hesitation now. Not for either of them. Yagi dropped a quick kiss into Izuku's hair and steered him back to class where more training and tests awaited him. It was time to strive for another perfect score or mastery of another technique and Izuku was as excited as he'd been on day one. Perhaps moreso given the strange electricity running up his arms; power and purpose made tangible along his skin.

Yagi’s touch felt a little like wielding One for All. There was strength in daring to interpret his mentor's words literally for once.

Forever.

Yes. Izuku would consider forever.

Chapter End Notes

Okay! So the short of it is I do a lot of research on fic/fandom and I've just begun work on my dissertation, specifically on Coffee Shop AU.s (I'm massively excited). A small portion of my work deals with gender so if anyone is willing to fill out this survey (it's super short) and/or reblog this post I would be MASSIVELY grateful. Obviously the farther this can travel the better in terms of results, so thanks in advance if you help out <3
Thank you to everyone who answered the survey! Here, have some stupidity I wrote during lunch :)

Aizawa was used to his phone ringing at all hours of the day and night. His co-workers both in and out of school knew that his sleep schedule was non-existent and that if anyone needed a hand he was always the first one on call. Indefinitely. Spotted a villain nearby? Rescue mission going south? Facing down Death's grim visage in the form of 80+ papers to grade? Just call Aizawa. He'd grumble about it and demand a coffee in payment later on, but he didn't actually mind the work. Aizawa had known from the age of eight that this was the lifestyle he was signing up for. Heroes didn't get off hours or vacation days. Hell, they barely got retirement.

Which was why when Hizashi called at 2:37am Aizawa was awake on the first ring, he answered promptly, already had a pair of sweats pulled on and his scarf held firmly in his hands when—

—he simply hung up.

A muscle in his cheek twitched. Aizawa stared as cell phone immediately began ringing again.

"Absolutely not," he growled at it.

Hizashi was sent to voicemail. He called back. He called back again. There was a blessed moment of silence before he called a fifth time and Aizawa's laptop began lighting up with texts.

Ring, ring, ring—it's me again, bitch.

"I'm going to murder him," Aizawa announced. Ashes gave an agreeable meow before she (damn her) stole the warm spot on his bed and fell right back asleep. Aizawa was left to his cursing and stumbling as he finished getting dressed. He'd have to go.

Not because he was a Hero.
Because his damn phone wouldn’t shut up until he did.

***

"He's heEEEEEEEEEEEERE!"

Hizashi blasted the last half of the word using his quirk and Aizawa had to hold his ground outside the entrance to U.A., his scarf and hair both whipping around his shoulders. It went on just a moment too long and with a hiss Aizawa activated his own quirk. Hizashi was left voiceless in the middle of the courtyard, planted like a stone among a sea of students, all of them whispering and pointing as they passed. When Aizawa finally shuffled in Hizashi was still there, now sporting two finger-guns and a suspiciously brittle grin.

"He's here! Yeah! Best friend in the entire world, coming through—the kind of friend who probably would have appreciated a different greeting after a long night I'm just realizing this now. Alright! What can you do? Let's move forward. Yes, that's the ticket. Make way, people, make way."

The students obediently scurried aside as Hizashi draped an arm over Aizawa's shoulders and steered him towards class. All the while he kept up a monologue that pounded through his head and had the kids snickering into their hands. Half-hidden by his scarf, Aizawa let his eyes roam and took careful note of who was enjoying themselves the most. He'd just found his volunteer group for cleaning up the practice cities.

"—appreciate it. Really I do. What a pal. What a champ. You should have some sort of reward, Shouta. A medal! Medals are great, aren't they? All gold and shiny and... uh..."

They'd arrived at his classroom and in that short amount of time Hizashi had come to the conclusion that Aizawa didn't want a medal any more than he wanted a six-foot, one-inch asshole yelling at the top of his lungs at 8:00am. Luckily, he seemed prepared for that eventuality.

With a manic finger held up in a "wait" gesture Hizashi turned, scrambled into the classroom, and came back three seconds later with a coffee cup in hand.

Damn straight he did.
Aizawa snatched the brew and took a long, desperate gulp. Hizashi fiddled in front of him.

"Do you forgive—?"

"No." Aizawa kept drinking.

"...right."

When the coffee was gone—"That's impressive, man, really it is"—Aizawa shoved the empty cup back against Hizashi's chest and watched him fumble for a moment. That done, he conjured up a glare with all the strength the caffeine had given him and it was a glorious thing to see Hizashi squeak.

"If you ever call me up at 3:00am again because there was a goddamn stinkbug in your bedroom I will personally reach down your throat, grab those vocal cords you're so fond of, and drag them out through your teeth."

"...I don't think that's how anatomy works," Hizashi whispered. "But yEAH! MESSAGE RECEIVED! And the favor was appreciated. Very much so. You are just... wonderful, Shouta. Scarily wonderful. And, ah, for the record? Just—for the record it wasn't—wasn't quite 3:00am! More like... 2:30..."

Aizawa had already slammed the door in his face.

***

Out of all the possible issues between them entomophobia should have been the easiest to deal with. After all, it wasn't like Hizashi was a cruel man. Or manipulative. Or prone to bouts of stupidity (beyond the usual). For all their differences they'd always gotten along well and if you'd pressed Aizawa back in his school days about whether something entirely out of Hizashi's control could ever come between them, he would have honestly and forcefully shown you the fucking door.

Still. None of this changed the fact that over a decade later Aizawa was ready to bash his best friend's head in because of a goddamn moth.
"It can't hurt you," Aizawa said through gritted teeth. He had his cell on speaker hanging limply in his lap, head low, Ashes putting small holes in the back of his shirt as she kneaded it and he just didn't care.

Hizashi yelled something incomprehensible. Luckily, Aizawa had grown used to translating panicked gibberish.

"Yes I'm sure. It only looks big and scary, alright? It's probably just attracted to a lamp or something. Turn out the lights, ignore it, and it'll ignore you. The worst that could possibly happen is the asshole irritates your skin a little bit." Aizawa decided to leave out the parts about severe allergic reactions and the few moths that fed on blood when there was no fruit nearby. Hizashi wasn't asthmatic and they weren't living in freaking Malaysia.

...he'd been researching this shit a lot lately.

Too bad telling Hizashi to turn out the lights and beginning a sentence with, "The worst that could happen" didn't do much to calm him down.

Aizawa sighed and rubbed at the bridge of his nose as the voice on the line grew louder. Higher pitched. Sharp enough to shatter glass, really. Apparently the moth was doing all sorts of evil, moth things now. Which was to say, flying.

"Can't you just kill it?" Aizawa groaned, but Hizashi wasn't listening. Of course now, while completely out of his mind with fear, was the one time he didn't activate his quirk. He could have killed the moth in a milisecond but noooo. "Fuck me sideways I'll—Hizashi stop screaming—I will be there in a few minutes. Just... god just...go hide in the corner or something."

It was never just bug duty for him. Oh no. Hizashi's screaming meant that Aizawa would have to deal with the neighbors first, quite possibly the cops (whose badly hidden animosity towards heroes sure didn't help matters), check the house thoroughly for any "accomplices," and then he could kill the damn thing. He'd be lucky if he got back into bed within the hour.

Rubbing at his eyes Aizawa considered booking Hizashi with a therapist. He considered insisting that the man move to warmer climates where bugs didn't crawl inside to escape the cold. With raging jealousy he watched Ashes give a massive yawn, saw those teeth glinting in the moonlight, and considered buying Hizashi a cat.
In the end all he did was go and take care of the moth.

(And if at the last moment Aizawa changed his mind and carefully set it back outside instead... well, he sure as fuck wasn't telling Hizashi that.)

***

It became a Thing between them. God help him but Aizawa's routine now included getting out of bed at all hours of the night—only on nights when he was actually attempting to sleep though!—and walking the three blocks to Hizashi's apartment to save a grown-ass, pro hero from whatever evil bug had wormed its way into his nightmares. Pun not intended.

It reached the point that when Nedzu came to him requesting that Aizawa live in the dorms with the rest of 1-A he fairly jumped at the chance. Let the surprised headmaster think it was just his protective streak showing. All Aizawa needed was to be eight miles away from Hizashi's place for a while. Even that fool wouldn't expect him to go all that way in the dead of night. Not unless it was an emergency.

They'd had long conversations regarding the definition of "emergency" lately.

All of which was to say that Aizawa had enjoyed two, blessed weeks of near-sleep in the small room off from the brats' hallway. Sure, Bakugo tended to set fire to his bedsheets and there was a screaming match about something or other each morning, but that was just par for the course when teaching super-powered kiddies. Nothing Aizawa couldn't handle.

"Sensei?"

He rolled up on one elbow, squinting to make out Midoriya in the doorway, the faint light from the kitchen casting shadows along his face. He was twisting the hem of his All Might pajamas (really?) and looking nervous. Even by his standards. Aizawa bit the inside of his lip and hoped it wasn't nightmares again.

“What’s up, kid?” Comfort was never his strength, but he could try dammit.

Indeed, Midoriya seemed to become more agitated, going so far as to cringe slightly. He glanced hesitantly over his shoulder where, Aizawa could now hear, steadily raising voices were emanating
down the hall. He sat up, wondering if something was really wrong.

Maybe something in his expression was decent for once because Midoriya immediately began babbling.

“We’re sorry for waking you up, Sensei, really, but there’s this spider in Aoyama’s room and he’s freaking out about it and it’s HUGE, no one wants to touch it, but Tsuyu says she’s going to eat it if no one else will, and... Sensei? Uh... Sensei? Are you okay?”

No. He most certainly was not.

Aizawa allowed himself ten seconds of internal screaming before he got out of bed so fast that Midoriya scrambled back, letting out a small “Eep!” as he did. Quirk already activated—like his idiot kids weren’t trying to freeze or burn the spider, Jesus—Aizawa marched down to Aoyama’s room with as much stoic acceptance he could muster.

This just seemed to be his lot in life. All the more reason to murder Hizashi come Monday morning.

Because really, Aizawa had to take satisfaction where he could find it. Killing spiders and best friends seemed like a good place to start.
Hello, friends!

1. I meant to upload something on Saturday to celebrate the beginning of season 3 though obviously that didn’t happen. Still, I get the feeling we’ll need even more fluff with what’s fast approaching...

2. This is a fill for everyone who asked for a reverse of chapter 3 where Izuku slips up and calls All Might "Dad." Sorry it's so short but I 100% couldn't figure out how to make it longer

3. Finally I'm thinking of writing a coffee shop au for these dorks?? Because I always want coffee shop aus for my fandoms. Would that be something people are interested in reading? So far this collection has been more canon divergence than flat out AU, so I can always post it separately. But if the fic ends up as a short enough one-shot I might just post it here anyway.

That's all I've got. Enjoy the drabble! <3

"Midoriya, my boy—"

"Yeah, Dad?"

Yagi froze in the act of pulling yogurt down from the shelf, slamming his hand over his mouth both to cover his squawk and catch any blood he might be coughing up. Goodness though, Midoriya didn’t seem to have thought much about his word choice there. He didn’t even seem to have noticed.

The young man simply examined a carton of eggs they hoped to buy with all the attention he’d give to analyzing a villain; head bent and one hand rubbing lightly at his cheek. Yagi didn’t miss the woman next to them though, pausing her own examination of cheeses to shoot them a curious glance.

Oh fucking hell.

"I, ah..."

So. What exactly was he supposed to do in this situation? Three years at U.A., decades on the job, and nothing had prepared him for this. Certainly Nana had never bothered with a What To Do When
Your Protégé Slips Up And Calls You Dad lecture (though if she had it probably would have just been twenty minutes of her cackling). And heaven forbid Gran Torino ever catch wind of it. No, this was horrendously uncharted territory. Did he call Midoriya out on it? Let it lie? If he did say something how was Yagi supposed to convey that he was thrilled with the term—good god, was he ever—but only if Mirodiya meant it and it hadn't just been some meaningless slip best left unacknowledged between them because otherwise that would just embarrass the boy and Yagi knew embarrassment, thank you, he was experiencing it right now.

Maybe he could just die. Yes, that sounded doable. Or a villain could attack! Damn but he'd be thankful for a good villain right now. The bad sort of good villain. Someone who would cause a lot of distracting damage.

No one burst through the grocery store wall though. There was no scream down aisle five. Yagi was left with his mouth hanging open, shivering in the refrigerated section as Midoriya determined that these eggs would do just fine. This was meant to be a simple outing to secure groceries for the dorm and Yagi honestly didn't know how it had turned into this. Him. Panicking. Midoriya. Feeling filial? Good god. He placed the eggs in the cart with what seemed like agonizing slowness and finally looked up.

"You were saying something, All Mi—? I mean Yagi!" Izuku's gaze slid to the woman as he quickly changed tactics. She'd noticed though. One eyebrow was creeping into her hair. Yagi was poised to make some joke about delusional kids or bad nicknames when she said,

"Do you make a habit of calling your father by his last name, young man?" She stared at a gaping Midoriya over a thick pair of glasses, going so far as to sniff at him. "It seems rather rude. Not that it's any of my business," and making it clear that she quite enjoying making it her business the woman snatched up her cheese and bustled away, casting caustic looks behind her as she went.

Well...that could have been worse?

Midoriya stood rooted to the tiles though, his expression clearly asking, "Do I call my what by what?"

And wasn't that just a wonderful solution. Yagi could put aside his own panic if someone else was panicking more.

"We'd best get this back," he said, wincing at the crack in his voice. Yagi bustled about and slammed into the cart and began shoving it in a general direction, tossing in a few more foodstuffs as he went, all of it random. "Yes! Come along, Midoriya! We don't want to keep the rest of your class waiting,
now do we?"

It was a good thirty seconds before he heard the familiar clomp-clomp-clomp of sneakers rushing up behind him. Midoriya fell in beside Yagi with a hand over his mouth and bright, salmon pink cheeks.

Yagi winced again at that look. He opened his mouth. Closed it. Opened it again. Finally found his voice. "We don't need to discuss it," he said.

Midoriya swallowed hard. "N-no. No we don't."

Well then. That was for the best. Everything resolved.

"Because sons don't really need to say that they're sons, right? They just are."

And thus it was that Earth’s Number One Hero nearly died that day when his feet caught on the rung of the cart and his hands slipped off the handle and his heart just stopped. Cartwheeling to stay standing Yagi pivoted to get a look at Midoriya staring determinedly into the distance, a stubborn glean in his eyes that was usually reserved for battle. The facade cracked only when the silence went on a beat too long. Midoriya's gaze skittered his way. "Right?"

And that Yagi knew how to answer. One hand returned to the cart. The other reached down to ruffle his hair.

"Right, my boy. You're very right indeed."

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Bonus:

Later that day All Might appeared in the store requesting security footage of the refrigerated aisle between the hours of 2:00 and 3:00pm. Employees speculated over how their meager assistance might help solve a major investigation.
Nothing like that. It was just a man treating himself to a copy of a favorite memory, a reminder, and a truth.
Ah, the end of the semester when life is nothing but work and sorrow barely staved off by caffeine. Comment two weeks from now to see if I'm still alive lol

(Threw a few headcanons into this one btw. Whatever reads as non-canonish is that. Definitely. Because I'd definitely never make any mistakes :D)

"Which is exactly why you need training in formations and spatial awareness," Aizawa said. He smacked a lazy hand against the diagram on the board. "If you hit your teammate during a fight instead of the villain then congratulations, you've now got two enemies to contend with, and I'm sure as hell not going to be the one to bail you out. In fact, I—"

The rather uncomfortable lecture was interrupted by a knock on the door. All of 1-A let out a collective sigh of relief.

No-one came in though.

"Ah." Realizing the issue Sato jumped out of his seat to open the door himself. Detective Tsukauchi stood with hat in hand and a vaguely embarrassed smile.

"You realize," he said, "that us normal folk can't move a door that size, right?"

"Life more weights," Aizawa said.

Chuckling, Tsukauchi stepped inside. His easy-going nature put everyone at ease—surely there wasn't an emergency if he was in such good spirits?—but the fact that he remained in uniform at 2:54 told them that officially business was still underway. Everyone sat straighter, uncrossed their legs, folded hands carefully over the tops of their notebooks. Izuku in particular tried his best to look presentable. If Tsukauchi was here then maybe All Might needed him for something.

"You never were one to beat around the bush, Aizawa," he said. "I'll be sure to give you the same courtesy. I apologize for interrupting your class, but I'm afraid I need to borrow one of your students."
Iida's hand shot into the air. "Are we in trouble, sir?"

"Trouble? No, no. Nothing like that. Consider this a personal favor more than anything else. Really, it's nothing that any of you need to worry about." Izuku had already prepped himself to stand when Tsukauchi turned his smile to the back of the class instead. "Koda? If you'd be so kind?"

It certainly wasn't what any of them were expecting, though Bakugo's disbelieving snort was a bit unwarranted. The only ones who seemed indifferent to this pronouncement were Aizawa and Koda himself. He gathered his things—hands twisting the edge of his shirt just a little nervously—and puttered to Tsukauchi's side with his head bowed. Aizawa merely waved them off and picked his chalk back up. Tsukauchi left the door wide open.

"Now, as I was saying—"

Objectively speaking six minutes isn't a long time, but when you're waiting for the end of a school day it can feel like eternity. With Aizawa's back to them Izuku briefly turned to catch Uraraka's eye. She was already passing notes to Jiro, and when he turned back Iida was giving him what he probably thought was an inconspicuous look. It was clear that they were all thinking along the same lines: class was over in six minutes and Koda was a distinctly slow walker.

The moment the bell rang the four of them were out of their seats and tearing down the hall.

"We're terrible," Iida said, huffing as he worked to keep up with Jiro. He might have the boost in his calves, but at normal speeds she had him beat. "I mean, what if this is something personal? Something Koda doesn't want us knowing about?"

Uraraka shook her head, hair flying. "The detective guy."

"Tsukauchi," Izuku said.

"—promised it wasn't anything bad. So it's gotta be something cool, right? And I want in." She leveled her back and dug her legs in, sprinting a few feet ahead. "Jiro! Wait for us!"

She did, stopping at the school entrance. Her arm flew out to point and then she was sprinting again
towards Koda and Tsukauchi, just across the street; Izuku, Uraraka, and Iida just a few paces behind. Koda split into a huge grin when he spotted Jiro.

"You ass," she said, knocking into his shoulder. "You don't get to ditch class early and go off with a handsome detective without me. That's best friend rules 101."

Koda nodded furiously.

Tsukauchi blinked. "Handsome?"

"Is there anything we can assist you with, sir?" Iida had fallen into something like a parade rest, his wandering hands tucked firmly behind his back. "Not that I assume you need assistance. I'd never imply that you don't know how to do your job. After all, if you required multiple members of 1-A you surely would have asked for them. Which you didn’t. I only mean—"

"He means," Izuku interrupted, "that Koda is our friend." He flashed him a smile. "So if he does need help...we're here." Uraraka made a series of boisterous noises while Jiro punched Koda on the arm. Tsukauchi was left shaking his head in fond amusement.

"Well if you're alright with it...?" When Koda signed his affirmative Tsukauchi just shrugged. "Fine by me then. It's not quite what you kids think though. Koda doesn't need our assistance. I need his. So c'mon then. I don't want the trail to get cold."

The four of them exchanged confused glances, but Tsukauchi was already heading at a brisk pace back down the street, Koda following at his heels with a suddenly serious expression. It seemed like work was underway and the other four kept their mouths shut as they headed far past U.A. and deep into the shopping district. Izuku wasn't sure of their destination until he spotted the bright police tape up ahead. Tsukauchi helped them underneath it and lead them into a flower shop. He pointed at a room in the back.

"She's in there."

'She' as it turned out was not the witness Izuku was expecting, but rather a large lab with a dopey smile and thumping tail. Her collar read Minnie—bit of irony there—and she let out a series of happy barks at the unexpected visitors. It was Koda she raced towards first though, slamming her nose into his stomach and trying to bury herself there. With a gleeful smile Koda bent and let Minnie tuck herself into his arms, whispering something into her ears.
Tsukauchi sidled up beside Izuku, close enough that their shoulders brushed. "Villain attack earlier today," he said. "Any thoughts?"

"There's no damage," Uraraka said, quiet as Koda continued speaking with the dog. "Everything looks fine up front. I wouldn't have known there was a problem except for the tape."

Iida was worrying his bottom lip. "Quirk?"

"That's what we're thinking." Tsukauchi ran a hand through his hair, the only sign of agitation they'd seen from him. "Invisibility. Something that lets him pass through walls... We're not sure yet. Between you and me this isn't the first store that's been hit these last few weeks. It's far from the most glamorous case, but with the League making public threats the mayor has been on our asses to crack down on the recent crime spree, especially when it comes to the minor stuff that doesn't warrant a pro hero call. After all, if we can't even manage some robberies what good are we?" Tsukauchi grimaced. "Each time we've failed to find any witnesses though, until..." He brought the hand down to gesture at Minnie. "The woman who owns this place said she was carrying an order out to the client's car when she was robbed. The dog was the only one who might have seen anything."

"And you think Koda can provide his own, unique witness statement," Izuku finished. Tsukauchi flashed him a smile.

"All Might did say you were quick."

Uraraka's eyes lit up at that, but they didn't have time to unpack such a curious statement. Jiro shushed them as Koda finally stood. Minnie pressed against his leg and he shrank back a bit, uncomfortable with all the attention. He did start signing though.

"It's hard to translate," Jiro said. She cocked her head at whatever he was saying. "From dog to human, I mean. Not the JSL. Hmm. Wait, the guy spoke to the owner?"

Koda nodded as Tsukauchi's eyes narrowed. "And she smelled different afterwards. Hmm? Yes, Iida, I'm familiar with the language. Not quite as adept as Jiro though." She flushed pink for some reason and Koda twiddled his thumbs. "Did Minnie see which way he went?"

Minnie had and Tsukauchi pulled a bag of pretzels from his coat pocket, tossing her a few in appreciation. They left her thumping her tail and followed Koda out and back down the street. Izuku
felt a strange flare of pride rising in his chest.

"This isn't the first time you've called in Koda for help, is it?" he asked, voice pitched low. A smile pulled at the edge of Tsukauchi's lips.

"No," he admitted. "His quirk is more suited for police work than I think he first realized—not that I'd ever dissuade him from the hero track," he said, trying to mollify Iida and Uraraka's expressions. "A few months back we had a domestic dispute, but the wife refused to say anything. Too scared I imagine. She did, however, have a parrot repeating some... unsavory phrases." Tsukauchi's eyes darkened. "A colleague of mine quipped that it was too bad we couldn't just ask him what happened. Well..." He shrugged.

"Koda should be very proud of all he's accomplished!"

"I had no idea he was doing side work for the police." Uraraka rubbed at her chin.

It was Jiro who lifted her head and shot them superior looks. "He told me," and she skipped ahead to where Koda was scanning the power lines. Uraraka had dissolved into giggles.

"Not sure she should be calling older guys 'handsome' anymore where Koda can hear..."

"Or at all," Tsukauchi muttered. "Hey! You find something?"

Koda had. Waving them over he pointed excitedly to a series of sleepy birds, only a few of which bothered to even chirp at them indigantly. It took a few minutes, but they eventually got out of them that yes, a certain individual had passed through here earlier. Go that way and leave us alone. A block later they found a stray cat. Then a rat. The beetle in the bush that Koda cowered from but spoke to anyway. By the time they reached the outskirts of the district the sun was beginning to set and Koda was explaining that they'd been following the smell all along.

"Metallic," Jiro translated. "Right, Koda? Yeah... or at least that's as near as he can translate it. Minnie compared it to her dog bowl and the birds said he smelled like the disks humans drop."

"Spare change," Iida said.
"Shinso."

The other five turned towards Izuku, eyebrows raised. Ah. Right. His train of thought wasn't obvious to everyone else. He'd promised Uraraka he'd work on that.

"Shinso. At the Sports Festival," he said, a little frantic to explain. "He smelled like that. A bit... metallic, yeah. That's the only way I can think to describe it. It's subtle," Izuku said, waving hands at Jiro's expression. "I only noticed it when we get close."

"Close?" she drawled.

"While fighting!"

Iida slapped a hand into his palm. "You think this may not be a physical quirk at all then? That the culprit is hypnotizing the victims?"

"Or erasing their memories," Uraraka said.

"Replacing them?" Koda signed. "False memories?"

Izuku nodded. "It would explain why you haven't found any eye-witnesses yet. The guy just didn't think to use his quirk on the dog."

"Shit." Tsukauchi was outright gripping at his hair now. "Alright. I can check the shop owner's records, see if she really had a delivery at that time. For now though...you know where this guy is hiding, Koda?"

He nodded once—sharp, confident—and pointed towards what appeared to be an abandoned lot. Uraraka and Jiro linked arms while Iida cast it a distasteful look. Izuku couldn't blame them. To say it was an unsavory place was putting it mildly.

"If he really can manipulate people then he should have better digs," Jiro muttered.
"Implying that there are serious limits to his power," Iida said. He stretched his arms and did a few squats. "Petty crime is all this lowlife can manage."

Uraraka cracked her knuckles. "I'm not afraid of him."

No. They'd faced far worse.

Tsukauchi smiled as Koda stepped up beside him, his friends doing the same on either side. He tapped his cell thoughtfully as he gazed at them each in turn.

"I was going to call for backup, but since I already have five heroes with me..."

Izuku beamed up at him. "Leave it to us, sir. I texted my mom. She knows I'll be late."

"Shit. That's right, remind me that you still go home to your mothers."

Despite that Tsukauchi lead them towards the lot where a single light shown in the dark, not unlike the solitary campfire of someone trying to keep a low profile. They kept close together, alert, safe in the knowledge that they had each other's backs.

Two hours later, Aizawa received a text at home:

_Made an arrest. More help than I expected. Extra credit? :)_

- _T_

Aizawa stared down at the five names Tsukauchi had provided and bit back a sigh. Stupid, _talented_ children.

Koda already had a 100 on their latest test. Aizawa added a +5 anyway, a 'Good work,' and called it a night.
Chapter Notes

A friend of mine asked me yesterday how many of these I plan to write. My answer was sending her the two page, single-spaced, still growing Word document I've saved with prompts. Some of them are intricate ideas with actual plot and questions about world building... others are, "Floor is lava" and "Aizawa needs a fucking Snuggie."

Either way, I'll be here a while :D

"What's wrong now?"

Momo didn't bother asking Bakugo himself. Like the rest of the class she turned directly to Kirishima when he stormed through the door, confident in his ability to translate explosions and strings of curses into something like sense. Indeed, he hopped up onto his desk and nodded towards the open window

"It's Midoriya, of course." He said, smiling sunnily.

"SHUT UP!"

"He's committing the egregious sin of enjoying his lunch hour. Just sitting in the shade of a tree, writing, eating..." Kirishima wiped an imaginary tear from his eye. "Our boy looked so peaceful. It was more than Bakugo could stand."

"Shut. Up." He growled it this time, leaping over to try and smash Kirishima's head into the opposite desk. He got his hardening up just in time. "Fucking Deku is scribbling in that stupid notebook of his again. Which means he's probably saying shit about you." Bakugo shoved his head again for good measure.

Momo blinked. "Notebook?"

"Now that I think about it, he does always seem to have one with him." Jiro tilted her head side to side, considering. "Think it's a diary?"
Behind her Uraraka gave a very small, very heartfelt gasp.

"If it is then the kid has the right idea."

They all sat up straighter as Aizawa shuffled into the room. He yawned hugely before shoving the rest of a sandwich in, chewed like a robot, finished, brushed crumbs from his shirt. He stared when the students continued staring at him. "What?"

"Diary?" Uraraka ventured.

Aizawa shrugged. "It's a healthy coping mechanism for anyone, but especially heroes who face trauma on a regular basis and don't always have access to therapy or strong support networks. If the problem child is pouring out his drama on paper it's less likely to erupt in my classroom."

"Oh my god," Jiro said. She flat out refused to acknowledge the sense in that. At least right now. "Do you...?"

"Hm?" Aizawa settled behind his desk, pulling out a juice carton. "Yes."

"Oh my god."

"I wonder what that reads like," Momo murmured as Bakugo scowled at them each in turn. They could see little sparks drifting up his wrist as he settled his gaze on Aizawa, practically humming with disproportionate rage.

"Like Deku would ever do something smart! Fucking shit-for-brains is writing his analysis journal." Bakugo made the last two words sound like 'sewage dump.' Or 'cauliflower dinner.' "You think he's healthy? Deku's obsessed. Always scribbling and muttering to himself. Got the old ones lined with sheet protectors, I bet. This one is volume fucking nineteen!"

Kirishima sighed. "Yet the fact that you know what number he's on... doesn't that tell you anything?"

"Shut up!"
They were all surprised though when Aizawa opened his eyes again. He paused in the act of consuming his apple juice and went so far as to lean forward across the desk. His pupils contained the faintest glint of red. "Analysis journal?"

Bakugo scoffed. "Fucking nonsense. He deconstructs—" (serious air-quotes there) "—our fighting habits to come up with weaknesses and strengths. Strategies too, not that any idea of Deku's would work." In the back Uraraka raised a hand to point out that Midoriya's strategies did work more often than not, but then shut her mouth at Bakugo's expression. "He did it for the pros when we were kids and now writes non-stop about us. Like I said, probably writing shitty things about you, weird hair." Bakugo slammed a hot palm against the back of Kirishima's neck.

Aizawa stood though. He calmly finished his drink and tossed it into the trash.

"Yaoyorozu. Go find Midoriya and bring him to me. The rest of you take your lunches outside."

They all turned to one another. "Sir?"

"Now."

Well, when he put it that way… Uraraka, Jiro, and Kirishima left in a hurry, dragging a sullen Bakugo into 1-B as they went. Momo headed in the opposite direction. After a few moments she found Midoriya under a tree out front, writing contentedly in a dog-eared journal. He looked relaxed. Peaceful.

Which for some strange reason made Momo's lunch feel like it was crawling back up her throat. She swallowed hard and picked up the pace.

Whatever it was, best not to keep Aizawa waiting.

***

"You wanted to see me, sir?"
Aizawa took a moment to observe Midoriya from under his lashes. Long hair and the assumption that you were always half-asleep had its advantages. The kid hadn't crossed the threshold of the classroom yet, seemingly content to keep his distance until he knew exactly what this was about. He looked a little sunburned. Fidgety. Healthy otherwise though. Midoriya would have seemed exactly like any other high school kid if not for the slightly panicked expression and the scars on his hand.

A hand protectively clutching a notebook.

In an instant Aizawa had leapt out of his chair and snatched hold of the book, pulling it gently but firmly from Midoriya's grasp. He wasn't All Might fast, but he was fast enough, and there was something satisfying about seeing the kid gap down in shock at his empty hands. Back in his chair Aizawa stretched out and flipped the book over. Hero Analysis For the Future No. 19. Good. It would have been embarrassing if he'd grabbed the wrong text.

As it was, Aizawa was able to wave the book carelessly in Midoriya's direction. "Looking for this?"

"Sensei—!"

"Odd." He pretended to flip through the pages, reading, but really watched the way his charge stiffened in the doorway. "Someone bigger and stronger than you has taken this. How sad. Oh well, I get to read through this at my leisure now and I doubt there's much of anything you could do to stop me." For added emphasis Aizawa toyed with his scarf. Just a bit.

Midoriya finally took three steps into the room. "Sensei, why...?"

Aizawa glared over the pages. "Who the hell said I'm your sensei? For all you know I'm a stranger. An enemy. A villain who now has access to a very detailed record of all your friends' weaknesses and strategies on how to defeat them."

It took a second, but then all the blood drained out of Midoriya's face. It wasn't a pretty sight with that sunburn.

"I—I wouldn't let anyone take it," he protested, hands wringing his shirt like a rag. "Okay y-you, yeah, sure, but no one else. I'd never—I...who would even want—?"

"They don't need to want it. You drop it on your way home from school. Some no-name grunt sees
"Hero Analysis' sprawled out on the front cover." Midoriya got a shade paler. "Grunt brings it to his boss. They think it'll be a fun laugh until they realize there's actually some useful shit in here."

Midoriya swallowed. "They're just... notes. They're not useful. Not like that!"

"And now you're giving yourself too little credit. You're humble, kid, but not stupid. You're honestly going to stand there and tell me there's nothing in here that the League could use?"

No answer came. For a long moment the silence was only broken by sounds out the open window and a muffled ruckus in 1-B. Aizawa let him stew another ten seconds before letting out a sigh. He hooked an extra chair with his foot and dragged it over.

"Sit."

Midoriya sat. He looked a little like a doll, vacant and breakable. Aizawa resisted the urge to tell the kid to show some of that backbone he mustered up in battle. He didn't actually want a fight right now. Just some goddamn critical thinking skills.

High schoolers. Honestly.

"It's always the smart ones who pull the stupidest stunts," he muttered, mostly to himself. Beside him Midoriya twitched. "You do understand why this was stupid, right?"

"Yes, Sensei." He whispered.

"But?"

"I just..." Midoriya bit hard into his lower lip. "I'm careful with them. Really. And I didn't think..."

That his scribblings amounted to much. 'Humble' didn't quite cut it. After all, Aizawa wasn't blind to how Midoriya still cowered under Bakugo's glare, despite the fact that he'd proven himself equal—if not stronger—in battle and academics. The kid barely raised his hand in class even though he always knew the answer. And then there was that quirk. Aizawa knew he didn't have the full story, but the registrar records were well kept documents. If they said Midoriya only developed his quirk a few
months before the entrance exam, then that's what happened, and Aizawa couldn't imagine that such a state had made for an easy childhood.

Who cared about *Deku's* writings?

Midoriya was still tearing into his lower lip. "Do you want me to burn them?"

Aizawa scoffed. "Don't be dramatic. I want to teach you code."

"You...? What?"

"And I'm not mad so you can wipe that look of terror off your face. Have you eaten? You're pale as fucking milk, kid."

Aizawa ducked behind his desk and took longer back there than he actually needed, listening until the suspicious sniffing had died down a bit. He finally reappeared with paper, pen, crackers, and two more juice boxes. He shoved the last two at Midoriya and raised a pen for emphasis.

"You put these," he tapped the journal, "somewhere safe. No carting one through nineteen around anymore. Lock them up and leave them there, got it?"

Midoriya nodded like a goddamn bobblehead, sipping at his juice.

"You start journal twenty with this."

Writing out the code was second nature to him by now. It was rather beautiful really, a combination of fantasy symbols, numbers, and just enough real-world language to put someone nosey on the wrong track. If Midoriya's expression was anything to go by he also found it stunning. Aizawa would have liked to take credit for it, if only to have an awed expression like that aimed his way. When it came to him the kids normally looked scared as well as impressed.

"It seems complicated..."
"It is," Aizawa said flatly. "Which is why you'll be spending the next two weeks in here with me."

"Two weeks!"

"Every lunch hour and for half an hour after school until you've learned this front and back. Then you can start scribbling all your little strategies again."

It was slow going, but soon enough Midoriya's expression changed from horrified to determined. A much better look on him. He leaned across the desk to lightly trace a finger under the numerous lines of code, each seemingly more complex than the last. Aizawa finished writing out the page and placed it atop the crackers. The first paragraph contained part one of the cypher. The other was a note. Aizawa flicked the latter.

"You pass when you can translate that for me."

"Okay, but..." Midoriya was back to biting his lip.

"But what?"

"Isn't this just, um... a Band-Aid? I mean if someone did find my journals and really wanted to read them—not that they do!—all they'd need is to solve the code. It might take a while, but they could do it."

Slowly, Aizawa sat back in his chair. For the first time that afternoon he let a grin overtake his face.

"...Sensei?"

"I'd like to see them try, kid. This code? Nedzu developed it especially for me. So if you think there's some snot-nosed villain out there who's smarter than your headmaster then by all means, continue to worry. Or, you could start learning the damn thing."

Midoriya's only answer was the scratch of his pen.
Two weeks later—almost to the hour—Izuku sat under his tree and put the final letter of Aizawa’s note into place:

Kid,

_Difference between heroes and villains? The heroes are willing to learn from their mistakes. Plus ultra. Now write something useful and tell me a weakness about my own quirk I haven’t thought of yet._

-A
I'm finished my work for the semester! Decided to sit down and write some fluff in my new and glorious free time.

This is a tie-in to Chapter Five's "Collection." Just for the record I'm only doing a single universe with these drabbles when it fits my needs. Meaning that the stuff in "Collection" obviously happened, but not necessarily stuff from "Letter" and "Letter (2)." I'm in far too great a mood to write angst right now lol.

"Oh thank you so much for bringing him home, that wasn't at all necessary, I'm sure you have much more important things to be doing, but he's going to be so grateful—as am I—!"

Inko Midoriya was a bundle of ramblings and near-tears as she led All Might through the door of her house (he had to bend considerably, tucking his precious cargo closer against his chest). As she bustled nervously she reminded him very much of her son in that moment. Same green hair. Same earnest, flustered expression. It sent a strange pain shooting through him that had nothing to do with the fact that All Might was nearing the end of his transformation. Yes, he could have easily left Midoriya at the nurse’s office and yes, he was sure there were many who'd take issue with him using today’s last minutes like this...but really, something more important?

Absolutely not.

"Just a bump to the head," he assured her. The familiar need to laugh in the face of injury took hold, but All Might forced it back down. He could feel the blood seeping between his teeth. "I'm afraid our sparing matches got a little out of hand. Not to worry though. Recovery Girl assures me that your boy will make a full recovery. He simply needs some good, old-fashioned rest. And what better place to do that than at home with his mother, hm?"

Ah. It was quite obvious where young Midoriya got his crying from. Inko pressed the hem of her sweater to her eye as she looked up at them. Midoriya was still sleeping deeply against All Might's chest and not for the first time he marveled at how light the boy was. He might have forgotten he was there if not, paradoxically, for how heavy his presence was. Slowly, almost hesitantly, Inko reached up to brush back a strand of her son’s hair.

"He'll be fine," All Might said.

There were profuse "thank you’s after that and for some reason All Might found himself more uncomfortable with the praise than he normally would be, unable to smile it away like he would with a stranger on the street. Instead he tucked Inko's words away for a later date—perhaps one a day when everything else seemed dark—and allowed her to direct him towards the bedroom upstairs. Of course, she didn't know that he'd already been here before; a skinny, heaving man who'd nearly joined her son in collapsing from exhaustion. To think that nearly a year had passed since then. All Might couldn't swear that Midoriya was taller now, but he liked to think so. He felt a little different in his arms.

Gently, All Might curled his hands more firmly around the boy's legs and shoulders. Of course, the
difference might be in him alone.

Nevertheless. All Might knew these steps well now and he waved Inko off, letting her bustle into the kitchen with a promise of tea. Down the hall. Third door on the left. All Might was already grinning like a loon as he nudged open the door.

His posters were still up.

"Young Midoriya. You are predictable in the best ways possible."

His posters were still there, oh yes. As were the plushies, the comic books (highly sensationalized literature), and the limited edition All Might bedspread. With a fond shake of his head he transferred Midoriya to one arm and locked the door behind him. It would raise an eyebrow if Inko came knocking, but the precaution was needed because a cough and a cloud of smoke later there was only Yagi, staggering a bit as his arms shrunk.

He didn't drop Midoriya though. Never that.

Instead Yagi crossed the distance on trembling legs, lowing his charge carefully into bed despite the tremors beginning wrack his whole body. He truly had held it for too long this time and wouldn't be at all surprised to find that he'd lost another minute of his transformation. It hadn't been anything like a real decision though. Young Kirishima was feeling guilty enough about that hit and the rest of Midoriya's friends didn't need to see him in a hospital bed any more. Not after recent events. He'd assured Recovery Girl that he had more than enough time to get here and back...though he might have exaggerated just a bit.

It was a pity. He really would have enjoyed sharing tea with Inko.

Yagi had a few minutes though and he used them indulgently, peering carefully around Midoriya's room while he slept deeply beside him, the boy's limp hand lightly pressed against his hip. Closer inspection proved that it wasn't just All Might merch taking over the room. If anything, there seemed to be pieces of Midoriya stuffed into every corner and crevice. Like the real him was hidden from anyone not willing to take a closer look. There was a picture of him, Uraraka, and Iida on the desk. A number of hand-knit scarves tied around the bedpost. A small stack of novels holding up a lamp. Sketches, many of other heroes, scattered across the floor. When his limbs felt less shaky Yagi rose and gathered them up into a neat pile. Perhaps he could convince the boy to give some as holiday gifts. The portrait of Thirteen was rather inspired.

It was when Yagi stood again that he saw it: the collection of All Might figurines placed carefully along the dresser. Midoriya had all six of his costume variations from over the years, the All Star movie collection, ten different versions of 'Civilian All Might'... and the one, the only, True Form.

Yagi let out a shaky breath as he touched it. It was just as he'd remembered from that day on the beach. More moving, even. Midoriya had created perfectly straight lines with his figurines—like there was an All Might army watching over him each day—but the True Form stood out from the rest, a General positioned at the very front of his ranks. It didn't escape Yagi's notice that in a messy teenager's room this was the only thing without a spec of dust on it.

"You little fool," Yagi whispered. Seeing the figurine here, still intact and pristine, sent that pain shooting through his chest again. Distinct from the other aches in his body, it burned warm and thrummed each time he breathed. Like the satisfying soreness that arose after a long, tiring workout. Yagi spent his last minutes examining a reflection of himself with narcissistic focus, though it didn't really feel like him. This was some other kind of Yagi. He only hoped this little guy took his job just as seriously. Watching over Izuku Midoriya was no simple task. Or one to be taken lightly.
"All Might?" Inko's voice wound up the steps.

He sighed, replacing the figurine carefully at his station. It was time to go. Working quickly, Yagi located pencil, paper, and penned a note to Inko, claiming that an emergency had arisen and he'd have to take his tea with her some other time. Then, after a moment of hesitation, Yagi wrote out a note to Izuku to. He slipped it beneath the boy's back: hidden from his mother, unlikely to be missed.

Seeing the figurine again... it didn't feel like enough. His own side of this relationship, that is. All at once Yagi had the overwhelming urge to show Izuku how much the boy meant to him. To make things tangible, just like that little Yagi.

And he thought he had the perfect way to achieve that.

"All Might? Is everything alright up there?"

Later though. Right now Yagi dropped a quick kiss onto Izuku's curls, unlocked the door, and slipped out the window.

He was old, but he could still manage a second story roof just fine. Yagi slid down the shingles with a grin and headed in the direction of a very old friend.

***

"There you are!"

Izuku spotted Yagi in the corner booth of the ice cream shop, a massive sundae already waiting in the middle of the table. It was more than four people could have handled in one sitting, but that didn't stop Yagi from pushing the whole thing at Izuku the moment he sat down. There was only one spoon.

"Wow," Izuku said, his eyes bugging just a little. "What's all this for?"

If Yagi was at all embarrassed at the extravagance he didn't let it show. He merely shrugged, shooing at Izuku until he dug into the brownie on top. "Just a little get well treat, my boy. You took a nasty kick to the head yesterday. Everything still alright?"

"Mm hmm!" A massive swallow and Izuku had room for chatter. "Wasn't Kirishima amazing? He's gotten much better at stealth—I think he's been doing extra work with Hagakure lately—I never heard him approach, at all, and the next thing I knew everything was super woozy—"

Yagi let Izuku rattle on, making any adventure of injuries in the way only young boys could. They'd have to work on defense now that he had more control over One for All...

"Is that why you wanted to see me," Izuku asked, mouth full of ice cream. He raised the note with a sticky hand. "I'm up for training, if you—"

"No, no." Yagi immediately waved away the idea. Head injuries might be common in their line of work and he certainly trusted Recovery Girl's diagnosis, but they weren't to be taken lightly either. "I just wanted to see you."

Izuku's smile was more than worth a trip out here and the overpriced sundae.

"...although there was something else I wanted to show you."

And there the smile went. Foolish boy was just like his mother. Walking pessimists, the both of them.
"It's nothing bad, nothing bad, Prince of Nonsense." Izuku blushed to the roots as Yagi leaned across to ruffle his hair. "Eat your ice cream and keep breathing. You know about the statute on new hero merchandise?"

"Oh—of course!"

It didn't surprise Yagi. It was probably the one law that every child was thoroughly invested in. During the rise of hero academics the world had quickly come to realize that not every student would graduate from their chosen schools and even fewer would go on to become actual heroes. Some would fade out of the limelight within a few months of their debut. Others didn't make it into the light at all, and some would prove over time that they never deserved the title "hero" in the first place. It was a very mixed bag and the companies focused on producing hero merchandise couldn't afford to pour limited time and resources into those who wouldn't stand the test of time. It had led to some rather stringent laws regarding when a hero could have merchandise produced and who produced it remained regulated. All of this meant that the Sports Festival winners—no matter how impressive—didn't get their own figurines yet. Seniors didn't have t-shirts. Those who'd just given their debut shouldn't expect anything for a while. In short, any merchandise out there for new heroes had to be of the home-made variety.

But then, he was *All Might*. The number one hero knew how to pull a string or two.

"You mustn't tell anyone I have this," Yagi whispered. The day was hot and the only reason he'd gotten away with a sweatshirt was because of his thin, sickly frame. No one gave it a second look. Which was what allowed Yagi to slowly lower the zipper now, revealing the newly minted t-shirt underneath. "I'm allowed to bend the rules a bit nowadays. Besides, you don't really think I could live without merch for *my* number one hero, did you?"

The shirt was a simple thing. Just green with DEKU blazed across the front in bold, black letters. But there was nothing simple about the way Izuku's spoon clattered to the floor. How his eyes blew wide and immediately overflowed. Yagi would forever remember the embarrassing, high-pitch squeak that emerged; the extra money he'd pay when Izuku overturned his ice cream, shattering the bowl in his mad scramble to get across the table.

Izuku had his figurine. Now Yagi had this shirt... but also the real deal right in his arms, sobbing as Yagi laughed into his hair.

Honestly? He rather thought he was the more blessed of the two.
I AM ALIVE. Well, vaguely. Semester ended and I hit an exhaustion wall (yay two weeks of Stardew Valley and Criminal Minds binging) so this is me attempting to learn how to write again.

In all seriousness, I've wanted to write a conversation between these two for a while. Turned out quite differently than I'd initially planned, but waddya gonna do.

"You can keep complaining about the homework or you can go eat lunch. Your choice, brats."

There were various groans as 1-A conceded, still loudly voicing their displeasure as they shuffled out the door, some of the braver students (Bakugo) going so far as to throw Aizawa dirty looks. It all rolled off his back like water and he shooed the stragglers away. Honestly. The kids all had insane work ethics... until it came to putting their thoughts down on paper. How dare he assign a short essay instead of another grueling, after school training regiment. Try to give them a bit of rest after recent events and what did it get him? Whatever the hell that gesture of Ashido's meant. Hm. Maybe he'd ask Hizashi about it later.

Aizawa was so focused on potential insults that he didn't realize one student was still lagging behind. Not until she had stationed herself right in front of his desk. Solid and inescapable.

"Why didn't you call on me, Sensei?"

Aizawa briefly shut his eyes.

Dammit.

Leave it to Tsuyu to hammer home a blunt question while twisting it into an accusation. He could easily call her out on her tone—despite how chipper it actually was—or insist that his teaching choices were none of her concern... but that would have been disingenuous and not at all fair to one of his most promising students. The last thing he wanted was to teach Tsuyu the absurd adage that she should follow his lead "because he said so." Or worse, simply because he was an adult. Age, even positions of authority, meant little in the midst of an all-out battle. Heroes needed to obey their superiors out of trust and respect. And superiors needed to swallow their pride and concede when
someone younger than them had a better plan. Or a quirk more suitable to the situation. Aizawa had seen too many colleagues injured and killed because of another hero's pride.

So no. He wouldn't be teaching his kids that.

Even if Tsuyu was still blinking at him expectantly. Aizawa could just see her out of the corner of his eye: a line of black hair and steady hands through his bandages. Yes, it was true he hadn't called on her today. Mostly because he hadn't been able to look at her—not really—not for nearly a goddamn week.

"Do you want to sit?" he asked. Grumbled it.

She shook her head. "No, Sensei."

"Of course you don't."

Aizawa sat. He'd never admit it, but that villain had done a number on him and shuffling into class with an "I'm fine" was a whole lot different than teaching for three hours straight. So fuck it, he didn't so much sit as collapse into the chair and all the while Tsuyu's expression never changed; never morphed into pity or disgust that her so-called instructor had gotten his ass kicked by an oversized zombie. Aizawa wanted to hate her for that. Just a little, and instead hated how immature he was being. Blame his emotions on Recovery Girl's drugs and move on.

Aizawa looked.

Tsuyu was hard to read. (That would serve her well.) She wasn't a Bakugo, but she wasn't quite a Todoroki either. You knew her only as soon as she did something. Kid was a creature of action. Which was why Aizawa waited until she said, "Are you going to let me thank you?"

He shut his eyes. Again.

"No."

"Why not?"
"You're a smart girl. You know why."

"Pretend I'm not."

"No."

Tsuyu tilted her head, considering Aizawa with far more intensity that a student was allowed to level at a teacher. He bore it though, for the same reasons that he bore the questions that others would see as impertinent. He hadn't been able to look at her for a week for the simple reason that every time he did Aizawa saw Shigaraki's fingers just itching to touch her face. That image wouldn't be leaving him for a long ass time and the last thing he wanted was to discuss it with the girl in question. A broken, bleeding face. Elbow turning to ash beneath his feet. Aizawa had more pressing things to think about.

He still looked at Tsuyu now though. She seemed... off-kilter.

"You know that everyone had to speak with U.A.'s psychologist. Not just you," he said, voice pitched respectfully low. "But if you feel like you'd benefit from more time with her I can certainly —"

"No." Tsuyu interrupted. "Maura Sensei is very nice, but she already recommend that I talk to you about USJ."

God dammit.

Aizawa resisted the urge to pound his head against the desk. He was good at compartmentalizing. Or at least, he'd gotten good after more than a decade of hero work. His nightly patrols didn't intersect with his partnered work, which didn't intersect with teaching, which under no circumstances bled into his private life. A tiny voice in the back of Aizawa's head insisted that he was long past that particular separation, but he backflipped it into some dark corner because kids falling asleep on his shoulder or sending him 3:00am texts did not mean he was ready for one of them to come and talk to him about their feelings.

He stared at Tsuyu (is this what she wanted?), too aware that his glare only had half its potency through those bandages. She stared right back, better at this than Aizawa would have expected. Humph. Didn't she basically raise her siblings though? Fuck but that would do it.
"At least sit down," Aizawa begged.

A long tongue shot out to snag one of the desks and dragged it forward. Tsuyu perched herself on top of it.

She wanted to talk. Maura—who should be enjoying her last hours alive—had apparently encouraged Tsuyu to talk. To him. At length, if her comfortably slouched posture was any indication. Yet for all that Tsuyu wasn't talking. She seemed entirely content to let her lunch slip by in silence, smiling slightly as Aizawa finally gave her his full attention.

...Okay. Now he felt a little guilty about that. Was this it then? Let the kid feel superior for a while? Because Aizawa could manage th—

"I'm really glad you're alive, Aizawa Sensei."

He actually flinched, rearing back in his seat at the combination of words and relieved tone; the blunt truth in the mouth of a child. Tsuyu swung her legs and draped her arms over her knees, smiling still at his reaction. "And I'm glad that I'm alive too."

"Kid," he almost growled, but Tsuyu's finger shot up, wagging back and forth.

"That wasn't a 'thank you.'" She said. "Just a statement of fact."

Uh huh. Like he hadn't discovered linguistic loopholes long before she'd been born. Aizawa settled for tapping his own fingers impatiently on the desk. "You get two more," he finally said. "Two more 'statements' and then you go eat lunch."

Tsuyu seemed to like that offer, for whatever strange reason of her own. "We need to take care of our bodies as well as our minds," she murmured, like she was reciting something from rote. Then just as fast her expression changed, breaking into a broad grin, larger than the others and that in no way fit for the conversation. "Can they be questions instead of statements?"

"...yes."
God but he was going to regret that, wasn't he?

She took pity on him though. Tsuyu immediately began swinging her feet and blurted, "Will you teach me how to—" then she stopped.

Aizawa let her sit. "To?"

"Not freeze," Tsuyu settled on, looking unhappy with the phrasing. It wasn't like he needed clarification though. In a rush Aizawa could see her again: not here, but wide-eyed and wet as she stood stock still and let death come for her. It wasn't Tsuyu's fault. No one could blame a kid for reacting naturally. It hardly mattered if Aizawa still had nightmares about his own teenage years, a knife coming at his throat while he just stood there and stood there and stood there. Later his teacher would praise him for a last-second dodge. Aizawa never admitted that his legs just gave out. So yes, he could blame himself... but not her.

Instead of offering incompetent words Aizawa slipped a folder from his desk and tossed it to her. Tsuyu caught half with her hands and the flyaway paper with her tongue. Aizawa chose to ignore the saliva that now covered his notes, instead focusing on the fact that she'd read them and get it. The scribbled lesson plans focusing on speed, conditioning, channeling that adrenaline rush. She'd understand that they were already on the same page.

Tsuyu chose to ask her second question with face hidden behind the paper.

"Would you have done that for anyone, Sensei?"

Hm. Vague. Hesitant, even. Though Aizawa didn't need clarification for this question either. She wasn't asking if he'd have defended anyone because she knew damn well that was a hero's job; a stupid question in the mouth of a smart girl. No, Tsuyu wanted to know if he'd have pushed for anyone.

Body broken and bleeding. Head smashed from an All Might-sized weight. Still lifting it at just the right moment.

Aizawa thought about the 154 students he'd expelled before getting his hands on 1-A and said, "No."
Tsuyu could make of that what she willed.

She was edging back towards Todoroki level of impassivity as she hopped down from the desk, returned it, gave him his work, and started out the door, clearly expecting Aizawa to follow. Halfway to the cafeteria Tsuyu slipped her hand into his and god help him, Aizawa let her.

"What's my name?" she asked.

"That's three questions. You get two." Tsuyu swung their hands until Aizawa sighed and said, "Tsuyu Asui."

"But what do you call me?"

"...Tsu."

They'd come to the fork. Left went to the cafeteria. Right to the teacher's lounge. Tsuyu gave his hand one last squeeze and blinded him with another smile that somehow, impossibly, pushed back the nightmare just a bit. She was here.

"That's why I believe you when you said 'no.'"

Huh. Aizawa was about to ask what the hell that was supposed to mean when she turned and flounced off to lunch, happy to leave him standing there like a fool in the hall. Tsuyu walked slower than usual.... perhaps letting him look.

"Cryptic brat." He was smiling as he said it though.

Tsuyu went left. Aizawa went right, determined to find Maura.

It seemed they still had a lot to talk about.
Will Aizawa ever do anything but have awkward conversations with his kids across a desk? Why is it always lunch time? Do I remember what actual plot is? Stay tuned to find out!
It's been raining a ton here. I wanted to write something soft. Scribbled this out at 3:00am last night.

Stormy nights felt like something straight out of a fever dream. Wind and rain had knocked out the power hours ago, leaving the already jittery group meandering. Too dark to read. Too early to sleep. Everyone had eventually wandered off to their separate rooms with candle in hand, just to lay in their beds and listen to the rain. Little thoughts seemed important now. Would the food in the fridge spoil? How long until dawn? None of the clocks worked. Time had just stopped, and the air was somehow both chilled and humid at once; the thunder shaking the very foundations of their school.

Izuku slipped out of bed. His hands ached.

There wasn't a moon tonight. Nothing to guide him across the room except his own familiarity. With the rain rushing in his ears—like white noise, but better—he tip-toed to his bureau and opened up the bottom drawer, finding the blanket he'd stashed there during move in. Mom had knitted it years ago, loose cables done in green to match their hair. Despite the summer months Izuku pulled it around his shoulders and breathed in the scent of dust and home. There was still a sauce stain down at the corner; a pulled stitch from where her ring had caught it in a rush. Izuku took his time, because time was in abundance right now. He rocked in the middle of his room and held the blanket close. Already his hands felt better beneath the wool.

The storm came in waves. Rain would pound at the window, recede, thunder following close by, and then the lighting arrived on its heels, completing the cycle. It was when his room lit up with shadows that Izuku padded barefoot to the door, foregoing any light. It was just him and the blanket. A few deep breaths too. He was careful to keep his hand wrapped as he negotiated the knob, opening the door crack by crack lest it squeak. Some dreaming part of Izuku expected a flood beyond the threshold and even though he found only carpeting, it still felt wet between his toes. Izuku splish-splashed his way down the hall—unnaturally dark and silent. Like the school was stuck holding its breath—and snuck into the third room without bothering to knock.

Todoroki was still awake. They all were, but it was Todoroki's room that Izuku chose for reasons that didn't need to be explained. Or if they did it wasn't the sort of thing they'd tackle tonight. The point was that he was here, welcomed, encouraged even at a time when everything felt possible. The right side of Todoroki's hair shown out in the darkness—as did his eyes.
"Hey," he said.

"Hey."

It was too dark to see, but Izuku could feel the shape of the room. He bypassed the desk and the bed, blanket dragging on the floor as he approached the window seat and Todoroki in it. He'd pressed himself up against the pane, the only part of him not curled up tight was the finger he drew slowly across the glass. As Izuku climbed up onto the seat's other side he watched Todoroki trace the droplets running down the window. He'd done the same as a kid during long car rides with Mom, but not like this. With each pathway Todoroki left a thin coating of ice behind, crafting gorgeous webs that extended up and away from his hand. Feet slotted together, shoulders curving close, Izuku let his eyes glaze over until the window lost all its detail. It was still beautiful though. Shimmering and cool.

Time passed. Nothing worth tracking. Todoroki was dressed only in his pajamas so Izuku scooted until he could lay half the blanket across his knees. With that loss he shivered and Todoroki reached out with his left hand, steaming slightly in the darkness. They found a balance together and listened to the rain, watching shadows moving in the fog that were just birds but looked like so much more. When the lightning skittered out and the thunder was just an echo in their bones, Izuku nudged open the window—only a crack—so that Todoroki could freeze the real droplets instead, tiny icicles that collected and rolled before spilling into their laps. Izuku picked them up like pearls and marveled how they didn't melt. Not unless Todoroki wanted them to.

Yagi would have seen raw power at work. Aizawa the chance to practice nuance with his quirk. Izuku saw only bright jewels that made him smile. And though everything was still sluggish, he summoned One for All into his hands until his skin thrummed with rainbow energy—looking a bit like the web of ice, feeling just like thunder. When Todoroki dropped the jewels into his palm they reflected Izuku's power and sent prisms scattering across the walls.

The two boys watched the spectacle until dawn broke, the storm transitioning into a drizzle that made the whole world fuzzy around the edges. In another hour Aizawa would announce that the storm had caused damage across the campus, and given that the teachers were needed to check, maintain, and repair the security system, the students were free until further notice. It would be a slow day of soup, warm socks, popcorn, video games. They still had time. Though Izuku and Todoroki didn't know it yet.

So they both drew in deep breaths to try and extend the moment.
"I don't know why you put up with that!"

Uraraka said it loud enough that her words carried across the courtyard to where Bakugo was still sauntering away, and all it got her was a lazy middle finger raised above his head. She let out a squawk that rivaled an angry goose and Iida dove forward, locking his arms around hers and digging in his heels. Despite that Uraraka almost managed to slip away.

"Calm down, Uraraka, calm down! We cannot afford to fight among ourselves and we must be excellent representatives of U.A. at all times. Especially in public."

"He started it!"

"Yes, but don't finish it!"

Izuku just shook his head, bending to scoop up what was left of his lunch. The milk carton was a bust and his sandwich lay in pieces, but the chips were still safe in their bag, if a little squished. It had been a long time since Kacchan had pulled a stunt like that. Grade school maybe? He'd mostly moved on to cutting Izuku with words instead of fists—recordable offenses didn't go over well with Hero scholarship applications—but blasting things out of Izuku's hands had been a favorite of his for a long, long time. He actually felt a little nostalgic, thinking back.

Too bad for Izuku, Uraraka noticed that smile. With Bakugo out of sight she whirled on him instead and Izuku tumbled onto his ass with the force of that glare.

"Why do you put up with that?" she insisted, sounding more curious than mad now. It was the only thing that gave Izuku the strength to push himself back up and gather his food, Iida helping.

"Uh, what?"

"You know what, Deku!" Uraraka gestured sharply in Bakugo's direction, huffing with steam and more than a bit of worry. Her expression quickly softened though. "You keep defending him. Putting
up with him. Honestly, we're supposed to be heroes and he treats you like dirt. I just don't get it."

"I'll admit that I also find Bakugo's temper to be alarming... as well as your acceptance of it." Iida took a moment to fix his glasses, not quite meeting Izuku’s eye. "Please don't misunderstand. This is not a criticism of you, Midoriya. I am quite familiar with bullies and how difficult it can be to stand up to them."

Uraraka blinked. "You are?"

"Mm, yes. I fear that being Ingenium's younger brother is a solid, but hardly fool proof defense. Especially when it is counteracted by a bookish personality and what I've been told are rather odd mannerisms." Iida shot them a self-conscious smile, shrugging as he cleaned up the milk. "I've had my fair share of undesirables in school. But! Had they followed me here I would hardly allow them to continue such behavior. Especially when my academic record supersedes their own." Iida gave Izuku a rather pointed look until he gasped, throwing up his hands in protest.

"No way! Kacchan did better than me during finals—"

"Not by much," Uraraka said.

"—and he's way stronger than I am."

Iida shook his head. "He is not. The nature of your quirk limits your abilities, yes, but we've both witnessed the progress you've made in a very short amount of time." Behind him Uraraka was nodding forcefully. "Combine this with your speed, strategy, and your ability to keep your temper... I find you to be a far more intimidating opponent than one such as Bakugo."

"Same, same." Uraraka brought her thumb up, slamming it into her chest. "And I've actually fought the asshole."

"Uraraka!"

"Oh he is an asshole, Iida, get over it."
Izuku was bright red as he stood, scurrying over to dump most of his lunch in the trash, clutching his remaining chips protectively against his chest. No, they weren't right about Kacchan, but he could still appreciate the support. Ida and Uraraka continued their argument as they made their way to the picnic benches, both of them immediately halving their food and giving it to Izuku. They didn't even seem to realize they were doing it. Uraraka simply, naturally, handed over her banana after using it to bop Iida on the head.

"What we may or may not be calling Bakugo aside," she said. "All it would take is one good whack for him to leave you alone. Bullies are always like that. You show them you're not afraid and then bam, they run off to torture someone else."

Iida narrowed his eyes. "There's something very un-hero like in that assessment, but I won't argue the point further." He waved off Uraraka maturely sticking out her tongue. "I have doubts that such a plan would work on Bakugo though. After all, he responds so viciously to any of Midoriya's achievements. If he were to fight back, I fear that would only fuel Bakugo's fire."

"Hmm."

"Actually," Izuku said. "It was after I punched him during our final exam that he finally started listening. Sort of. We came up with a plan, at any rate."

There was silence around the table.

"You punched him?" Uraraka whispered.

"I don't want to hit him again though. You're right, Iida. That might be how we're forced to deal with villains, but it shouldn't be how we solve problems among ourselves." Izuku peeled the banana he'd been given, considering. "The thing is though, I'm not sure there is a problem. Kacchan and I actually get along really well."

"Okay no. Back up. Do you see the nonsense we're dealing with?" Uraraka made a blunt sign to show just how crazy Izuku was, causing him to laugh. The corner of Iida's mouth twitched before he sobered.

"You can't possibly believe that though. Right? Bakugo he..."
"Treats you like shit," Uraraka cut in. "He's always, you know," she waved vaguely between them. "Yelling and insulting and acting like a bastard."

"Uraraka."

"If you can come up with a non-curse word that accurately conveys Bakugo's nature I really will agree that you're smarter."

Iida thought a moment. "Scoundrel."

"No one says scoundrel anymore."

"I do!"

"Really not helping your case, buddy."

"You two just don't know him like I do." Izuku's words quieted them down, but did nothing to change their looks of disbelief. "Kacchan and I have been best friends for forever. I understand him. Like, when he's angry or just acting it out. Or when he's scared." Izuku stared down at his lap, picturing the subtle changes in Bakugo's expression. Because yes, he got scared. Like anyone did. It was only noticeable in the twitch under his eye and that compulsive need to swallow, but it was there. Izuku never missed it. "He's never hurt me. Not really," he hastened to add.

"Not like he ever blasted you with an untested weapon on our first day of training," Uraraka said.

"Or continually puts us in danger by refusing to follow basic orders. Such an ego." Iida shook his head.

"He's impulsive—"

"He's cruel and I'm not..." Uraraka made another aborted movement, unsure of where to go. "I'm not saying he's only his faults. I admire Bakugo for the fight he gave me in the Tournament. I admire his tenacity too. And I'm not saying that I—that we—don't have faults of our own to work through." She raised her hands and instinctively Iida and Izuku did the same, near matching scars spanning
both their knuckles. "But Bakugo is different. It's not just his attitude, it's how he treats you. He might have been your friend as a kid, but not anymore. I would have given up on him ages ago, Deku."

Deku. Izuku smiled around the name. "No, you wouldn't. Because heroes don't give up on people, do they?"

How did you give up on family?

Before Uraraka could answer something hard slammed into the back of Izuku's head nearly toppling him into the table. His reflexes were good, but not when something was coming from behind with the speed of an explosion behind it. Iida caught Izuku around the shoulders while Uraraka dove across to grab whatever had hit him.

"Still can't catch huh, Deku!"

Bakugo didn't even look their way, crossing the courtyard back towards Kirishima and Kaminari. He was out of sight again by the time Izuku had straightened back up.

He laughed, rubbing at his head as they looked down at the slightly charred apple.

"See? Kacchan is Kacchan."

And no matter what anyone else might think, that was just perfect to Izuku.

Chapter End Notes

Bakugo is my Snape of the BNHA world: I adore him as a complex character, think he's pretty awful as a person. I can appreciate his role in the story though and respect him as a fan favorite, so I wanted to delve into Izuku's thoughts just a bit. A little glimpse into why a now more confident boy would continue to put up with that kind of treatment.
Bakugo (Meta)

Chapter Notes

Apologies that this isn’t a normal drabble update. I’ll admit I was super nervous to post “Cruel” since I know how volatile (ha) Bakugo is in this fandom, but ultimately the desire to try something different won out. Since last night I’ve been immensely pleased at how civil people are being in the comments section. Yes, there are jokes that some found uncomfortable, some bashing of other fics, but on the whole it’s not the backlash I was expecting. So thanks for keeping things respectful, peeps. It means a lot.

That being said, I am goddamn weak for good analysis and discussion. While reading through comments this morning I had so many things I wanted to say and respond to, but no idea of how to divide it up without repeating myself across every review. I also know myself. My “brief answers” inevitably become “it’s an essay now, oh god” so I figured I’d just turn this into the next chapter. I’ll still respond to the more targeted comments on “Cruel” and any outlying points, but for the most part if we’re talking about Bakugo as a character, wondering why I didn't answer your comment? (When I finally catch up on answering them…) You’ll find my thoughts here.

So if you’re interested in my ramblings, feel free to read on. If not, I hope to see you for the next drabble! <3

Katsuki Bakugo. Where to even begin.

Two things to note right off the bat. 1. I’ve only read through vol. 7 of the manga (finishing up the Stain arc) and I’m one episode behind on the anime (battle with the Vanguard Action Squad has completed), so there are no doubt moments that manga readers can point to and go, “But you haven’t considered this!” No I haven’t. Because I don’t know that it exists yet. Sorry! Perhaps my views will change once I get to those moments, but for now I’m reading Bakugo primarily through the anime canon.

2. I really, really don’t like Bakugo.

I try not to let that color my writing when I’m sticking (mostly) to canon characterization—hence why I just wrote a drabble vaguely justifying his actions, because that’s something that Izuku does and will no doubt continue to do—and I’ll try not to let my feelings color this essay too much either. But it’s definitely a factor.

Because Bakugo, for better or worse, is a polarizing character. He gets people riled up. You love him or you hate him and no matter which side of the divide you fall on chances are you’ve got opinions.
And that’s great! Hell knows I do. But that also means it’s easy to let emotions cloud clear readings of evidence and analysis. Whenever that happens I like to step back and ask myself what questions the character raises and how I can back up the answers I see. For Bakugo the most prominent questions I see surrounding him are:

1. Does he really bully/abuse Izuku or is he just a ‘tough love’ sort of guy?
2. Should his actions be forgiven because of his age or does he still hold responsibility?
3. Have we seen compelling character development thus far and if so, is Bakugo a better man than when the series started?

These are the questions I kept in mind while flipping back through some of Bakugo’s more influential scenes. Now as I’ve already admitted, I’m going into this messy pseudo-essay with a serious bias, but I don’t see how anyone can look at Question #1 and just shrug off Bakugo’s actions; label it “tough love” and move on. Admittedly I think Horikoshi wants us to see this as a “Jerk With a Heart of Gold” scenario because although BNHA is a wildly entertaining series that I love to death, it’s not terribly innovative in terms of its tropes and story structure. We can recognize and extrapolate from the character types we see here. Izuku is the underdog protagonist who is going to achieve his dreams. All Might is the lovable mentor who (oh god) will die (or at least fully step aside) to give the hero room to grow. Aizawa is our quirky trainer—he’s the real jerk with a heart of gold. And Bakugo is the villain-type who acts as a foil to our hero, the kind of guy who rises to the occasion only at the last moment. Presumably everything will be forgiven in the final act when Bakugo either sacrifices himself to help Izuku or stands at his side to take down the common enemy. Maybe there will be a grudging (and supposedly tender) moment between them before things go back to how they’re “supposed” to be: Bakugo being an ass and Izuku putting up with it. Because that’s their dynamic.

But I really don’t buy it.

Could Horikoshi do something entirely different with Bakugo’s arc, deviating from the tropes I’ve come to expect? Absolutely. But assuming he doesn’t we’re supposed to root for Bakugo, which gets REALLY hard when you have this kid inciting an entire class to bully Izuku. Destroying his precious journal. Telling him to kill himself, for gods sake. And that’s just at the start of the story. Since then he’s tried to terrorize Izuku into not attending the school of his dreams, sabotage his relationships with the new students, blasted him full throttle with an untested weapon that could have easily killed him (I have no doubt the support inventors do everything they can to thoroughly prep their weapons, but it had never been tried with Bakugo’s actual quirk before), disregards the strategy/needs of any team he’s paired with (Sports Festival, Final Exam), and by extension puts those around him in great danger, considering that 1-A has been hunted almost since they started school. For real, that moment when everyone notices he’s missing at the end of the summer training camp arc? For those few seconds I was convinced he’d just run off on his own, as he intended to do before Izuku and the others found him. Because that’s the sort of guy Bakugo is. He cares only about his own pride, even when that means putting himself and others in danger.

Is this a great character flaw? You know it is, but it makes for a terrible person and so far I really
haven’t seen much in the way of actual improvement for Bakugo. It’s easy to think there is because as the viewers we draw cause and effect between events that aren’t necessarily linked. “Oh yeah Bakugo was horrible at first, but he’s been through so much since then. The sludge monster, his kidnapping… he’s suffered enough.” The problem is that this suffering is entirely disconnected from his actions. It doesn’t teach him anything. Take, for example, their final exam. I had hoped watching that episode that Izuku and Bakugo would fail, if only to show Bakugo that going off half-cocked, fighting no matter what, hitting your own damn teammate—those things are really bad habits that are going to get him or someone else killed soon. Instead Izuku has to use Bakugo’s own pride against him: you hate losing even more than you hate me. And they pass. He’s rewarded for this behavior. Bakugo doesn’t learn to question his actions; he learns that he can get away with them for a while and then still come out on top (against All Might, no less). He’ll work with Izuku, but only as an ultimate last resort.

We see the same pattern in the forest. Bakugo could have actually split from the group. His kidnapping could have been a result of his arrogance. Instead it’s incidental to it, he’s kidnapped despite being protected by others—something he didn’t want in the first place. It’s easy as viewers/readers to look at these traumatizing events, let protective instinct kick in, and assume that there’s a correlation. Bakugo does Bad Things and now Bad Things are done to him, so it’s all even now, right? Except not at all, because he doesn’t yet understand that his actions keep hurting others in the ways he’s been hurt.

Has Bakugo gotten a little calmer since the beginning? Yes, but I think that’s more a byproduct of being surrounded by teachers who don’t enable his actions quite as much as his middle school teachers did, plus a continually bruised ego keeping him sullen. I’ve yet to see any true regret or maturity from him. I can think of four moments where Bakugo really softens and none of them are terribly impressive: crying as he declares that he’ll surpass Izuku (pride/hatred of another), helping Izuku beat All Might (pride again), spitting that there was “nothing frail” about Uraraka (viewing everyone as a potential enemy. We only see this comment as great because the world is sexist as fuck. Bakugo’s equality stems from seeing everyone and everything as competition, no matter their gender), and his “Don’t come, Deku” which yes, can be read as “don’t endanger yourself for me,” but could just as easily be read as “don’t you dare come.” Because the Bakugo we’ve seen really would rather die than get rescued by “quirkless Deku” again. At least, his pride convinces himself as much.

Bakugo reads as a villain. He doesn’t want to help people. Or live up to a family member like Iida. Or even just make money like Uraraka. He wants to be powerful. To be in control. A memory that haunts Bakugo is the simple act of someone “lesser” than him (Izuku) offering him a hand up. He’s incapable of understanding that Todoroki is ambivalent about his own power; not using his fire MUST be a personal slight against him and him alone. Bakugo wants to come out on top, every time, and one doesn’t need to do good deeds to achieve that. Now the obvious counter to this is how much we see Bakugo worshiping All Might as a kid, but I’d argue that this worship doesn’t translate well into action, and I don’t just mean the shitty things I’ve listed above. When we see Izuku’s flashbacks he chatters about “saving people with a smile.” When we see Bakugo’s flashbacks he’s defending himself from third graders because a hero “never gives up.” Izuku honed in on helping others no matter the odds. Bakugo grabbed hold of that tenacity as a way of making himself superior. They each love the world’s Number One hero, but for very different reasons.
(As a side note, Izuku’s own characterization feeds a great deal into Bakugo’s. If the hero thinks he’s good then he must be, right? Except Izuku has no real justification for defending Bakugo (despite what my own drabble attempted to explore). We can chalk it up to something like not literal Stockholm Syndrome, but I think that’s just an integral part of Izuku’s personality. Like so many lovable anime protags, he is incapable of giving up on someone. Ever. Kota is another excellent example. Izuku meets this kid, gets kicked in the balls, is told to stay away from him, and finally learns that Kota hates heroes due to trauma in his past. So does Izuku give him space? Of course not! He follows him to a private place and just like the narrative rewards Bakugo for his shitty decisions, it rewards Izuku for his as well. Following after Kota ensures that he knows where he is when the battle starts, can rescue him, and ultimately change his mind about heroes. Izuku sees the good in everyone. He’s the embodiment of plus ultra—ALWAYS go beyond—and though that makes for a wildly enjoyable character (a true favorite of mine) it can be a dangerous trait in the real world. I’ve known Izukus and Bakugos before and there’s a fine, shaky line between “I want to help and support this person as they work through their anger” and “I’ve allowed myself to be their punching bag for so long that I think this is normal now. I’ll change them though. Someday.” Izuku is far into the latter. He believes that it is his job to save everyone, physically and emotionally, even if it destroys him in the process. Letting Bakugo cut him with words is just an extension of Izuku continually breaking his arms to defend others. He’ll take whatever hits he needs to, except that when it comes to Bakugo he’s not protecting or helping anyone. He’s just enabling.)

The only reason we know we’re not supposed to see Bakugo as true villain material is because of some flimsy, storytelling necessities. He’s attending U.A.! Of course he’s a hero! Well yeah, because it’s hard to have your protagonist’s foil do his work if he’s not in the protagonist’s class to act as that contrast. In any serious, real life hero school that moment where Aizawa watches Bakugo from the hallway would have amounted to something and he would have gotten the axe ages ago. (Unless you want to read the hero community as being so desperate for new, powerful recruits that they’ll take chances on people like Bakugo. That his quirk outweighs how he uses it.) It’s the same reason we still have Mineta. He’s a useless pervert being taught by the guy who is notorious for expelling kids. Mineta is there for the (supposed) comic relief, not because it makes sense in-world. Hell, Horikoshi already gave us Shinso. People think he’s destined to be a villain because he has a scary quirk, but Bakugo blows things up while screaming crazily for everyone to die and no one seriously suggests that he’s a villain? It’s not because Bakugo has shown us—or his classmates—some intrinsic goodness that makes him exempt from those fears. It’s because worries like that aren’t useful for the plot. He’s somehow an obvious Good Guy up until we hit certain moments within the League, and even then (from what I’ve heard) the idea that Bakugo could be converted isn’t taken very seriously. His status as a hero exists because of narrative expectations, not because of anything he’s actually done.

Of course, he’s just a kid, right? How can we rag on a child when he just doesn’t know better? But I think it’s pretty clear at this point that Bakugo does know better. He’s a teenager, yes, but that hardly exempts him from responsibility. He knew exactly what he was doing when he told Izuku to go jump off a roof, or blasted him as hard as he could, or refused to so much as look at him during their exam… these are active choices, not mindless mistakes. It’s important that we look at the other 20+ students surrounding him and whether they take out their anger in harmful ways like this (they don’t). Whether those kids make similar mistakes but then learn from them (they do—Iida’s selfish impulsiveness is at the heart of the Stain arc). And we need to look at this fictional culture too. Like how U.A. children are expected to carry the responsibilities of adults, especially when they have
actual villains already after their blood. It doesn’t matter if they’re literal children, their actions have consequences, and if Bakugo isn’t mature enough to be a hero yet (which he’s not) he should not be given that opportunity, because saying, “Eh, he’ll grow out of it eventually” is likely to get someone killed in the intervening years. Again, the only reason he is given such leeway is because of plot.

And we can explain his behavior. Bakugo is secretly the most insecure. He was praised endlessly for his quirk and now doesn’t know how to deal with not being the best. Though I haven’t read it yet, I hear that his mom is a real dick. These are all important considerations and should be things the poor guy addresses in therapy, but they’re not justifications. They’re not excuses. And they’re not a free pass to continue this behavior. Bakugo is the embodiment of our beloved B99 GIF: “Cool motive, still murder.”

All of which is to reiterate what I said in my previous author’s notes: Bakugo is my Snape. Do I love him as a character? God yes. Do I nevertheless think he’s a trash person on the whole? YOU BET. Granted Snape is far, far worse what with being an adult and a wizard Nazi, but I can still see similar treatments of the two by both the authors and the fans. Horikoshi wants us to forgive Bakugo because of a few moments that gesture towards goodness. J.K. Rowling wants us to accept Albus Severus Potter because of one grand gesture. Sorry, neither flies for me. Which isn’t to say that forgiveness isn’t worth seeking and giving, it just needs to be done on the right terms. That means the offender needs to apologize for their behavior (not try to excuse it), change it, and accept that forgiveness is not something they’re entitled to. They might not get it. That’s not an arc we saw with Snape, but I really hope we get to see it with Bakugo.

Ultimately, I think he’s such a polarizing character because so many of us can see ourselves in both him and Izuku. Many have dealt with similar insecurities and made similar mistakes. Anyone who once hurt others because of what they were struggling with is of course going to root for and defend Bakugo. We want to see him loved and forgiven. In contrast, anyone who has been on the receiving end of bullying like that (me) might find it hard to support him, gaping at Izuku’s praise because no, we don’t love our abusers. Both sides are right and it comes down to where Horikoshi takes him. If Bakugo demonstrates growth that includes clear demonstrations of remorse, acknowledgment of past wrongs, and a plan for how to improve his behavior? Then goddamn I’m rooting for the kid. But I don’t think we’ve seen that yet. So until then I’ll just be in my corner, quietly writing him out of most of my fics lol.

And if you made it this far? GOD BLESS. What a champ. Here, have a virtual cookie.

Thanks for reading and feel free to drop (respectful) thoughts in the comments. I probably won’t have time to hash out full debates; I just wanted to throw out my own perspective following that drabble. Which I’ve done.

Shutting up now :)
"She is not your plaything," Aizawa said, holding Ashes up as the spit and twisted in his hands. He took the scratches popping up on his skin with barely a blink and all of 1-A stared on, awed. Vaguely horrified, but awed. "She is not a toy. If she distracts you from your training she goes back to my place, end of discussion. Ashes is here for one reason and one reason only: to eat all the bugs so that you little assholes will finally let me sleep."

Tsuyu's hand shot into the air.

"What."

"Why can't I eat the bugs?"

"Because you are my friend and I'm not having my friend eating cockroaches we found in the bath!" Ashido pointed a finger sternly in Tsuyu's face. "I get that you're part frog, but that is still disgusting. Revolting. Nasty. ... something else too. I don't know enough synonyms!"

"Nauseating," Iida offered, looking a little green.

"Nauseating. And you don't brush your teeth nearly enough for that. In fact, go brush your teeth right now. I don't trust you."

Tsuyu tapped her chin, considering. "I think I'll regurgitate my stomach onto your bed instead."

"Ew! Aizaiwa-sensei!"
He briefly closed his eyes. "Does everyone else understand?"

"Yes, sir" came variously subdued voices.

"Fantastic," and he dropped Ashes to the ground where she immediately bolted. They saw a grey blur streaking down the hall, a sharp turn into a bedroom, and then the distinct sound of a small body crashing into a myriad of objects. There were various thumps and cracks as things went flying to the ground. Then silence fell over the group.

"That was my room," Izuku whispered.

"Clean it up," Aizawa said and went to disinfect his hands.

***

Ashes was a...unique addition to their dorm room life. Truth be told, they largely forgot she was there for the first two weeks. After the hellish drive over in a cat carrier, Aizawa daring to hold her, and the bold escape into Izuku's room, 1-A didn't see more than a glimpse of her for days after. Sometimes they'd catch sight of narrowed eyes underneath their beds or hear rushed eating from the kitchen late at night, but on the whole she was a ghost among them. Two days in Aoyama had joked that they should rename her Ghost over dinner and Aizawa glared hard enough for him to choke.

"Utterly deplorable," Iida said now. He slammed a card down onto the bed and Uraraka shouted with glee, successfully winning another round. As she gathered up her share of the pot (candy, stickers, a few bags of chips) Iida stared around the walls of her room, offended. "An institution as prestigious as U.A. shouldn't have a bug problem to begin with! Top food, the greatest training facilities the hero community has to offer...you'd think they could afford some exterminators."

Momo was squeezed in between the two of them. She gathered the cards and started passing them out again, thumbing each with surprising skill. "It's not that simple. U.A. is pretty old, right? My parents' mansion—"

"Mansion," Uraraka groused. Momo gave her head a little pat.
"My parents' house is old too and it doesn't matter how much they spend on sprays and the like, critters always find their way in each winter. Little spiders. Moths that get into the cashmere. It's just something you get used to. Besides, I'm pretty sure the Headmaster has more important things to put the school's money towards than bug control."

Iida sighed. "You're right of course. I apologize for my egregious assumptions."

"You're fine."

"Your experience is not universal," Uraraka said. She gathered up her cards and gave them a careful look over, clearly intent on reigning destruction down once more. "You're right about the moths though. It didn't help that mom needed to replace so many sweaters over the years. I didn't mind them though. The big ones are rather pretty. Bees on the other hand..." Uraraka gave an exaggerated shiver.

"Are you allergic?" Momo asked.

"Well no, but they're mean! Stupid, creepy, crawling, stinging—"

"Actually, I think you're confusing them with wasps."

The three turned to the opposite end of the room where Izuku was sequestered at Uraraka's desk, hastily trying to finish the assignment he'd let sit too long. At the silence Izuku spit the pencil from his teeth and titled his head back so he was staring at them upside down. "Bees are small, rounder, fuzzy and sort of cute, like moths. If they sting you the barb gets stuck in your skin and they die."

Momo put a hand to her mouth, wincing. "They're pretty calm too. Unless you're near their nest, of course. It's wasps that are the mean looking ones. One crawled into my drink once and stung me in the mouth. Twice."

"Midoriya that's horrible!" Iida was making frantic chopping motions in an effort to dispel the image.

"It's not as if you haven't been through worse," Momo pointed out.

Izuku grinned. He tilted his chair a little farther. "I actually think I'd rather break my arms again. Getting stung is awful."
"In your *mouth.*" Uraraka whispered. She gave another shiver. "And bees? Cute? Nuh-uh. Nothing cute about bugs. Ever. Ashes needs to pull her weight around here and keep all the creepy crawlies away from me."

"Now that I think about it," Iida said. "I haven't seen any invaders the last few days."

"Or the cat," Momo added.

The four of them grew quiet, keeping nice and still lest said cat was somewhere nearby. No one had seen hide nor hair of Ashes the last few days, though plenty had gone looking for her. Just potential streaks of gray from the corner of your eye; a scratch on the bedposts to mark her passing. It was like living with an adorable, deadly assassin... which the more they thought about it, yeah. That fit Aizawa to a T.

Uraraka pulled an Izuku and flopped backwards over the bed, reaching upside down to grab hold of the bed-skirt. "Maybe she's hiding under—"

Here. Something small, dark, and screeching like metal on metal darted out from the depths of the bed, managing to clip the door on its way out. Uraraka yelled and tumbled to the floor. Izuku followed with a crash as his chair overbalanced. Iida made a dive to save them both (without success). Only Momo saw Ashes slam herself into the open door, flop onto her back, stare dazed and angrily up at the ceiling—how *dare* this happen to me—before finally sprinting away, leaving a host of injuries in her wake.

"I love her," Momo said as her friends all groaned.

***

Everyone loved Ashes and they all had different ways of showing it.

Maybe the run-in with the door knocked something loose in her head. Maybe it forced her to be in the same room as others, visible (the horror) just long enough to realize that the twenty kids clomping about weren't going to hurt her. Whatever it was, Ashes started hanging out with them from then on: tail swishing as she watched the chit-chat from her corner; prowling high atop the kitchen cabinets like a deity overseeing her subjects. Which, fair.
She still didn't let anyone touch her though.

***

That is, not until Momo started making a new toy every five minutes.

"This is perfect for both of us!" she exclaimed, laughing as Ashes made a lunge for the new laser pointer she'd created. Not the light, but the laser itself. Kitty was smart and Momo let out a coo as Ashes bit viciously into the metal. "She gets bored with things very quickly and Aizawa-Sensei wants me to practice making lots of small objects in a short period of time to increase my creation stamina. So," Momo gestured to the small mountain of cat toys that now sat on the kitchen table. Kaminari poked it enthusiastically until half of them fell to the floor.

Ashes immediately abandoned Momo's wrist to launch herself after them, eviscerating a poor, stuffed mouse.

"Ouch?" Kaminari said.

"Yeah. Getting the molecule consistency right is tough." Momo sighed, leaning her head in her hand. "I don't want it to be so hard that it's not enjoyable to bite, but not so soft that it does that." She gestured at the mess of stuffing that now littered the kitchen floor. "I should probably do some more research."

"You should invent new cat toys!"

"I could do that too."

"Who died?" Tsu asked, coming in with a curious and worryingly interested expression "Oh no. Poor mouse."

Kaminari tossed her the cereal while Momo made a long, sparkling ribbon appear from her arm. Ashes meowed happily and dove for the new toy, intent on ripping it to shreds just as fast as her little claws could get there.
"Wow. Forget us. Let's sic her on the League."

***

Creative strategies to train their quirks were always praised. They also made excellent excuses for playing with the new kitten.

"I’ve been abandoned," Momo groused, not two hours later as half the class piled onto the common room couch. Sero was sprawled out across Ojiro and Sato, laughing his ass off. Koda was also laughing into his hand, trying to peer over the mess to get a better look. Shoji just stayed seated on the floor behind the couch, one eye peering up over the cushions.

Aoyama stood in the middle of the room, looking torn between laughter of his own and nauseous, queasy regret.

"He’s good at that," Sato said, admiring how Aoyama shot off three quick lasers: big enough that Ashes lost her shit trying to go after all of them at once, small and thin enough that they dissipated before hitting anything. He turned a little on his heel—wobbling more than was normal—and shot a short beam up towards the ceiling. Ashes made a damn good attempt, launching herself onto and then off the coffee table, scrabbling at air with ferocious cries. She kept snapping at all the sparkles that drifted towards the floor.

Sero had been wheezing over the display for the last ten minutes. He gripped his stomach, mirroring Aoyama.

"Dude, I love this, but you'd better quit before you—"

Too late.

Aoyama spun a little too fast, lost his balance, fell on his ass and promptly vomited into the carpet. The four boys yelled out in disgust as Aoyama sheepishly tried to block the mess from view. It wasn't the first time he and Uraraka had made a mess in front of their friends and it no doubt wouldn't be the last.
"Do that," Sero finished. "Eh, no worries. Shoji can you grab us some—Ashes don't eat it!"

***

In the coming weeks Ashes found a place for herself among the entirety of 1-A, sometimes in ways that were expected, others decidedly not. After Uraraka's fall a joking rumor began that the U.A. dorms must be haunted. After all, what else could explain the glowing eyes the kids would sometimes see beneath their beds? Strange scratching sounds at night and the tiny pitter-patter of feet? Sero in particular enjoyed amping up the joke, claiming that something must have possessed him whenever he felt compelled to scarf down a tuna fish sandwich.

No matter whose room she stayed in though, Ashes could always be found early in the morning riding on the top of Ashido's head. No one was quite sure how or why they started that, but at some point following her acceptance into the fold Ashes had figured out how to curl herself comfortably between two curved horns.

"My hair is comfier than any of the furniture here," Ashido said, buttering toast while Ashes watched from above. "It's all the conditioner I use."

"You both look very well rested," Iida said, which might have been mistaken for a compliment if it weren't for his own, haggard expression. Behind him Uraraka stifled her giggles. Ashes was still mostly nocturnal (her eyes were already drifting close as she buried her nose in pink curls) and as class representative Iida had taken it upon himself to keep her entertained and taken care of in the dead hours of the night; the unexpected single mom of U.A. Ashes would keep everyone awake if she was given free reign of their rooms. She'd also keep everyone awake if they closed their doors. After all, that's what powerful lungs were for. The only solution seemed to be nightly entertainment. Sometimes that was taken up by Aizawa. More often, as he made his patrols and investigated the League, it fell to Iida. Goodbye, sleep.

He eventually sighed and reached to scratch Ashes behind her ear.

"We played hide and seek," he said as Uraraka lost it in the corner. Ashes gave a sleepy yawn in response.

They discovered quickly though that the only thing she liked more than hide and seek with Iida, or playing with Aoyama's laser, or riding on Ashido's head...was Kirishima. All of him.
"Doesn't that hurt?" Jiro asked, not for the first time that week. It seemed that she had a fairly selective memory when it came to this, but Kirishima didn't mind. It just meant she was worried about him. Each and every day.

So he just threw her a grin. "Nope," he said, nearly drowned out by the scritch-scritch-scratch as Ashes clawed at his bare arm. He was hardening it, of course, allowing the cat to sharpen to her heart's content, then pushing his quirk up to his shoulders and neck as Ashes climbed hirer. "Her claws have got nothing on some of the hits I've taken. It's good for her, doesn't hurt me..." Kirishima shrugged, nearly dislodging Ashes in the process. She let out an indignant meow before falling right back to her work.

"Whoops. Sorry."

"My turn, scooch!"

Kaminari came flying over the other end of the couch, shooting off tiny little sparks of electricity over the skin of his palm. Ashes paused with her claws still poised on Kirishima's neck, eyes blown unfathomably wide as she watched the display. Jiro snickered as her paws slowly dropped, her center of gravity lowered, butt rising into the air as she prepared to strike. With a grin Kaminari scooted back. All three were holding their breath now until Kirishima raised an eyebrow and whispered,

"You realize this it gonna hurt, right?"

Kaminari let the electricity explode in the air and Ashes struck, flying through it—fur a static mess—before landing squarely on his stomach, claws still extended. The cry Kaminari let out was enough to draw the rest of the class into the living room, weapons drawn and ready for battle.

Not that anyone really thought they could match such a ferocious beast.

***

It started a bit of an argument though. A silly, not terribly heated thing: who did Ashes prefer to play with? Surely it was Jiro's ears. Scratching posts and sparkles were just fine, but nothing beat
something that Ashes could bat at continually, dart away when she least expected it until she was pouncing from shoulder to shoulder. Please, Ojiro said. Ashes loved his tail the best. What else could she play with and ride on? Tsu insisted calmly that Ashes was happiest when bug hunting with her —"We share the kills. It's a bonding experience"—and poor Ashido shrieked her little, disgusted heart out.

They were all wrong, of course, shockingly obvious the day they walked in on Ashes and Koda having a full-blown conversation over tea.

"... he can talk to her," Aoyama said, deflating like a rag doll. "Right."

Sero sighed. "We never stood a chance."

Ten minutes later, flustered and shaking, Koda signed that Ashes had actually named herself back on the streets. She liked 'Ashes' just fine, but the sound she'd long associated with herself... well. The closest thing it translated to was 'Queen.'

Aizawa caught the end of that conversation and snorted on his way past. The kids heard something that sounded like "Figures" over the rim of his mug.

Everyone pretty much accepted that. Only Iida hid in his room the rest of the day, contemplating the fact that their pets apparently had a level of sentience he'd never considered before. It was a rough night all around.

***

In the coming weeks Hagakure became the official Ashes Catcher. Being invisible and all, she was the only one who stood a chance at catching the little beast. Ashes chased Tokoyami daily (apparently a bird was a bird in her mind) and avoided Bakugo like the plague—animals traumatized by fire didn't tend to do well with kids who frequently caused explosions. Uraraka, meanwhile, flat out refused to pet her. When pressed she just muttered something about her own childhood trauma and wandered off. She became the official keeper of the Ashes Scrapbook though.

And Izuku... Izuku was strange.

"I don't think she dislikes me," he said, extending a hand towards Ashes for the third time that
morning. She gave his fingers a tentative sniff, a lick, and then the hair along her back ruffled up alarmingly. Ashes didn't run off like she had the first time they'd met, but she didn't seem inclined to get any closer either. She settled for cautiously circling Izuku, wary. His shoulders dropped.

"She's warmed up to everyone else," he muttered. Iida and Uraraka had already struck up a different conversation. Izuku didn't even realize anyone was listening until a heavy hand fell on his shoulder.

Yagi stood behind him, bedhead and a mug of coffee in hand. "It's normal," he whispered, hiding the words behind a yawn. "Animals are far more sensitive to power than we are. The more power an individual has..."

He trailed off, but Izuku didn't need a play-by-play. One for All had been growing across generations and though he could only tap into a small percentage of that power right now, the rest was still thrumming through his bones. Izuku watched as Ashes got a little closer and finally sat, tail swishing as she stared up at him.

"Give her time," Yagi said. "You'll eventually be her favorite, my boy."

"Ah! ... I—I think you're biased..."

Perhaps someday, but right now (whether they were willing to admit it or not) it was abundantly clear to 1-A who Ashe's favorite was. Even Aizawa bowed down to the preference.

"I'm cheating," Todoroki admitted, gazing down at Ashes as she purred and purred in his lap. From his doorway everyone had crowded to watch the taming of the beast. Ashes flopped over onto her back. Stretched. One paw came up to lazily tug at his shirt. The purring continued, loud enough that it could be heard into the hall.

Todoroki shrugged. "I'm a living heating pad, so."

Jealous didn't even begin to cover it, but they'd rag on Todoroki later for hogging all that precious attention. For now, the kids were happy to just watch from afar, letting those loud purrs soothe everything within them they didn't realize needed soothing.
Fun fact #1: a wasp actually crawled into my dad's beer one summer and stung him twice in the mouth.

Fun fact #2: that has Haunted me ever since and I now guard my open drinks very, veeeeeeery carefully.
Hello, lovely readers! Sorry this drabble took so long to arrive. I'm juggling six writing projects atm and averaging 250 words on each daily, so... things are slow going lol. But one has arrived! Woo. Yay. Insert confetti emoji here.

This particular drabble is a fill for a reverse "omg Deku is SHREDDED" trope where they freak out over how tiny Deku used to be instead. I THINK this was Wolfsrainrules' prompt? If not someone yell at me.

Enjoy! <3

"This is too normal," Jiro whispered. "It's freaking me out."

Fair enough. If U.A. was known for anything beyond its ability to produce top-notch heroes, it was its wonky and lawsuit worthy curriculum. The strange was commonplace here and while most high schoolers wouldn't blink at things like choosing a class president or the occasional attendance grade, they were things to be celebrated in Aizawa-Sensei's classroom. Anything remotely normal drew straight up cheers from the students.

Usually.

"While this might appear insignificant to you all we feel that it is an important step in rehabilitating U.A.'s image." Principal Nedzu raised his arms at the announcement, clearly hoping for vocal support. He didn't get it. Instead he trotted back to where Aizawa stood, climbed him like a tree, and positioned himself on top of the desk. Everyone slightly raised their chins to keep eye contact, like devotees observing a god.

"Out of all our students you are most aware of the rather negative feedback we've been receiving." Nedzu nodded seriously to himself, hopping a little from foot to foot. "We are, of course, taking more serious steps to improve our institution, including better security, but I've found during my years as an educator that the little gestures can do just as much good. In fact, we need those simple gestures. They are at the very heart of what it means to be a hero."

Iida slowly raised his hand. "Perhaps, Sir... but a yearbook?"
Even the word sent a murmur rippling through the class. They weren't bad per se, just not a part of U.A.'s culture. It was unanimously decided during the school's founding that producing a text filled with the birth names and other personal information about would-be heroes wasn't the smartest move. Any memories would have to solidify through personal photos and the merch that—if you were lucky—your agency would one day oversee. Sure, things had gotten a little more relaxed over the years. Names became common knowledge through internships and the Sports Festival, but despite this yearbooks had never caught on. One student after another found themselves shrugging at friends, unsure how to feel about the change.

"Well I like it!" Ashido cheered and Nedzu gave her a tiny thumbs up.

"Your instructors will take care of the work," he said. "As I'm sure you understand, this is primarily a form of publicity, so the construction of the book will not be left to you students. We want to remind the public of our achievements here and thus the information will be very carefully cultivated. It is not the most honest move, but a necessary one. I’m sure you understand." There was something rather menacing in Nedzu's eyes and those in the front row reared back. It cleared away after a moment though, leaving a sunny smile in its place. "We just need you kids to provide pictures!"

Bakugo twitched. "Pictures?"

"Yes, yes. Three if you would: a baby picture, one from before your time at U.A., and something current, preferably something that highlights U.A.'s facilities or your relationships here. Or both! If you don't have anything you like, feel free to browse through the security footage. Present Mic will be available this afternoon to go through it and pull screenshots. We have a lot of excellent video from your training sessions. Ah, minus your first trip to USJ, of course." A few of the kids flinched. "Oh! And if your pictures showcase your quirk in some manner, that's even better. Hardly a requirement though."

"It's due Thursday," Aizawa intoned, the only words he'd spoken for the last twenty minutes.

"Indeed! Please be punctual. There's much to do and very little time to do it in." With that Nedzu grabbed hold of Aizawa's arm and swung himself down from the desk, trotting out the door as he waved goodbye. "I look forward to seeing your choices!"

Left standing at the front of the room, Aizawa brushed white fur from his shirt and pinched his eyes shut. When he opened them again Kaminari had his hand hesitatingly raised.

"What?"
"Uh, Sir? Just wondering... will the teachers also be required to...?"

"No."

"Too bad," Sero whispered as Aizawa turned to write something on the board. "That's a missed opportunity. What the hell does baby Eraserhead look like?"

Izuku didn't know. All he was sure of was that he'd also missed out on seeing a picture of baby All Might.

Sometimes the world really was cruel.

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"Here we are!"

Izuku already had his face in his hands, Uraraka digging an elbow into his side while Iida straightened in anticipation. Leave it to his mom to come back with not one, not two, but five stuffed photo albums for them to flip through. Izuku hadn't realized she'd even kept all this. Who bound a whole collection of their kid eating dinner?!

"She loves you," Uraraka whispered, sounding positively giddy about it. And yeah, she really did. Izuku looked up at his mom's round, beaming face and felt something tightening up in the middle of his chest. There'd been so much fear lately. The kind of stress that dug wrinkles into her forehead and paled out her cheeks. Seeing her thrumming with an excited energy on a bright, Sunday morning forced a smile onto his face despite his embarrassment. Besides, Uraraka and Iida both came from families just like his. Bigger, but no less bright. They got it.

"I wasn't sure which one you'd want," Inko said, puttering as she laid out each album on the coffee table. Like priceless artifacts displayed before curators. "They want a baby picture? How wonderful! I have plenty of those. But anything else before U.A.? That's so broad, goodness." She worried the edge of a cover, bits of it flaking off against her thumb. "If you'd like my opinion—" and Inko hesitated at that. "I think you were quite handsome around this time last year. Before you started that training regiment of yours. Not that you aren't handsome like this," she hurried to add, going so far as to pinch Izuku's cheeks (undermining the 'handsome' as she went). "But you had such a grace back then. All long, lean limbs. That's my physique, you know. Well. It was for a time. Younger woman
can get away with so much—you know that, don't you, Uraraka?—but a mother to a teenage boy? No, no. You need strength and good food for that. "Inko gave her stomach a pat and smiled a wide, radiant smile.

"You look great, Mom." Izuku said, so caught up in the truth of it that he didn't remember to be embarrassed. Her eyes filled a little at the compliment, but didn't overflow.

"I know," she said, sounding a little choked. With a deep breath she nudged the books forward, dropped a kiss into each of their hair, and bustled away, saying something about making them some snacks.

Uraraka practically melted into the cushions. "I love your mom," she said. Iida nodded forcefully in agreement.

"A wonderful woman. I can see much of her in you, Izuku. While we have the time the both of you must come and meet my family as well."

"Mm." Uraraka's head lolled on the cushions. "I don't know when my parents are getting back but yeah, same! We should have a big get-together for the whole class sometime. Like a 1-A party."

Izu winced. "Don't let my mom hear you say that. She really will invite everyone over and I don't think I'm ready for her to meet Aizawa-Sensei yet..."

"But perhaps something more formal." Iida was scrubbing viciously at his glasses, lip between his teeth as he thought it over. "After all, if U.A. is looking to improve the public's opinion of them on a personal level, some sort of gathering might be the perfect way to accompany the yearbook. Open to a few members of the press perhaps, but primarily for family and friends of the students. Classy, of course. Something that will emphasize our respect for culture and the hero community’s strong social ties. After all, for us the fight is only half the battle. The rest is reassurance!"

Uraraka leaned until her mouth was right near Izuku's ear and though he froze, he managed to get his heart to quiet down long enough to hear, "Uh oh. He's entering full class rep mode."

"I can hear you, Uraraka!"

So he could. As the two of them bickered across him Izuku leaned to snatch up the closest photo
album, not entirely sure he wanted to see all that his mom had saved; entirely sure he couldn't resist. He let the heavy book fall open at random and groaned aloud, drawing his friends' attention. Of course, every photo was a bright collection of red, blue, and yellow.

"You had an All Might onesie," Uraraka gushed, slamming herself into Izuku's shoulder to get a better look.

"He had many of those." Inko's voice came drifting out from the kitchen. "I bought seven—one for each day of the week—so that some of them might actually get washed!"

"I don't remember that," Izuku muttered, bright red as Uraraka laughed and Iida carefully slid the picture from its bindings. It indeed showed a young Izuku in an All Might onesie, holding himself up with the help of a table leg. What was presumably also an All Might blanket (only the red and blue were visible) had been carefully tied around his shoulders so it drifted down like a cape. Though the real draw was Izuku's smile. Gap toothed and bright, it very nearly blinded them.

Iida traced his finger along the picture's edge as Uraraka took the album from Izuku's lap. He let her, grabbing another whose cover was in better shape. It felt heavier though and seemed to have places that just wanted to fall open. Like they'd been looked at again and again.

"Did you wear anything other than All Might merch?" Uraraka asked, sounding more fond than she had any right to be. She flipped through page after page of brightly colored t-shirts, plushies, socks with stars on them, and carefully styled hair. Izuku opened his mouth to point out that at that age he really didn't have much control over his clothing. Whatever he was dressed in was what his mom had chosen... but one look at the picture of him raising an All Might action figure into the air, eyes wide with adoration, and he figured that the point was kind of moot.

He opened up his middle school years instead and discovered a whole new kind of horror.

"No," Uraraka whispered.

"Midoriya!" Iida exclaimed, somehow sounding both upset and proud.

He wasn't given a chance to defend himself. They didn't get their snacks either. Iida pocketed the original picture of baby Izuku in his onesie; Uraraka snatched the one they'd just found, and within seconds the two of them were bullying him back to the dorms with identical, impish smiles.
Ink wrapped the food up with a smile. It would keep.

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"Dude I just need to—nope! Don't fight it, man! Just stand—yep, stand right there. That's perfect. That's... huh."

Kirishima backed up until he'd merged with the rest of 1-A, all of them standing and staring at Izuku in a tight little group. He didn't need to look down to know that his whole body had gone flaming red. Literally. Somehow they'd talked him into shucking his shirt and standing—shorts only—beside the hallway bulletin board. There they'd pinned a two-year-old picture of Izuku at the pool.

Uraraka let out a low whistle. "Long and lean... your mom really wasn't kidding, was she?"

Izuku meant to say "no" but it just emerged as a low, embarrassed whine. He hadn't realized it at the time, not with nearly a year of slow preparation, but his body really had changed dramatically during his training with All Might. The picture at the beach showed his same spiky hair and sunny smile, but they were attached to twig-like arms and a nearly concave stomach. Izuku fidgeted as his friends' eyes jumped from the past to the present, no doubt taking in his now broad shoulders, the six-pack abs, hands that were scarred and calloused by fights. It was a far cry from the skinny boy from before. Sneaking his own glance at the picture, Izuku marveled at how big his head looked; almost like his body couldn't hold it.

"Small," Jiro said, pointing like a zombie at the board. "You were so small."

Kaminari was clutching at his hair. "For real what the hell? I mean we've all gotten stronger. I'm totally ripped now—"

Ashido side-eyed his arms. "Are you?"

"—but you're like one of those nerds on the makeover shows. You know," Kaminari mimed dolling up his face. "Where they take the skinny twerps and make them hot? That's you, Midoriya!"

"I'm—I'm not..." Izuku tried, but absolutely no one was listening to him.
"It's certainly impressive." Yaoyorozu was the first to break from the group, trotting over to stare at the picture with chin in hand. She seemed to measure something, nodded, then gave his bicep the same treatment. Izuku yelped at the touch. "I'd be very interested to know what your training regimen was, Midoriya, if you'd be willing to share it. As well as your diet. That is a **shocking** amount of progress in a very short amount of time... and I do need to work on my physical strength." Yaoyorozu sighed, running a hand down her stomach.

"Your body looks great!" but Mineta was immediately silenced.

"What *was* your regimen, Midoriya?" Iida asked. He too approached the picture, positioning his glasses for a better look. He was like an expert examining art.

"Uh..." Izuku shifted. It wasn't like he could tell them the truth. 'Oh yeah, nothing drastic. I just ran into the world's Number One Hero, somehow convinced him to take me on as his apprentice, and he personally trained me until literally an hour before our exam. Nothing anyone can't accomplish!'

Yeah right. Some *part* of the truth couldn't hurt though...

"I cleaned the beach," Izuku said. He couldn't help but smile at the baffled looks on his friends' faces. "You know the spot about a half hour from here? People had been using it as a trash dump and a friend—" (close enough) "—suggested that I clear it for training. It's a way of lifting weights that helps people." Izuku raised his arms, palms up, as examples.

Kirishima was very nearly crying. "That's so *manly*."

"Ah—! Is it...?"

Sero nodded, almost to himself. "Is that what the Principal meant about heroes and small things?"

"It's certainly something," Ojiro said, slapping Izuku on the shoulder. With his tail he knocked the pin out of the picture and caught it on its way down. He examined it with a wide, teasing smile.

"You were a twig," he laughed, passing it so Ashido could get a look. "You realize you've gotta use it as your yearbook pic right?"
Izuku knew. Iida and Uraraka had already made that abundantly clear.

"And then we've gotta frame this and put it somewhere the whole dorm can see."

"We—? What!"

In the end it wasn't quite as bad as Izuku had feared. With Inko's permission they laminated his pool photo and after giving a copy to Nedzu, reattached it to the board. However, that was soon followed by nineteen others: an old shot of Tsu and Habuko outside an ice cream shop. Kaminari balancing a soccer ball on his head. Aoyama mimicking the pose of a store mannequin in the background. Bakugo, covered in soot from his own explosions, grinning with a high at the camera. Ojiro proudly displaying a recently earned blackbelt. Uraraka hanging upside down from a tree. Tokoyami high-fiving Dark Shadow. Hagakure in an extravagant hat (in only the hat). Mineta using his quirk to build a makeshift throne. Ashido doing a one-armed handstand. Koda positively covered in birds. Jiro DJ-ing at a friend's birthday party. Yaoyorozu getting a piggyback from her father. Shoji with his nephew swinging from three arms. Iida curled on the couch, tucked safe against Tensei's side. Kirishima waking up from an impromptu nap, behead galore. Sero displaying his drawing of the city. Sato winning a pie-eating contest. And Todoroki, grave faced, but pressing a kiss into his elder sister's hair.

Those made the picture in the middle bearable.

And then weeks later two more pictures appeared, despite the fact that they didn’t have to: a high-school aged Aizawa graduating from U.A.; a young Yagi giving bunny ears to Nana Shimura (and Nana giving bunny ears back).

Izuku stared at that picture for a long, long time; the only one in the dorm to really get it. Sometimes passing their smiles made his chest hurt. Sometimes he smiled back. Every time though he was simply glad it was there.

He'd gotten his All Might pic and a young Izuku was right there beside him.
Kurisuri

Chapter Notes

Have I mentioned yet that I love it when All Might curses in English? And then says things like "oh my goodness" when he's truly shocked? What a gem!!

"Ah fuck."

Yagi knew he should have taken the time to change before meeting with Izuku. He wasn't the world's Number One Hero anymore, couldn't hold his muscle form for more than a few seconds, and as such had no real need for so-called gym clothes. He wasn't sparing with Izuku or helping him lift refrigerators now, so why bother changing out of his collared shirt and tie? The ones that actually fit him and Hizashi said made him look like a "Rockin' and rollin' star!!" Yagi was almost, sort of, maybe a little proud of how he looked now. Sure, he was still a wobbly skeleton with sunken eyes—on his good days—but at least that skeleton had a real wardrobe. Yagi was reluctant to return to his old, oversized clothing.

So he'd said goodbye to Aizawa and walked straight to one of U.A.'s training facilities. He'd overseen Izuku's form for roughly ten minutes, decided that it couldn't hurt to demonstrate just one punch, and promptly vomited blood the moment he did.

Straight onto his new, wonderfully fitted shirt.

"I'll get a towel!!" Izuku cried, running in what seemed to be a random direction, missing the fact that there was already a towel piled at their feet. Yagi shook his head at him and only succeeded in hitting his sleeve with more droplets.

"Dammit."

Izuku snuck back with paper towels from the bathroom and Yagi bit down on a smile of thanks. That never looked good with blood between the teeth. He settled for patting Izuku on the back instead.

A few wipes, little bit of saliva, and he was mostly good to go. The shirt was a lost cause though. A pity, considering he actually liked this one.
"Hey, All Might? What does that mean?"

Yagi blinked, wondering how the hell you got to your teenage years without learning what a lost cause was—especially when mothers frequently yelled that at their children in jest—but was fully prepared to explain to Izuku the horrible staining properties of blood and how embarrassment kept an old man from shucking a shirt and soaking it in hot water. His bare-chested days were behind him.

Except then Yagi realized he'd never said any of that out loud.

He raised a hand and Izuku immediately helped pull him to his feet. Yagi gave that hand a little squeeze. "What's what, my boy?"

"That word, uh—" and Izuku made a startlingly good approximation of the English word 'fuck,' close enough that Yagi's towel dropped down to join the first.

"It's English right? But I don't think we've learned that in Present Mic's class yet. What does it mean?"

...sh*t.

"Um," he said eloquently.

It boggled Yagi's mind that anyone as innocent as Izuku had ever managed to survive this world. Surely any teenage boy would at least recognize the tone of a curse word? How many kinds of one-syllable words did you bite out when something went wrong? Yet here the kid stood, looking up at his mentor like he expected Yagi to impart a standard vocabulary lesson. "Yes, dear boy, that's the English word for broccoli. You can easily understand why I'd use it in this context." For a kid who spent half his time analyzing everything around him and could come up with strategies that left Yagi open-mouthed with awe... he could also be remarkably dense.

Surely this wasn't the drama he was turning it into though. Izuku wasn't literally a child. Not by U.A.'s standards. No doubt he knew a string of new, innovative curses that Yagi had never even heard of. Youth were like that right? Discovering a few in another language wasn't bad, per se. No, not at all. Actually, the more Yagi thought about it the more positive the situation seemed. Why shouldn't he teach Izuku in ways that went beyond the battlefield? Especially when it came to something as fascinating and nuanced as language? Oh, he was well aware that his fellow citizens
wouldn't agree, but Yagi had always found a particular pleasure in curing; a freedom of expression not offered to him through any other verbal means. Provided that he was sure to caution Izuku against using such vocabulary in certain company—particularly the press—there was no reason not to expand the boy's knowledge. Yes. Yes, this was a good thing.

So why the hell couldn't Yagi get his mouth working?

In the end his voice failed him completely. Blood ignored, he pulled his phone out with stained fingertips and did a quick translation. To say that these particular curses were mild was an understatement—at least comparatively—but Izuku's eyes still widened at the screen and Yagi still couldn't stop the blush from creeping up his neck.

"Oh."

He gave Izuku two awkward pats. Then a third for good measure. "Never let Recovery Girl hear you saying something like that, okay?"

Izuku swallowed and nodded. "She'll be mad?"

"Not at all." Another pat, firm and solid. "Not at you, my boy. The woman has the mouth of a sailor. I suppose seeing the worst of the hero community will do that to you. But she's rather strict about how children conduct themselves and I... well. She's already mad at me."

True enough. Izuku passed back the phone and caught his mentor's eye. Something like a promise passed between them.

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Too bad for Yagi, promises were meant to be broken.

Or at least, they sometimes bent under a child's best intentions.

"Fuck!"
Shattered arms. Mangled fingers. More than one dislocated shoulder. None of it quite compared to the unique pain of stubbing one's toe, the digit bending back and jamming into his foot. Izuku had taken his shoe off for a measly thirty seconds to get a rock out of it and of course this happened in the meantime. It was a Monday.

He was so focused on hobbling in a circle (that would somehow help the pain, right?) and keeping the embarrassment to a minimum that Izuku hardly registered the word he'd spoken, let alone the fact that it wasn't in his native tongue. When he finally looked up he found mostly confused—but interested—looks around his classroom. Iida and Tokoyami were the exceptions, the former staring comically at Izuku with his mouth hanging open around his knees.

And at the front of the class... Hizashi looked ecstatic.

"SIT YOUR BUTTS DOWN!" he yelled and all of them did, more out of surprise than actual obedience. Izuku joined them. His toe and cheeks throbbed with two very different kinds of heat.

"Initiative," Hizashi said gleefully, waving their English textbook about before tossing it aside. "I like it! Where'd you pick up the curse, Midoriya?"

"It's a curse word?" Ashido asked, voice peaking with interest.

Izuku muttered something about reading it online. Lying was bad, very bad, yeah, but he wasn't about to betray All Might.

Iida's hand was chopping methodically into his desk. "It's not appropriate!" he said. "No U.A. student should ever be caught using such foul language—"

Behind him Uraraka slid down into her seat with a sheepish expression.

"—it does a disservice to this university and furthermore—"

"Hey now."
Hizashi didn't yell this time. He didn't have to. Volume was the easiest application of his quirk, but he had pitch as well. Izuku couldn't describe what it was about the words exactly, but they froze him in place just as easily as Aizawa's stare always did. Hizashi looked out over his class, calmly, and that more than anything got them all to quiet down. It wasn't always easy to see, but right then the pro hero in him was readily apparent.

Then he smiled and the tension evaporated like smoke.

"Hey now!" Hizashi repeated. "What do you kiddies know about cursing? Nothing, that's what. I mean okay yeah you probably know something, but there's a reason why you lot are the students and I'm up here teaching the language." Hizashi smacked his thumb into his chest and grinned. "Betcha didn't know that cursing can help deaden pain, huh? Mm hmm. Taboo language floods our bodies with adrenaline which does a real good job of helping you ignore that injury in battle. Or just stubbing your toe. Whichever it is, seems like a kind of useful thing for a hero to know about, right?"

In the front Iida had also slid down into his seat. He appeared torn between interest and shame.

"It's not all that simple though," Hizashi said, seeming to warm to the topic. He swung himself on top of the desk and sat down, booted feet kicking against the wood. "Language—any language—is all kinds of messy. Beautiful, but disorganized. Bit like our dear Shota's hair."

There were a few titters around the classroom. Everyone grabbed paper and pen for notes.

"Words only have meaning because we say they do. What's that thing out there, Jiro? Help a guy out."

"Uh," she blinked at where Hizashi was pointing out the window. "The grass?"

"No, no, the other thing. The thing I can't describe yet because I don't have other sounds with meaning attached to them. But I'm pointing right at it."

"The tree?" Kirishima asked and Hizashi 's hand came down hard to smack the desk.

"A tree," he said gleefully. "Why in the world are we calling it that? Sure, sure we can do some historical research. Figure out if it's derived from some other word that came before it. Maybe it got
mashed together with something else along the way or mangled from being misheard too often. Whatever. The point is someone, somewhere made a sound with their mouth and decided that this sound represents that thing. It's an insultingly simple description of how language evolves, but you get the idea. A lot of snotty-nosed scholars call it the signifier and signified, so that's fun."

Hizashi hopped back down, strutting between the rows. Everyone watched him, enraptured. "Now we learn language when we're itty bitty little things. First couple of years? They're the best. And that's when we start learning which words are taboo too. See, you've gotta remember that language is like Shota's hair—yes, I'm sticking with this—because it's messy as hell and always changing. Sometimes it's down. Sometimes he's got it in a ponytail. Other times a pretty braid. Language changes too and what one generation considers taboo another might have reclaimed, or just plain old gotten used to. You can't go assuming that your curse word is someone else's curse word too.

"So!" Hizashi spun around, pointing at Izuku. He immediately shrunk back. "Midoriya. Are you fluent in English?"

Izuku mustered up a tiny smile. "If I was I wouldn't be in your class," and Kirishima roared with laughter, reaching to smack him on the shoulder.

Hizashi shrugged. "Yeah, unless you were an intellectual mastermind pretending to be learning English to secure an easy grade... not that I ever did such a thing." Behind him Iida choked. "But since you're not fluent that means the nifty little curse you learned doesn't mean much does it? You know it's bad, but that big brain of yours doesn't feel like it's bad—not like when you use one of the curses you grew up with. Need to let off some steam? Stick with Japanese. Want to start a fight in America? Well now you've got that vocabulary. Or at least you will in a second." Grinning, he leaned into Izuku's space. "What's the worst curse you know of, huh?"

Izuku spluttered. "Um..."

And before he could get anything out—before he could even consider whether he was equipped to intentionally say something vulgar in front of his teacher, with Iida looking white in the background and Uraraka hanging excitedly off his shoulder—there came a voice from just in front of Izuku.

Bakugo let off a string of curses that was not fit for reprinting in any family-friendly media. What resulted was not unlike most of 1-A's moments of pandemonium, with the exception that a few of the more buttoned-up classmates appeared shell-shocked in their seats. Hizashi had no such problems. He let out a "YEAH" loud enough to rattle the windows and raced to the board, jotting down the curses with vague, English translations. Izuku closed his mouth and then guiltily began his own notes.
There was homework of course and when the other instructors caught the kids reciting such language in the halls it perhaps caused a bit of a stir. In that Aizawa shrugged, and Nemuri cackled, and Nedzu wished them good luck on their quiz.

By the time the new lessons had spread to 1-B they'd also reached the infirmary. Luckily for Yagi, he wasn't the culprit here.

Just another pupil, picking up a few pointers the next time he and Izuku trained.
Hello, everyone! Long time no see. I've got a couple of things to lay out here:

1. Yes, this is another Bakugo meta, one that encompasses everything up through Chapter 190 (So spoilers! And yeah... it's long...). I thought long and hard about whether to post it here and decided to primarily because a number of people expressed a desire to see more meta stuff if I wrote it. Like with the first one, if you're not interested in this stuff just feel free to pass it over.

2. I've decided I won't be responding to comments on this particular chapter. It's not out of any feelings like, "Muhaha! I've had my say but now you can't have yours!" but just because I'm so tried of thinking about Bakugo now lol. And I have lots of other comments still to respond to. And real life writing to complete. So feel free to leave any thoughts and I'll absolutely read them, I just won't be taking the time to respond.

3. You might want to read this on a laptop/desktop. I have no idea what will happen formatting-wise on the phone with all these images and they're already pretty screwy. I did the best I could. Sorry!

4. I'm reposting this exactly as it'll appear on tumblr. If you'd prefer to read it there (especially with the pics) you can find it [here](#)

5. Finally, I feel bad that it's been so long and now you're just getting a meta. So here, have a preview of the next drabble :D

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The moment Izuku, Kirishima, and Todoroki had approached him about a sleepover at Todoroki's place—Endeavor conveniently out of the country—Aizawa had started preparations of his own. He'd vetted the pro, Thunderclap, well aware of the kind of damage Kaminari could inflict when he put his mind to it. He'd personally searched the Todoroki household before saying goodbye to the boys just hours ago. And before he went, Aizawa had introduced them to U.A.'s newest form of security. They'd be rolling the app out to all the students later that week, but for now his kids were the test subjects. A single button got them in contact with their teacher. A single press would send out an alert.

The alert Aizawa had gotten just moments before.

***

Enjoy!

There's something to be said for the argument that the most important part of a story is its beginning. The start of a tale either grabs us or leaves us cold. It sets up all our expectations and, whether the
author is consciously aware of it or not, has a strong impact on the ending. Stories don’t exist without their beginnings (for obvious reasons) and it’s worth giving them some extra attention. *Boku No Hero Academia* starts with this:
We don't know these people yet, but it's easy enough to figure out their role in this tale; who's the hero and who's the villain. We learn a lot in just five panels. Bakugo has been beating up on another, weaker kid and he's "already made him cry." This is significant because it sets up Bakugo's empathy—or lack thereof. His first victim is not Izuku, the "friend" who we later learn infuriates and at times even intimidates Bakugo. As horrible as it is, we can explain some of his violence towards Izuku, though we certainly can't justify it. But this is different. Bakugo appears to be beating on a random kid simply because he can. Because he *enjoys* it. Though we're only in the first panel, the crux of Bakugo's characterization is laid out for us to see. It emphasizes my primary argument and the reason why I don't think he can ever be a hero, no matter how much Horikoshi wants us to root for him.

Bakugo lacks empathy for other people.

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He takes extreme pleasure in not just being the best, but actively tearing others down. No matter how much improvement we see later (and as I'll show I believe it's very, very minimal), this is a trait that I
personally believe doesn't just leave a person; it's not something you easily "grow out of," if you grow out of it at all. To quote a phrase we've needed a horrifying amount in the last few years, Bakugo enjoys hurting others. People like that aren't heroes.

Pay attention to the symbolism here, Horikoshi's decision to associate the boys with horror tropes (fire, bat wings, a deformed hand) which are then used to physically harm Izuku. If I didn't already know from my first read through that Bakugo is a protagonist, this page tells me pretty clearly that he's the antagonist. It's a serious problem with Horikoshi's writing of Bakugo that we see throughout the first 190 chapters. He keeps telling us he's a hero (you go to a hero school, you associate with heroes, you say you want to be one, etc.) while *showing* us the exact opposite. It says a lot that Bakugo tells Izuku "The best heroes out there, well... they showed signs of greatness even as students," implying that if you're not The Best now you have no hope. It *sounds* like what All Might
says later, that “Most of the top heroes show signs of greatness even as children,” but then he goes on to say “Their bodies simply moved before they could think!!” We know in hindsight that greatness has absolutely nothing to do with quirks, given that All Might himself was once quirkless. It has nothing to do with physical strength either. Rather, it’s all about heart and action. Bakugo did not and I believe still does not understand that. Regardless of whether you believe he redeems himself at all, he's starting at rock fucking bottom.
NOT TO MENTION I’LL BE ONE OF THE RICHEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD!!

I’LL EVEN SURPASS ALL MIGHT AND BECOME THE BEST HERO OUT THERE!
Flash-forward and a 14yo Bakugo has found the perfect balance between physical and psychological bullying. Everyone around him is an "extra"—he's the star of this show. He's allowed to yell at his classmates, jump up onto the desk, and blow up Izuku's all without even a blink from the teacher. Yes, it's a problem that the adults in Bakugo's early life don't reign him in, but I honestly don't believe that's the reason he's like this (as I'll demonstrate in just a bit). It started too early. It's something innate—or learned so damn young that it might as well be. I'm sorry, but being praised for having a talent (his quirk) doesn't make you a bully. Praise doesn't necessarily breed superiority and superiority doesn't necessarily translate into active violence. This is Bakugo choosing to be cruel to those around him.

This is also the first time we hear about his so-called motivations: surpass All Might and be one of the richest people in the world. I use "so-called" because everyone in 1-A wants to be a great hero...
but for empathetic reasons. Izuku wants to save people with a smile, to inspire them like he was once inspired by All Might. Iida wants to live up to his family's legacy, primarily his brother. Uraraka also wants money, but that's because she wants to support her family. Everyone's dreams are directly connected to other people. Meanwhile, Bakugo's are disconnected from others—they're just "extras." I'd argue that he doesn't actually have true motivations. Why be a hero? Why not a villain if he just wants to be the best? The only explanation we get so far is because he needs to surpass All Might, the current best, the one he grew up watching on TV. Heroes are on top at the moment. They're the cream of the crop. If Bakugo had been born into a world with no All Might, one where villains held more power? I honestly don't believe he would have chosen this path. He wants power for the sake of power; to be the best because it's, well, the best. That's not a dream. That's megalomania.
?!

BOOM!!
Bakugo then destroys Izuku's journal, something he must know is incredibly important to him given how long they've known each other. Once again this is cruelty for cruelty’s sake. We also have another shot that clearly pits Bakugo and the rest of the class (with horror-esque quirks again) as the Bad Guys compared to Izuku outlined in white.
We get this creepy as hell smile. It's this moment that raised Bakugo from garden variety bully to outright abuser in my mind. He *enjoys* acting like he's having a nice conversation with Izuku, all while threatening him and burning his jacket. Bakugo thrives on scaring those he deems weaker than him. It's how he gets his kicks.
This is the guy we're gonna let defend civilians? Okay...

(Also, just take a moment to appreciate “Don’t you dare get into U.A., nerd!” It’s not “Don’t you dare apply” or any other variation thereof. Don’t you get in. Bakugo recognizes, even subconsciously, that Izuku has aspects to him (kindness, drive, analytical thinking) that would help make him a superb hero, things that the pros might want to nurture regardless of whether he has a quirk. Bakugo’s need to be the best is fueled by the fact that he isn’t. It’s not just a nebulous “Oh I need to beat All Might someday.” A part of him understands that right now, already, he’s not coming out on top. Izuku is inherently the hero he could never hope to be.)
And of course, we get the moment where Bakugo tells Izuku to "take a swan dive off the roof," still
smiling that smile. All Izuku has to defend himself with is words and Bakug makes it clear that if he
dares to speak up something else precious of his will be destroyed. Or he'll get another punch. Or
he'll be burned. Or something even worse than all that. Bakugo has set up a relationship based on
fear and submission and this has been going on since they were four. Liking Bakugo is one thing,
but I personally can't understand those who support their friendship/romance. This isn't friendship
and has never been friendship. Izuku just thinks it is because he's a) been abused by Bakugo his
whole life and b) is a very traditional Shonen hero who wants to save everyone and everything. In
Izuku's mind a hero saves everyone and rejecting Bakugo would be akin to rejecting his dreams. But
this is what their "friendship" really is:
We then head outside the classroom.
In classic abuser fashion Bakugo twists the scenario to blame the victim. His violence is Izuku's fault for "messing with me." Note also his interactions with his other so-called friends. Bakugo has no respect for their opinions—they're wrong about him going too far. Bakugo doesn't care about their interests, health, or records—it's only an issue if his record is blemished if they’re caught smoking (despite the teacher announcing that everyone in the class wanted to be a hero). Unlike Tsu’s excellent friend Habuko, these boys are never mentioned again and seem to have no real impact on Bakugo’s life.

Then begins one of the most frustrating aspects of Bakugo's characterization: his tendency to get kidnapped. This possession by the villain is so horrific that it makes us want to forget the abuser Bakugo is, but remember that even the worst people get scared. They still cry. Or, in Bakugo's case, they can still "look like [they] needed saving." It doesn't mean that they won't continue to hurt others the second things are going their way again. As I've mentioned in my previous meta, it's important to keep in mind that these events (sludge monster, training camp, etc.) are not ways of evening out the scales. This isn't karma at work. Bakugo doesn't get kidnapped because he was cruel to Izuku. He just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, yet a lot of fans point to these moments as justification. "Hasn't he suffered enough?" Yes, he's suffered, but that suffering hasn't taught him anything. These moments are in no way a result of his actions and thus have no bearing on how he treats others in the future. I actually think this is a missed opportunity on Horikoshi's part, but I'll get into that during the training camp arc.
For now Bakugo is trapped and Izuku comes to his aid. Some people will point to this as evidence of
their friendship. For me it remains evidence of Izuku's true heroism. He won't leave anyone to suffer, no matter what his feelings about them are. Izuku was just told by All Might (his idol) that a hero must “always be willing to risk their life” and that's exactly what he's doing here. It speaks only to Izuku's love of others, of humanity...not necessarily his love of Bakugo as an individual.

And it sure as hell contrasts with Bakugo's own cruelty.
After the battle we get a glimpse of how warped the hero community is. Meaning, there doesn't seem to be any psychological aspect to their testing. Provided you have a powerful quirk—which Bakugo does—it doesn't matter what your personality is like. They want you on the team. They don’t know Bakugo, but they think he should be a hero based solely on the fact that he can make things explode. (Remind you of any other fire-wielding abuser?) We can read this as a strategy, a way of snatching up powerful individuals lest they fall in with the villains instead, but that seems pretty flimsy to me. There simply isn't any consideration for temperament. At the end of the day quirks are tools and tools don't have any morality attached to them. They're not inherently good or evil. It's all in how you use them. I don't care how powerful and alluring Bakugo's quirk is. He's using it to blow up personal possessions and threaten his classmates. He never should have even made it through U.A.'s front door.
Later, of course, Bakugo can't even say "thank you" to Izuku. This tells us that he's not a literal sociopath though in that he recognizes the needs to say *something*. Izuku's act was big enough to warrant Bakugo following him home, he understands that someone helping to save your life is a Big Thing, but all it results in is more insults. He feels threatened by anyone saving him—especially someone "lesser"—but that's precisely what heroes do. Any help is "mocking" and any kindness is "pity." This is someone who is incapable of failing in any way (a crucial step in the learning process) and, as we'll see later, incapable of working in a group. Both of these things are crucial to being a hero and those unwilling to work with others, be vulnerable around others, are putting everyone else in danger. In contrast, Izuku whole-heartedly embraces the help he's offered. He recognizes that it will only make him stronger.
We’ll see plenty of examples of this later on, but we’ve got one coming up in just a little bit:
Uraraka was kind to Izuku by keeping him from tripping and wishing him luck. Izuku is kind to Uraraka by going back to help her. She in turns saves him from falling to his death and even tries to offer some of her points. This rescue then leads to his acceptance into U.A. All Might says, “You’ve acquired your quirk and moved others with your actions.” Kindness breeds kindness. Heroism breeds heroism. Helping and being helped is at the very heart of being a hero. Bakugo hasn’t learned that yet and I honestly doubt he ever will.

But before that we segue into Izuku's training montage and are told that “The young heroes today only want fame and glory, but being a hero is all about volunteer work.” Actually, this doesn’t describe anyone in 1-A but Bakugo (and Mineta, but everyone actually agrees that he’s a walking turd).
SURE IS...

I GOTTA STOP FLINCHING INSTINCTIVELY...
We’re given a shot of Bakugo annoyed at the implication that Izuku is still going to apply to U.A. and on the day of the exam we learn that he hasn’t “tormented” Izuku since being kidnapped. But like I’ve mentioned above, this isn’t some twisted logic of, “Wow I told Izuku to kill himself and then I got kidnapped, maybe the universe is trying to tell me something!” Take note of the background conversation—“Isn’t that Bakugo? From the ‘sludge’ incident?”—and his hunched shoulders. Bakugo is only laying off Izuku because he’s withdrawn into himself. His shame at needing to be rescued is that strong. Yet not being “tormented” anymore apparently doesn’t stop him from spewing death threats.
Now here, this is the first moment where we see Izuku and Bakugo interacting with anything like respect. Or just reeeallly basic human decency. Bakugo asks a question, Izuku answers him. It’s that simple...and then we’re right back to the threats that make up Bakugo’s communication skills. I want to be clear that I’m in no way ignoring these moments, but they’re most assuredly small. They’re also realistic. In that, abusers aren’t angry, violent horrors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If they were they’d be a whole lot easier to spot. It’s precisely because they have these moments of humanity that they’re so difficult to deal with. I’ve seen a lot of fans pulls out these moments and go, “See? He’s secretly a great guy” but there’s no logic thinking that this Bakugo somehow outweighs the previous Bakugos we’ve seen. His actions here don’t erase what he’s done before. Not to be dramatic about it, but we see this kind of justification in much more important things than manga series, what I think of as the “But Hitler had a dog!” syndrome. We want evil people to be evil all the time. Irrevocably. It’s easy for us to think in black and white so when something throws a wrench into that simplicity—like the fact that a genocidal dictator kept and loved his pets—we start questioning if they were ever really that bad. They were. Don’t doubt it. And it’s important to keep that in mind when we talk about Bakugo. He’s perfectly capable of chatting with Izuku, chumming with Kirishima, whatever, while also being an abuser. Humans are messy like that.
But back to the plot. Take a moment to appreciate how, in the picture above, Bakugo has conditioned Izuku to flinch at any touch, even a kind one. It’s usually played for laughs, but I’m not laughing...
Meanwhile, Bakugo is characterized as a “natural-born warrior,” not necessarily a hero. There’s a distinct difference here. You don’t need a code or honor or ethics to do well in battle. All this label tells us is what we already know: Bakugo is very good at hurting other people. I’d never claim he’s not a fighter, but not all fighters are heroes.

We learn that Bakugo came in first place during the exam and thus begins another aspect of his characterization that drives me nuts. Others have pointed out how talented he supposedly is at everything. Physical attacks, strategy, written exams... it doesn’t matter, Bakugo is almost always coming out in the top three (with one notable exception). But we don’t see him training hard like Izuku, despite being the other primary protagonist. We know his quirk has a limit, but that only comes up when he’s fighting All Might, the world’s Number One Hero. Why does everyone praise Bakugo’s strategic thinking when it’s Izuku who has the best plans? Why is he automatically in the top for studies when he acts like he wouldn’t sit still for half an hour, let alone study all night? This isn’t to say that characters can’t be well rounded—Tsu is, Momo is—but rather, to me this is another example of Horikoshi telling rather than showing. Bakugo is a genius at everything because...he just is. (Note that in his character sheet we’re told he was originally designed as a “genius” and this obviously stuck). Bakugo is one of the good guys because, again... he just is, even when that conclusion doesn’t match up with the evidence.

More on that later. For now Izuku has his first day at U.A. (woo!) and we get an important moment of actual growth. For me Iida is an excellent example of how Bakugo should be acting. Izuku initially associates him with Bakugo (another bully) and pictures him like this,
Seconds later Iida introduces himself like this,
Not all apologies are an overt “I’m sorry.” Iida’s “I misjudged you!!” is an admission that he was wrong, that he treated Izuku poorly back at the exam, and an implication that from here on out he’ll try to do better. Indeed, they become close friends after this because Iida actually treats Izuku with respect. No matter how much Bakugo has *supposedly* improved, he has yet to apologize to Izuku in any way or overtly change how he interacts with him.

(As another side note, there’s some evidence in these early chapters that Bakugo has financial insecurities. He wants to be rich as well as the greatest hero, he dreams of leaving their “crappy” public school, and he’s even more antagonistic towards Iida when he learns that he’s from a private middle school. But these insecurities don’t appear to stem from anything? That is, when we meet Bakugo’s family they don’t appear to be poor. They don’t look like they’re struggling. They could still be, of course—and perhaps a fear of remaining poor is a part of Bakugo’s makeup—but thus far I’m not convinced. If this is the case then once again we have a contrast: Uraraka. She really DOES come from a poor family, but doesn’t use that struggle as an excuse to hurt others.)
GOOD QUESTION, IIDA.

We get a flashback to when Bakugo learned that Izuku got into U.A. and once again he uses physical violence as a means of expressing himself. As he pushes Izuku against the wall he says, “I was supposed to be the first and only!” referring to being the first in their middle school to attend U.A. Remember, it isn’t enough that Bakugo gets into the best school with the highest score in his class, others need to fail for him to be satisfied.

This is also the first time we get to see Izuku standing up for himself, but we don’t get to see Bakugo’s reaction to it.
I'M...

I'M GONNA BE HERE NO MATTER WHAT!
The flashback ends here and goddammit it’s important to know how Bakugo reacted! Did he respond with more violence? Hit Izuku? Burn him? Did he refuse to believe him? Walk away in shock? Yes, Bakugo thinks in the present about how surprised he is that Izuku stood up for himself, but that’s not the same thing as seeing his unguarded reaction in the moment. That would have told us a lot about how Bakugo responds to change. It’s really too bad we don’t see it.

It’s also worth pointing out that at no point does Bakugo question *how* Izuku got in. He thinks he’s quirkless, so as far as Bakugo knows Izuku got in *despite* not having a quirk. Isn’t that worth investigating? Doesn’t that make him question what other qualities Izuku might possess that U.A. deems worthwhile beyond raw power? Aizawa later says that it’s “completely irrational” that Izuku got in based on a powerful quirk that hurts him. He then gives a fond “This kid” when Izuku uses OFA strategically. To him intellect and planning are *far* more important than power, which makes sense given that, in a way, Aizawa is quirkless himself. All he does is level the playing field. But does Bakugo think about anything like this? Does he consider that the supposedly powerless kid must have a different kind of power at his disposal? No, he doesn’t. All Bakugo can see is the fact that Izuku messed up *his* plans.

Aizawa introduces himself. The kids start their test. We get our first glimpse of Kirishima and Bakugo’s relationship:
Now Kirishima is all about being “manly,” big grand gestures, and his own quirk is strong/powerful like Bakugo’s—it’s explicitly a fighting quirk, unlike many others in 1-A. So it doesn’t surprise me at all that he’s grinning at the kid who causes a massive explosion. He might even be the one who yells “Awesome!” a panel later. It makes sense that he’d think Bakugo is cool at the start, but why he likes him later on...that I can’t explain. Again, I’d love some actual explanations. Why does a kind, honorable kid want to hang out with the class’s bully? We later see Kirishima trying to defend his old classmates from bullies, so why the HELL does he support one now? (And no, he doesn’t need to know about Izuku and Bakugo’s past. Five minutes in Bakugo’s company is enough to clue him in.) Kirishima just seems to accept him as he is and as wonderful a sentiment as that is for Disney films, it doesn’t apply to assholes like Bakugo.

During the test we see more of how little Bakugo cares for those around him, making sure that his explosion knocks Izuku off balance (during a test on speed) to say nothing of the fact that he’s creating literal fire. In a more realistic narrative he’d be burning Izuku every time he pulls this shit.
And later, after Izuku learns to use OFA in just his finger, we get to see Bakugo’s utter shock at the fact that he has a quirk. Of course, Bakugo responds predictably with violence, attempting to attack Izuku in front of Aizawa and the rest of their classmates.
It’s here that we learn Izuku’s place in Bakugo’s mind: everyone is an “extra” and Izuku is a “pebble in his path.” Though not anymore. Again, Izuku’s status change is based entirely on a display of raw, untamed power—power pretty similar to Bakugo’s. I don’t think either of them realize it in the drama of “omfg Izuku has a quirk,” but Izuku actually beats Bakugo here. Bakugo got 705.2 meters on his throw. Izuku got 705.3. It’s only .1 difference, but Izuku has achieved more in just a few days, maybe a few weeks (whatever time it is between exam day when he got his quirk and now) than Bakugo has managed since he was four.

(Side note: given Izuku’s strategic side I’m surprised that he didn’t figure out Aizawa’s game like Momo did. I think it speaks mostly to how nervous he is. He’s just been given a quirk—the quirk of his idol—and is fighting against his own self-doubt, the doubt of his teacher, and his lifelong bully just waiting for him to get expelled. No wonder Izuku believed Aizawa’s lie.)
DEKU FINE!
We then see Izuku reclaiming his childhood “nickname.” Not because he feels the need go on the offensive against Bakugo just yet, but because the name now has a positive association: Uraraka. I’m a big supporter of word reclamation and I fully embrace it here. For the first time Izuku is surrounded by people (other than his mom) who support and care for him and this is a huge part of the recovery process. It’s difficult (if not impossible) to escape or fight against an abuser without a strong support system in place. Uraraka and Iida are Izuku’s new support and despite Iida’s exclamation of shock, both allow him to use the term “Deku” as he pleases.

We then move into the kids getting their costumes and competing in their first battle training. Izuku/Uraraka are given the roles of the heroes while Iida/Bakugo are the villains. Yes, yes, this doesn’t actually mean anything, especially with Iida as a villain too, but I still find it telling that Horikoshi keeps putting Bakugo in the roll of the bad guy. He goes out of his way to show how horrible he is, both on the surface of the narrative and on a symbolic level, yet we’re continually meant to believe that he’s good... just because he supposedly is. Bakugo is the friend of a friend who does nothing but backtalk your group and Horikoshi is the deluded one going, “No, no, they’re
actually great! They’re so nice. I just...can’t think of an example right now...but they’ve definitely been nice before! I swear!!”

Bakugo is looking forward to “blasting everyone away” in this training and yes, All Might does tell them to go all out, but also makes it clear that they shouldn’t take things too far. So what’s Bakugo’s plan here?

This is completely sickening to me. There are people who fully lose themselves in violence, who get into such a rage that they act without thinking and then regret the consequences later. I’m not saying that’s excusable, only that it happens. But this shows us that Bakugo has thought things through. He’s not losing himself in an adolescent temper tantrum, he’s deliberately choosing to hurt Izuku as much as he can without risking his chances at winning. He honest to god loves “messing him up.”

And Bakugo tries. That first explosion could have easily hurt Izuku. And the second...
All Might just told Bakugo to stop this, but of course he doesn’t listen. Bakugo won’t listen to
anyone. And I truly believe he’s willing to kill Izuku here. Think about how he’s framing things. “He won’t die if it’s not a direct hit.” Bakugo and the others have just been commenting on how good Izuku is at dodging and Bakugo hates him for it—it’s another sign of cowardice in his mind. So if Izuku manages to dodge and escape the brunt of the blast that proves he’s a scared weakling. He’s lesser than Bakugo again. Bakugo wins. If he stands his ground he could die and if he dies, Bakugo wins. He says a few panels later that he wants to beat Izuku at his “strongest,” which in his mind means a stand your ground, use your quirk, all out assault. I full-heartedly believe that Bakugo would have preferred that Izuku stay put and die in that moment, rather than having to deal with him growing into more than a “pebble.” Because remember, they’re not friends. We’ve seen NO evidence that Bakugo cares for Izuku in any way beyond his desire to have someone around to make him look good, and that’s not caring. He’s no longer even thinking about his own career as a hero right now (risking disqualification by ignoring All Might). All Bakugo wants is to bring Izuku to his knees and the first thing Izuku says when he tries?

“They gave you... that?”

The knowledge that the costume department gave Bakugo a tool that increases his explosions exponentially is horrifying to him, because Izuku knows exactly what kind of person Bakugo is and how he’ll use that power.

Horikoshi is well aware of the problem he’s now set up. How does he keep Bakugo completely off the rails without having every reader despise him? (Spoiler, you can’t.) So he acknowledges that this is, you know, bad, and then tries to provide justification for it anyway. But All Might’s “justification” is more than a little flimsy...
NO...

BAKUGO'S CRAZY. HE'S LOOKING TO KILL!!

SENSEI, SHOULDN'T YOU STOP HIM?
All Might counters Kirishima’s belief that Bakugo is out to kill Izuku with a simple “No” and his reasoning behind this is that Bakugo “seems calm.” Um, I personally wouldn’t call this calm and even if I did, that has nothing to do with whether Bakugo seriously wants to hurt the kid he’s already been abusing his whole life. You can be calm and still blow someone to kingdom come. The two are not mutually exclusive. Or hell, his response doesn’t even counter whether Bakugo might hurt Izuku accidentally in all this. This is just another example of how Horikoshi provides “explanations” for Bakugo’s behavior that don’t hold any water. We accept that this fight isn’t as awful as it appears because oh, the great All Might thinks it’s fine! But if you spend two seconds thinking about it, none of it makes sense.

And of course, we’ll see later that Bakugo isn’t punished at all for his actions. No, losing the fight isn’t punishment. Just because he has an apocalyptic reaction to losing a basic training exercise doesn’t mean that’s an appropriate consequence for trying to kill a student good god.

Also, as my friend tactfulhaumaturgy pointed out... what the HELL happens to One For All if Izuku dies at fourteen??

Bakugo could have doomed the whole world there I’m JUST SAYING.
Regardless, the desire to win outweighs actually killing Izuku and Bakugo agrees not to use a blast like that again. He’s still got his priorities though.

**Come on. You’re not dead yet!!**
Yes, we know in retrospect that Izuku had a final plan in place, but Kirishima is still right that “This is just torture now! He could’ve already ended it with the capture tape!” He might have been wrong about Izuku’s ability to secure a win, but he’s spot on in pointing out that Bakugo is having fun. If he just wanted to beat Izuku he’d have used the tape, but instead he wants to humiliate, pummel, and—as said—torture him. I really don’t care if they’re just starting out and still have lots to learn. I don’t care if they’re “just kids.” At fifteen education doesn’t include learning, “Oh man maybe I shouldn’t beat the shit out of people I consider weaker than me.” Bakugo needs therapy, a ton of it, and I hope he improves... but that improvement needs to happen before he enters a course on heroism and is given all the responsibilities that come with that.
Back on their “friendship” again. We get a flashback during all this that I think is pretty important considering that it invalidates one of the most common justifications I see for Bakugo’s behavior: “It’s not his fault he’s like this. Everyone told him he was the best because of his quirk. He grew up being told he’s better.” But take a look at the timeline here:
You such a loser?

Aha ha ha.

Makes sense.

You could be a hero with a flashy quirk like that, Katsuki!

So cool.

Bom
Bakugo was an asshole well before he got his quirk. Right from the start of their relationship he was using power (in this case knowledge) against others, turning his understanding of kanji into an insult against Izuku that will literally follow him for the rest of his life. He sets up situations specifically meant to embarrass Izuku: “How about you, Deku?!?” And honestly? The teacher’s comment here is pretty innocuous. She says it’s “another” impressive quirk, implying that she’s labeled others in their class as impressive too, probably all of them because they’re kids and that’s what you DO with preschoolers. She says he can be a hero, but what instructor isn’t going to tell the 4yo, All Might obsessed child that he can be a hero? There’s no blatant favoritism here. Bakugo twists her words. He’s primed to think he’s the best because he already thinks it. He always has. He just needed one person in authority giving him a generic compliment to bring it to the surface. All the fans who claim that his quirk turned him bad? He was already bad. He’s been bad since he could walk and talk. Bakugo’s quirk just made him worse.
We’re not sure where exactly in the timeline it falls, but whether it’s pre or post quirk, we get another example of how Bakugo can’t stand cooperation, even as a toddler. Izuku offering a hand up? It can only be met with fury.
In the present Iida asks him “not to charge straight at Midoriya” and Bakugo does exactly that. Because why would he listen to his partner? Later his huge explosion startles Iida so badly that Uraraka has a chance at the bomb. If not for Iida’s speed, Bakugo’s lack of communication would have lost them the fight then and there. His unwillingness to engage in teamwork isn’t just a HUGE stumbling block for a hero, it later becomes a serious threat to his peers when the League starts going after them. Bakugo has joined a school that’s only looking for the best, tossed in with a teacher that’s notorious for expelling everyone, dropped into a training exercise that’s all about teamwork, tries to kill another students after he’s told to back off... and he’s not expelled for all this? Or suspended? Or even just lectured a bit?? This is purely for plot. In the same way that Mineta isn’t expelled because he’s the (sexist) comic relief. Within the logic of the story-world Bakugo wouldn’t have lasted his second day. By all ethics and sense he should not be in U.A.

This is also the first time we get a glimpse into Izuku’s thoughts on Bakugo outside of his narration and boy, are they telling.
These are the words of a victim: severely downplaying the abuse (he’s a “jerk”), immediately sidestepping that as a problem (“but he’s amazing”), focusing on aspects outside of what the person can control (“his strength... his quirk”), as well as generic qualities that literally everyone in this school has (“his goals...his confidence...”), and ending with a severely inaccurate view of his own worth, “He’s stronger than me in every way.” Yes, Bakugo is strong and strategic, we see that in how he uses his blasts to get behind Izuku, but it’s Izuku’s strategy that wins. He doesn’t see that his rescue points were the more rare and worthwhile way of making it into the school, or that he beat Bakugo at
the softball toss, or that he’s much better at strategy than he is. Of course he can’t. He’s been under Bakugo’s thumb since the beginning. But we can see it. And though he’s only just starting, we know that eventually Izuku will see it too.
He won’t be Bakugo’s punching bag for forever. The wording implies that he still kinda is, for the simple reason that you don’t recover from a decade of abuse that spans 3/4ths of your life within a matter of weeks, but Izuku knows that someday he’ll prove his worth. Not to Bakugo, but to himself. Right now he still believes this...
...and we’re supposed to believe it too. That Bakugo is “awesome” despite all evidence to the contrary. Sorry, Horikoshi. I actually need to see that for myself. Putting those words in the mouth of our protagonist doesn’t automatically make them true.
In the end when Izuku beats him we get a close up on Bakugo. It’s pretty much the first emotion we’ve seen him express besides smugness and rage. He’s *devastated*.

And he literally can’t take it. Unlike the hero points or the softball toss, this is objective evidence that (in one way, at one time) Izuku is better than him. We’re given imagery of Bakugo’s psyche breaking apart at the prospect.
Side note: this fight also showcases Bakugo’s belief that Izuku has been hiding his quirk from him this whole time. That he kept the secret to deliberately mock him. I’ll give him this one, for the simple reason that this does seem the most logical explanation from his perspective, especially if no one EVER develops quirks past age four. Still, it reads as incredibly ego-centric. This kid dealt with your bullying for years JUST so he could make you feel embarrassed during your first lesson at U.A.? Right, right. The whole world is out to get you, Bakugo, because you’re obviously at its
center. His egotism is so severe that when Izuku gives him an explanation he refuses to believe it. Doesn’t even consider it. This is obviously just another way for Izuku to embarrass him.
I GON'T QUITE FEEL SOMETHING.
In the aftermath of the battle All Might thinks to himself that sometimes the most conceited people are harboring the most fragile egos and I completely agree. Doesn’t change anything though. Bakugo secretly feels insecure? Join the fucking club. We can theorize about a lot of things to explain his behavior, but none of those excuse it. Like damn, I’ve been a self-conscious ball of anxiety since I came out of the womb and I still know it’s not okay to treat people like this. Bakugo knows it too and he still chooses this behavior time and time again.

It’s pretty impactful here that we see evidence of Bakugo crying because tears never fail to persuade a fanbase. We love our angsty faves (our hot angsty faves—please imagine how differently Bakugo would be received if he wasn’t conventionally attractive) and the second they shed a manly tear we’re falling over ourselves to give them a hug. I get it. I am that fan for a lot of characters, but Bakugo just hits too close to home for me. I’m all for the fans going, “Yeah he’s awful but I love him anyway.” Cool, friend. You do you. I’m glad you’re enjoying his arcs! But claiming “See? He’s secretly sad!” doesn’t pardon his actions...and a lot of fans seem to think it does.
BAKUGO.

GROW UP ALREADY.

STOP WASTING YOUR TALENT.
Another justification I see a lot—both in terms of his middle school years and at U.A.—is that none of the teachers punish him for his actions, so how is he supposed to learn? I mean, ignoring the fact that again, he needs therapy more than basic right vs. wrong lectures, there seems to be some serious miscommunication going on between Bakugo and his instructors. Aizawa tells him to “grow up already,” but then follows that up with “stop wasting your talent,” which allows Bakugo to view the reprimand in terms of the promise he just made to himself. AKA he’s going to be better than Izuku, the whole class, All Might too—he’s going to be better than everyone. Aizawa seems to be referencing what we’re all thinking: Quit being such a dick and acting like a two-year-old throwing a temper tantrum, but all Bakugo hears is, “Get stronger.”

We see that he wants to be class president which is HILARIOUS (good god no) because that’s another status symbol, and we get to see Izuku getting in trouble for telling Bakugo about his quirk. Sure, All Might isn’t actually mad, but it’s another example of Izuku getting hurt in his quest to
befriend/redeem/prove that Bakugo is really “awesome” deep down inside.

We segue into their next bout of training and I’ve noticed that people also love to point to this bus scene, claiming that Bakugo is the victim of U.A. See? Everyone is bullying him now.
BUT BAKUGO'S SO UNHINGED. HE'D NEVER BE POPULAR.
Except that’s not bullying. Not by a long shot, despite what (again) we’re supposed to believe simply because it’s coming out of Izuku’s mouth—or in this case his thoughts. Bullying is the act of oppressing someone else, usually in response to things they can’t control. Like not having a quirk. Or being too small to “play at being a hero.” Here 1-A is just pointing out the truth. Bakugo is an asshole. The fact that I’ve seen fans so riled up over Tsu and the others acknowledging how cruel he is says a lot about how we view bullies and their victims. Ever dealt with a bully before? Ever expressed how much you hate them to your friends or family and got an appalled “Now who’s being mean!” lecture in response, instead of them dealing with the fact that you’re the one being bullied in the first place? Yeah. That’s this.

So Bakugo now supposedly has our sympathy because he’s no longer surrounded by middle schoolers who follow his every lead and instead has to deal with people actually calling him out on
his shit. Poor baby. They make it to USJ and I’m so sad we don’t get to see their lesson because if anyone needs to learn from Thirteen, it’s Bakugo.

YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO UTILIZE YOUR QUIRKS TO SAVE LIVES.

I HOPE YOU LEAVE HERE TODAY WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT YOU’RE MEANT TO HELP PEOPLE.
Hero quirks should be used to save lives. Your powers are not meant to inflict harm. Help people. Someone give Thirteen a medal because thank you.

We know how things go down though. The villains arrive, Warp Gate blocks their path, and instead of staying put like Aizawa told them to, Bakugo immediately attacks, thus putting everyone around him in even more danger.
Yes, Kirishima attacks too, but the difference between him and Bakugo is that he admits his mistake and tries to learn from it. (To say nothing of the fact that later we learn one of Kirishima’s biggest shortcomings is his inability to step in when someone needs him to. Jumping the gun here isn’t good, but for him specifically it’s a sign of growth.)
He immediately gets that they shouldn’t have “rushed ahead like that.” If they hadn’t Thirteen might have been able to do something (remember, Thirteen can’t risk using their quirk on any of the students. By getting between them and Warp Gate, Bakugo and Kirishima effectively kept Thirteen from attacking.) A little while later we also see that others have learned from that mistake too. Izuku isn’t “that stupid.” He’s not going to attack without a plan. He’s not going to attack at all unless it’s absolutely necessary.
The most frustrating part is that the narrative rewards Bakugo for his impulsivity. By attacking Warp Gate he hears “that was close” and comes to the conclusion that he must have a body, thus allowing him to pin him later on when All Might needs help. Yes, it’s great that Bakugo eventually turns his mistake into an advantage, but it doesn’t erase the original problem. He didn’t listen to his superiors. Despite not having a plan and despite Kirishima pointing out that their classmates will need help (not all of them have quirks as suited to battle as theirs are), Bakugo brushes him off. For him it’s better to take out one of the strongest villains. The rest of his peers can just fend from themselves. It really doesn’t matter if they might be in danger.
He’s not a hero. He’s just a fighter.
And Kirishima is convinced by all this for reasons I can’t explain. Bakugo shows the slightest bit of thinking (“[Warp Gate] is how the punks are getting around”) and suddenly the fact that they don’t have a plan, regular attacks don’t seem to work (sorry, Bakugo, you claiming “It’s not like I don’t have a way to beat him!” doesn’t sound very persuasive. It just sounds like your ego again), they were told to hang back, and their friends might be in danger... none of that matters anymore. Like so much of Bakugo’s characterization, the reasons why Kirishima agrees with him and likes him boils down to “because he just does.”
Please also note that Bakugo’s reason for fighting Warp Gate isn’t to keep him from, say, warping in more villains. Or kidnapping their friends. Or really anything we’d deem dangerous. He’s 100% focused on Warp Gate because then they’ll have nowhere to run. Izuku, Tsu, and Mineta were (rightfully) exuberant when they thought the villains were leaving because that would mean everyone is safe. But Bakugo doesn’t care about keeping people safe, he just wants to fight. He wants to capture them and beat them and show them who’s boss. In his mind it doesn’t matter how much danger it puts everyone else in—the villains need to stick around so he can punch them. Winning by retreat isn’t an option.

I said it at the beginning and I’ll say it again: Bakugo lacks empathy for those around him.

Side note: We also see here another example of Izuku trying desperately to imitate Bakugo because of his “awesomeness.” Honey. Honey no. You don’t need to be like this jerk. Scream ‘go to hell’ if it helps build up your courage, but don’t emulate anything else.
LEAP

AHHHH!

JUST LIKE KACCHAN, THEN...!!!
Additional side note: Bakugo might be horrible, but I’ll admit he’s definitely not an outright liar. He could have easily let Izuku think he dodged that nomu attack, but strength means nothing to him unless it’s real.
With their first battle over we return to regularly scheduled classes and are reminded of the noble intentions most people have for becoming a hero.
AND DAD CAN HAVE EASIER LIVES.
1-B arrives (yay!) to “check out the competition” and Bakugo reveals another serious flaw in his thinking. It’s not just that he’s antisocial, he goes out of his way to make everyone else his enemy.
CAN WE PLEASE NOT RESORT TO CALLING THOSE WE DON'T EVEN KNOW "CANNON FODDER"?

WHOA WHOA WHOA

HUH ?!

ARE ALL THE KIDS IN THE HERO COURSE LIKE THIS ONE?
Shinso makes an excellent point here. As we’ll see later on, a hero’s reputation is paramount. It determines the agencies they’re offered invitations to, whether schools like U.A. stay up and running, if mothers are willing to send their sons off to the dorms... and 1-A is a group now. Bakugo represents a whole and he’s painting everyone in the first year hero course as rude, egotistical, and unnecessarily hostile with this introduction. His actions (as always) are having a negative impact on those around him. The fact that the teachers are willing to put a kid like this in a position of power, the most influential career on Earth, is utterly sickening.

Here we go again. Bakugo hasn’t said anything to undermine or discredit his peers’ accusations that he’s being too hostile. He just says something unrelated but cool sounding—“Why should I care? I’m heading for the top”—and the others, particularly Kirishima, fall all over themselves to point out how awesome he seems now. This is why I don’t buy the Kirishima/Bakugo friendship. Kirishima constantly takes issue with Bakugo’s behavior and then gets sidetracked by him acting like the cool, older, “manly” brother. He doesn’t like him. He likes this very, VERY simplified idea of him. Notice that they never actually talk. Kirishima just responds to things that Bakugo says. When have they chatted about school stuff? Shared their favorite movies? Hung out on the weekends? Interacted in any way beyond ‘guess we have to hold a conversation if we want to get out of USJ alive’? There’s absolutely nothing here to suggest that Bakugo doesn’t view Kirishima as more “cannon fodder.”

Meanwhile, Kaminari (the “stupid” one) is the only guy talking any sense and we know by now that we’re not supposed to listen to him.
Why should you care, Bakugo? Why bother to be even remotely polite to others? Because being a hero is being a servant of the people. I’ll dive into this when we hit All Might’s fight with AFO, but we’ll see there that the peoples’ support has a literal, necessary effect on the power of a hero. All Might only wins that fight because of his friends and his fans. Bakugo is under the impression that he can not only do everything on his own, but that he can do it with the whole world as his enemy.

It’s also worth pointing out that in the same chapter we have another character engaging in similar thinking: Todoroki. Unlike Bakugo he’s actually been abused and tends to view people as enemies partly out of self-defense, partly because that’s what Enji taught him—everyone is your competition (fuck that guy). Yet within just a few chapters Todoroki will listen to Izuku, start to accept all of himself, and ultimately become one of his closest friends. Todoroki achieves in a few weeks what Bakugo hasn’t managed in 14 years because he’s not a complete and utter asshole.

Todoroki is able to see Izuku’s potential and moves from viewing him as an enemy to his closest ally instead. Bakugo is still convinced he’s the best thing since sliced bread.
Remember what I just said about Bakugo’s actions reflecting a group and how damaging it is when he acts this way? Yeah,
Rather than reciting the athlete’s oath (what I assume is a gesture of solidarity towards his fellow competitors), Bakugo gives an unnecessary challenge on live TV. Including a rude gesture and “stepping-stones” replacing his favorite “extras” descriptor. Please note Kirishima’s shocked face—again. He’s either horrified by Bakugo or shaking with excitement over one of his one-liners, but that’s it. They don’t actually have a relationship.

And then Izuku gives us this crap about how he’s not smiling so he’s somehow a totally different Bakugo??
C’mon. Please. The lack of logic in their characterizations is just frustrating at this point and we’re not even halfway through what’s published!

(This is... so long, and I’m so very sorry. But goddamnit if I’m writing this I’m going ALL THE WAY)

So the festival gets underway and we come across what's easily my favorite moment in the series so far: Izuku proving that intelligence and creativity are as powerful as any quirk. Look at him taking first place with strategy alone!
He's humble about it though.

At times it's often to the point of self-deprecation, but I still appreciate this trait in a protagonist. It's not just a better way to live your life, it's *smarter* too. Izuku acknowledges that, yes, there's always an element of luck to his fights and beyond luck he always has the assistance of someone else, in one manner or another.
This allows Izuku to keep planning ahead and make the most of a situation without convincing himself that his plan will *obviously* work—and then panicking when it doesn't. His humility makes him an all around stronger fighter, something Bakugo truly fails to understand. With Izuku doing well in school now, he assumes that he's "pretty full of [himself]." Because why wouldn't he be? *Bakugo* is always full of himself and his worldview is the only one that dominates.
GETTING PRETTY OF YOUR HUH, Y BASTARD
AGAIN... DAMMIT!! THAT LITTLE ...!!!
We're treated to another close up on how incapable Bakugo is at accepting any kind of loss, especially when it comes from Izuku.
We learn that the next event is the cavalry battle, that Izuku has 10 million points to his name, and interestingly this moment of everyone becoming his "enemy" is juxtaposed with his middle school class bullying him.

Izuku immediately points out though that "the eyes on me are different than before." Unlike Bakugo, he's capable of treating his peers as challengers during the competition while still maintaining friendships at all other times. They're not really his enemies. These people aren't looking down on him like Bakugo does. Iida, Todoroki, and later Uraraka all challenge Izuku with the hope that competition will benefit all of them. Bakugo just wants to be the last guy standing.
NOT SURPRISED HE'S POPULAR THOUGH, GIVEN HOW ALL-PURPOSE HIS QUIRK IS.

EVEN WITH A PERSONALITY LIKE THAT, HE TOOK THIRD. THAT'S 200 POINTS...

FORGET CLASS B- HE'S TOO SELF-ABSORBED TO EVEN NOTICE US!!
THE NAME'S KIRISHIMA! REMEMBER IT!!

AH, WEIRD-HAIR.

And my hair's not much spikier than yours!!
IT'S MINA. MINA ASHIDO!

RACCOON EYES! MELT A PATH FOR US WITH THAT LIQUID!
Case in point, Bakugo hasn’t bothered to learn ANYTHING about his classmates. Or hell, he hasn’t even bothered to remember the things he’s seen, despite the fact that he’s gotten to witness everyone’s quirks all during their exam, first day of testing, and the fight at USJ. Later we see that he hasn’t bothered to learn anyone’s name either and doesn’t acknowledge his peers’ corrections. People exist only as tools for Bakugo to use to further his own gain. Note that he only seriously listens to Kirishima when he brings up "taking Midoriya down." That’s what convinces him to join up, not
some deep friendship between them.

Once again, compare this with Izuku.

RIGHT NOW, I’M ALL THEIR HOPES.
I'M... HOPES!!

I'M CARRY!!
He revs himself up knowing that "all the hopes" of his friends rest on his ability to stay in the competition—and his determination is so intimidating that it scares Todoroki into instinctively using his fire. Bakugo is also driven, absolutely no doubt about it, but that drive stems only from an unhealthy need to be the best. Izuku apologizes to his team when he thinks they've lost. He recognizes that it's not all about him...which seems to be a pretty important mindset for a hero.

All Might pointed out that everyone wants to team up with Bakugo because he has a powerful, all-purpose quirk, but notice that the strategists of 1-A (Izuku, Momo, Todoroki, Iida, Tokoyami, etc.) don't go anywhere near him. They recognize that a cavalry battle is all about working together, not just having powerful quirks or even a good combinations of quirks; that's useless unless the team is working in synch. And as we quickly see, Bakugo once again nearly loses everything due to his impulsivity and unwillingness to communicate with others.
He doesn't *know* if they're allowed to leave the group when he jumps. Even HIZASHI doesn't know and he's the announcer! If there hadn't been this technicality (which is real convenient plot-wise) then congratulations, Bakugo. You just came in last place and dragged the rest of your team down with you. Even after knowing this is allowed he continues to jump without warning, risking that Sero might not catch him this time—and of course, Sero would no doubt be blamed for this. It's bad enough during a game, but this is the kind of "my way or the highway" behavior that's gonna get your allies killed during a battle.
Yet again this behavior is overlooked. Kirishima justifies it because they got points and get to move on, so it's all good now, right? Provided that there isn't a consequence for their actions—and Horikoshi ensures that rarely is—then the action itself is never actually challenged.

Bakugo is so focused on reckless tactics and, more importantly, Izuku, that he doesn’t bother to pay attention to anyone else around him. Remember, everyone else is just an “extra.” They’re not worth his notice...which results in his band getting stollen. Yes, Bakugo managed to get his points back through some strategy of his own, but this never would have happened if he bothered to view people as people—as capable of challenging him. As we saw when Bakugo chose not to use the capture tape against Izuku, he either views people as “pebbles” beneath his notice or, when they become threats, they need to be “murdered” at his hands. Remember that winning for Bakugo isn’t just him coming out on top, it’s everyone else resting beneath his boot. Eliminating everyone else is his “first to end all firsts.”
With the cavalry battle over Todoroki has his conversation with Izuku (All Might’s illegitimate child *oh my god*) and we’re reminded that Izuku is primed to fear anyone deemed “intimidating” because of Bakugo’s abuse. Todoroki possesses a “colder intimidation” that’s “nothing like Kacchan,” showing us that every interaction boils down to whether the person is or is not scary like the bully who has defined much of Izuku’s life. But of course, Todoroki soon proves that he’s just mean *looking*, not actually cruel. In fact, the festival gives us a whole range of kids who prove themselves better than Bakugo by either showing their true colors or making mistakes and then *apologizing* for them.

For example, the kids all go back to being friends once the battle is over and have healthy debates about what they deem “fair.” These are respectful conversations that take their cues from everyones’ emotions (i.e. Uraraka isn’t actually upset here, so Iida can comfortably tease her about his win).
We know that Todoroki attacks Sero out of turn because he just had a fight with Endeavor. He at least has a REASON for lashing out (unlike Bakugo) but even then recognizes that he “overdid it” and immediately moves to thaw Sero out, apologizing as he does.
Yes, Hatsume manipulates Iida into helping her, but that doesn’t actually harm him in any way. She let’s him win the fight and apologizes for “using you like that.”
And Shinso remains an excellent example of what Bakugo SHOULD be. He looks scary, his quirk is super powerful, everyone thinks he should be a villain...but it’s clear he’s undermining those assumptions at every turn. He doesn’t rage at Izuku when he wins; they have a conversation about wanting to be heroes and he teases Izuku with his quirk. Once that’s done he’s greeted by his friends cheering him on and trying to comfort him. We’re shown how a powerful, scary looking guy can actually be a man of the people.
But back to Todoroki. We see that Bakugo is lurking in the shadows, eavesdropping on a talk that’s obviously private, but what he thinks of it isn’t revealed to us. Is he starting to reconsider Izuku’s claim that someone gave him his quirk? Or is he pissed that Izuku and Todoroki are challenging each other—entirely ignoring him as the (supposed) greatest threat? Given his track record, I’m inclined to believe the latter.
While this is going on we also see a parallel conversation between All Might and Endeavor. Real talk, Endeavor is exactly what Bakugo will become if no one steps in. We get a preview of his future and it’s pretty damn horrible. Having a powerful quirk gives Bakugo a free pass to violently attack his classmate? Well being the #2 hero gives Endeavor a free pass to set up quirk marriages, emotionally torture his wife, and outright abuse his son. No, the public at large doesn’t know about this, but there are plenty within the hero community who know or at least suspect. They’re not doing anything because again, power trumps temperament. And we see here that Endeavor, like Bakugo, doesn’t care about the people at all. All Might specifically asks for help to “train the next generation”—it’s not even about him, he’s admitting that he’s ‘weaker’ here and in need of expertise—and Endeavor still refuses. “You think I’d tell you anything?” Holy shit.
...for some tips about training the next generation.

...?

You think I'd tell you anything?
This is Izuku and Bakugo years from now, with Izuku asking Bakugo to be a hero and Bakugo refusing. And yes, a large theme of BNHA is how the next generation is going to be stronger and better than the previous one, but so far Bakugo isn’t heading in any new directions. What we see later? With Bakugo’s “growth” and Endeavor’s “redemption”? It’s flimsy as hell.

We move into the one-on-one battles and again we have 1-A helping one another when they can. Bakugo is the odd one out in that regard.
We get a glimpse of how friendships can be presented as a “weakness,” in that Shinso uses Izuku’s respect for Ojiro to his advantage. Yes, Izuku is hot-headed at times, but at least it’s coming from a place of love. Better to learn how to temper your loyalty to others during battle rather than being taught, oh yeah, maybe you should give a crap about other people once in a while.
We’re also reminded that Bakugo is not just generically intimidating like Todoroki. Many of his classmates are outright scared of him—and not in a humorous way. Uraraka, for all her determination to win, is really uneasy about going up against Bakugo and given what he did to Izuku during their first fight, I can’t blame her. Unlike Todoroki and Shinso, Bakugo has already shown that his scary exterior matches a violent personality.
I'M REALLY SCARED.

YEAH...
I’ve also seen a lot of people point to this fight as an example of how Bakugo *does* treat others with respect. He never underestimated Uraraka! Yay! What a guy! But let’s take a moment to think about the context here, namely that there’s a distinct culture of sexism at work:
Iida (who I consider to be a fantastic and upstanding person who sees Uraraka as his equal) is nevertheless appalled at the idea that Bakugo would fight a girl full out. His outdated chivalry isn’t something to admire here. So when Bakugo DOES give it his all suddenly it looks like he’s this great and fantastic guy. But not being sexist is a 
*damn low bar*. Fighting someone ‘even though’ they’re a girl isn’t exactly praise worthy. Yes, Bakugo views pretty much everyone as an “extra,” but this is a one-on-one fight. He CAN’T ignore her and that’s the only reason he’s giving Uraraka the time of day. By necessity she’s moved from being an extra to someone he needs to make sure he murders... so he does. He gives it his all.
The only reason people point to this line as evidence of his growth is because everyone else is characterizing Uraraka as a “frail girl.” So yeah, kudos to Bakugo for not getting wrapped up in that explicit sexism, but that doesn’t make him someone worthy of exuberant praise. He has to fight her, so he’s going to fight her. It’s that simple.
Bakugo doesn’t know Uraraka’s name either. He’s not positive about her quirk. He makes it clear that he’ll win the fight only by beating her down (as we see) rather than knocking her out of the ring or accepting her surrender—“crying uncle later won’t cut it.” And remember the stuff earlier about how Bakugo never retreats? Yeah, same thing here. “He won’t dodge” even though logically you want to keep moving while fighting a person whose quirk requires contact. Since Bakugo’s pride keeps him from moving around the ring, his only option is to blast Uraraka as hard as he can to keep her away. In his mind hurting her is the best plan. The audience members aren’t correct that it’s a “harsh” thing to do against a girl, but they are correct that it’s a harsh thing to do to a peer during what’s effectively a game. He could have used his quirk to maneuver her to the edge. Or blast
himself behind her (like he did with Izuku) and pin Uraraka, then throw her from the ring. Use the smoke and rubble to his own advantage... the point is Bakugo has options here, but once again he says no to that capture tape. He’d rather just “kill” everyone he faces.
Aizawa reads Bakugo’s choices as “caution that shows he recognizes her as a worthy opponent,” but the audience member who speaks out is right that he could be actively trying to win (pushing Uraraka out of the ring) rather than just blasting her again and again. If we didn’t know Bakugo so well at this point it might read as caution that keeps him where he is, but we know otherwise now. Since when is Bakugo cautious? The issue isn’t whether Bakugo is stronger than Uraraka and toying with her (he’s not, because strength comes in many forms), but rather what choices he’s making and whether he knows that those choices have a negative impact on those around him. Izuku’s right that “he won’t dodge” because he has a warped view of cowardice. Bakugo himself said he won’t accept her surrender. So all that’s left is to blast her repeatedly. Does Uraraka’s ability to take this beating demonstrate her own strength and drive? Absolutely, but it also shows Bakugo’s willingness to hurt others when it’s really not necessary. If anything, given how dangerous his quirk is, it says a lot about Bakugo that in ten years he hasn’t developed ways of fighting beyond literally blowing people up.

Ultimately, Aizawa’s commentary is directed at the reader. You, yes you there! You think Bakugo is horrible? Think again! Him blasting Uraraka endlessly isn’t a mean thing, it’s a well thought out strategy! Even the teacher thinks it’s great and you’re the stupid audience member ragging on him.
for no reason! This message is shoe-horned in though. It doesn’t match up with the evidence or the characterization. Sorry, Aizawa. I love you, but not when you’re just acting as a mouthpiece for Horikoshi.

IF YOU’RE
SO MUCH
STRONGER
THAN HER,
JUST THROW
HER OUT OF
THE RING AND
FINISH IT!!
And of course, Bakugo’s need to stand his ground is what allows Uraraka to set up her trap and I 110% hate that it doesn’t work. From an in-world and a thematic point of view it SHOULD work. Uraraka has the actual strategy here, she implements it, and losing would have taught Bakugo that maybe he should be re-thinking some of his world views. But no, he wins. And you know why?
Because he’s overpowered. He’s good at everything. Giant blast we’ve never seen before? No problem!* Izuku won the first leg of the competition with his ingenuity (Bakugo still in the top three), he came in second in the cavalry battle despite his obsession with Izuku supposedly undermining him (having his points stollen didn’t amount to anything in the end), and now he manages to win despite getting out-smarted and making terrible battle choices. With the exception of the license exam, his actions never have consequences. He always pulls through and thus never truly learns from his mistakes—because the narrative keeps refusing to treat them as mistakes.

*(And yes, I’m well aware that Todoroki is incredibly powerful and also releases a giant blast of ice we’ve never seen before, complete with similar shocked reactions from the audience. The difference is that Todoroki has limitations tied to his quirks due to his relationship with Endeavor and we see them having an impact on his fight with Izuku (shivering, slowing down). Kirishima’s weak point is what allows Bakugo to win their match and he’s just as strong fighting Tokoyami with his “stun grenade” against Dark Shadow. Bakugo points out that he also has limitations...but they don’t impact his performance at all. While everyone else is hitting their limit, he just keeps going and going until he finally passes out. But by then all the battles are over.
THAT'S WHY I THOUGHT UP THOSE MODS FOR MY COSTUME...

...THAT'LL LET ME FIRE OFF MORE EXPLOSIONS THAN I CAN USUALLY HANDLE...
No one ever expected Sero to beat Todoroki, but we want Uraraka to beat Bakugo. Todoroki’s ice blast is an unexpectedly dramatic way of winning a fight we already knew was his. Bakugo’s blast is a plot device used to keep him on top and away from any real consequences.)

The closest we get to anything resembling growth here is Bakugo’s comment that he knew there’d be a plan and his admission that his fight with Uraraka was a “close one.” He specifically says though that Uraraka had a plan because she’d been hanging out so much with Izuku, the one person who Bakugo no longer views as a “pebble.” He won’t even attribute her plan to her. Izuku has to tell him straight out that no, that was all Uraraka, and Bakugo looks pissed about it rather than impressed. Because everyone is just an annoyance to him and when they get stronger? Then they’re “trouble.” There’s never any pride in his peers’ accomplishments, just more fury that they’d dare to stand in his path. So yeah, maybe there’s improvement? But holy god is it small.
The fight ends with Uraraka unable to move, just like Bakugo intended. She calls out to her dad because literally everyone else has a person they want to fight for except for this kid.
(We get a similar shot of Iida later.)
Side note: we get plenty of instances in this fight/the festival where Bakugo says people need to “die” or “she’s not dead yet” or he’s going to “murder” someone. I don’t care if that’s just supposed to be an exaggerated quirk (ha) of his that’s used for plaque as well as people.
It makes me super uncomfortable for a kid to be thinking that way about his peers. Fans can romanticize it all they want, but that’s the sort of behavior that has teachers and parents keeping an eye out for future school shooters. This kind of stuff doesn’t make Bakugo “cool” or “edgy” or “secretly misunderstood.” It makes Bakugo an asshole.

We see 1-A “bullying” Bakugo some more. AKA just pointing out the truth in a manner that’s obviously meant as teasing.Yep. Sero and Tsu’s actions here are entirely the same as to Bakugo’s towards Izuku.
And we see Kirishima win his fight against Tetsutetsu. I’m sorry, but there’s more legitimate friendship in these TWO PANELS than there is in the entirety of the Bakugo/Kirishima interactions.
TCH!

WE NOW HAVE OUR FULL LINEUP FOR THE SECOND ROUND!

WITH THAT SAID...
We gear up for the final battle of Bakugo vs. Todoroki. Bakugo wanders into the wrong room and reminds the reader that everything has to be about him. Todoroki doesn’t want to talk? Too damn bad. How *dare* he ignore Bakugo while sitting in what’s supposed to be a private room to prep in, the one Bakugo just barged into uninvited.
So he responds with violence.
With a side of more violence when Todoroki reminds him of his “friendship” with Izuku (implying that Todoroki doesn’t know about how Bakugo used to treat him. I refuse to believe that an abuse survivor would think they were really friends if he knew the whole truth). The mere mention of Izuku is enough to have Bakugo flipping a table and he makes it explicitly clear that he doesn’t care about Todoroki’s or anyone else’s “feelings.”
YOU LOOKED LIKE YOU NEEDED SAVING.
But those feelings are what hold Todoroki back. He’s still not sure how he feels about his flames, so he’s not sure if he wants to continue to use them in battle. Bakugo refuses to understand that, so Todoroki only using his ice is seen as a personal attack. When everything is about you, the only explanation is that your opponent is trying to embarrass you, personally.
I'm taking the first to end all.
When Todoroki refuses to use all of his quirk (for *personal reasons*), he denies Bakugo the ability to fully crush everyone—that “first to end all firsts.” He’s incapable of accepting any win unless it’s a win where he beats someone until they can’t move (Uraraka), breaks open their skin (Kirishima), or holds them down while threatening them with more explosions and grinning maniacally (Tokoyami). Bakugo literally won’t accept it.
I agree wholeheartedly, Tokoyami.

With the festival over we see the kids picking out their hero names. Yes, it’s partly played for laughs, but doesn’t anyone else have a problem with the fact that Bakugo wants to name himself King Explosion Murder? Hero names are another aspect of their reputation, one of the most important, and here he is choosing something that’s not only arrogant (king) but not in any way reassuring to the people. We don’t even get to learn what his name is because he’s incapable of thinking up something appropriate!
NO GOOD.
TRY AGAIN.
We see Izuku fully reclaiming his insult, a fitting move for someone who wants to beat the odds with a smile on his face. Bakugo doesn’t look too pleased that Izuku is stepping out of his shadow and twisting a once hurtful word into something positive; a word that people will associate with heroism. He doesn’t even reference Bakugo in his explanation beyond the general admission that he always hated the name. All the focus is on Uraraka and how she changed the meaning.
HUH? YOU SURE ABOUT THAT, MIDORIYA?!

I ALWAYS HATED IT.
I'm no longer the useless Deku who can't do anything right...

...It made me happy.
Later Bakugo is supposedly annoyed at his classmates because they’re “so noisy” but really, we’re gonna ignore that the one time Bakugo (Mr. Shouts Constantly) has a problem with noise is when everyone is praising Izuku’s work ethic?
At least he doesn’t blow anything up this time.

With hero names chosen the next big piece of info is that over 3,000 pros want to draft Bakugo for his internship, which tells me that they’re all idiots who are more concerned with raw power than temperament. You know who’s not an idiot though? Best Jeanist. He chose Bakugo because he recognizes that he needs to be “reformed.”
Thank you, Best Jeanist, thank you! So far he’s the only one who recognizes (or at least recognizes and acts upon) how easily Bakugo could become a villain and he’s trying to head that off before it happens. Or at the very least, he recognizes what a shit hero he’ll be if someone doesn’t step in. He also calls Bakugo out on choosing his agency because he’s one of the top five most popular and no doubt the most popular agency of the ones that requested him. This is an excellent example of how skewed Bakugo’s thinking is. He had a list of 3,000 people to choose from and he just grabbed the “best” with no thought put into how he might work with Best Jeanist or what he wants to learn
from him. Indeed, Bakugo soon discovers how much he *hates* his internship. He’s so concerned with who’s at the top that he’ll ignore the 3,455 other options that might be more suited for him. Bakugo didn’t listen to Aizawa’s instructions to pick carefully. He doesn’t care.

I know it’s not in the manga, or if it is I somehow totally missed it, but this scene in the anime *is* an expansion of a conversation Best Jeanist has with Bakugo and I think it’s important enough to include here (and apologies for the particularly shitty screenshots):
"Katsuki Bakugo - Conqueror of the Image"

爆豪勝己
個性 爆破
but they also have a
爆豪勝己
個性爆破
What is
If we see villains, beat them up.
To give the public
Best Jeanist is doing his best to teach Bakugo a crucial lesson, namely that being a hero is about *saving people*. Making the public feel safe. It’s not, as Bakugo believes, about punching villains as hard as he can. That’s a secondary aspect. It’s the tool used to achieve the primary goal of keeping the peace. But as I’ll demonstrate later, we see no evidence of Bakugo accepting this lesson. He didn’t when Thirteen lectured them and he doesn’t now. Meanwhile, the rest of 1-A, particularly our core trio, are accepting this wisdom more and more. Heroes save people and they do it together.
After the internships the kids have their race and Bakugo gets mad that Izuku improved while he stayed the same, completely missing the fact that he had the chance to get stronger and didn’t take it. Then we get what is perhaps the most contrived and ridiculous attempt to continue this connection between Bakugo and Izuku.
JUST LIKE...

HE DID IT... WHILE I WAS OFF WASTING MY TIME WITH THOSE IDIOTS...
I can *maybe* understand Izuku thinking of Bakugo when he’s figuring out how to use his quirk more naturally... even though he has a lifetime of All Might obsession to pull from... and first hand experience viewing his speed alongside his strength... and an entire class of talented kids who have also had their quirks since they were toddlers...but whatever. It’s fine. What I *can’t* understand is how those are supposed to be Bakugo’s moves.

They’re not? At all?? We’ve seen Bakugo blast himself behind his opponents a few times and use his explosions to fly short distances, but he doesn’t jump like that or use his environment the way Izuku is using his. They’re completely different! And no, this isn’t a, ‘Oh this is a novel’s worth of Bakugo complaints she’s just taking issue with everything now’ thing. Long before I hated this character and an age before I wanted to write a meta I watched this scene in the anime and had to rewind twice because I didn’t understand WTF everyone was talking about. It has never made sense to me how all of 1-A comes to the conclusion that Izuku is copying Bakugo and honestly this is just erasure of all Izuku’s hard work. The narrative needs to stop trying to connect him back to his abuser because it’s horrible and it’s *forced*.

Side note: right before this All Might lectures them about avoiding property damage. Bakugo isn’t too concerned. It’s not like if he destroys a building he might kill someone in the process or anything.

After their lesson the kids learn about summer camp and while everyone is excited about bonding exercises (fireworks, bathhouses, etc.) Bakugo thinks it’s all so stupid.
We get a lot of small, but important moments with Bakugo here. We have the iconic ‘He and Kirishima study together!’ scene, but this doesn’t seem to me like Bakugo is actually going to help him.
(Or if he is it’s out of a desire to “beat” Momo in the virtue department. He still doesn’t give a damn about Kirishima.)

He continues to blame Izuku for his own emotional instability. Izuku isn’t allowed to improve because that pisses Bakugo off, but at the same time he’d better be a worthy opponent so that Bakugo’s victory isn’t hollow. You see how abusers love to create impossible expectations? It’s almost like they want to create an environment where their victim is constantly beaten down.
SEEMS LIKE... YOU'RE STARTING TO MANAGE THAT QUIRK OF YOURS. EITHER WAY...

STOP PISSING ME OFF WITH ALL THESE STUNTS.
He makes it clear once again that he’s willing to attack anything. Robots? Fine. Fragile human? Also fine. They get the same treatment. Bakugo insults his classmates and when they stand up for themselves he goes for their insecurities instead, the weaknesses that they’re specifically in school to improve on.

He threatens Izuku again, Todoroki too for good measure, and finally leaves. We learn that Aizawa does realize how awful Bakugo’s behavior is, but he hadn’t planned to step in just yet. Sadly, by the time he realizes how fast he’s “going south” there are other things taking precedent (exams, camp attack) and then, as we’ll see, Bakugo’s kidnapping erases it all again. How can we possibly reprimand him for his horrific behavior after he’s already been through so much??

(Spoiler alert, you can. The two things are not mutually exclusive.)
...it's dead.

KILL IT.
And then there’s the exam.
...SO COME AT ME, YOU TWO!
My god this arc makes me mad. What horrendous teaching. We’re told that while the others were paired due to skill or grades, Bakugo and Izuku were thrown together specifically because they don’t get along.
And that right there is the first problem. It’s not that they don’t get along; Bakugo doesn’t get along. With anyone. Izuku has ALWAYS been willing to work with others. It’s Bakugo who refuses support and, I’d like to remind everyone, hurts Izuku every chance he gets. This isn’t a matter of needing to teach them both how to work together, they need to teach Bakugo how to work with literally anything that’s not his own ego. Izuku is once again the victim here. He’s being punished with an incredibly difficult exam, paired with his abuser, because Bakugo hasn’t learned how to act like a damn human being.
We see that we’re off to a great start. Izuku is obviously nervous but making an effort. Bakugo is the one separating himself from both Izuku and All Might. The exam hasn’t even started and he’s making it abundantly clear that he’s not willing to meet them halfway. Or at all. *There is a clear difference between which of these kids needs work.*

All Might reveals that all the teachers are wearing weights and of course that insults Bakugo. He’s seen All Might go toe-to-toe with a Nomu and still thinks he’s at his level. Or even if he doesn’t believe it he’s still prideful enough to try.
We also learn that running away is an option! Encouraged even! A viable solution! Because they’re students! Fighting pros! Izuku and Bakugo are up against the Number One hero! And Izuku in particular just learned that sometimes running to get help is super important!!!
Bakugo won’t even consider it though. His arrogance here is amazing.
And when Izuku tries to talk to him? More than he’s *allowed* to in Bakugo’s eyes?
YOU GOTTA LISTEN TO WHAT I'M SAYING, KACCHAN!

IF... IF WE WANNA PASS THIS TEST...
That’s it. I’ve seen enough. I don’t care what happens after this, if I was the grader Bakugo just failed. Baring serious, extenuating circumstances there is no reason to attack your ally like that. Izuku is doing everything he can to meet his instructors’ expectations (work together with the guy who’s abused you your whole life!) and Bakugo responds by hitting him with a gauntlet and knocking him to the ground. The fact that Bakugo passed this test absolutely blows my mind.

Izuku finally can’t take it and yells what we’re all thinking: he’s trying to have a conversation. Bakugo is trying to beat him down.
When All Might shows up Bakugo attacks without discussing any of it with Izuku. And no, it doesn’t matter if he has a flimsy plan to blast All Might up close. All he’s done is gone off on his own and gotten himself caught. If All Might were really a villain than he’d just crush Bakugo’s head in. He’s dead now because he’s an impulsive ass.
KACCHAN!!

FWIP

YOU'RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME!
All Might asks if Izuku will run and leave Bakugo, but of course he won’t. Bakugo will never leave a fight because he needs to be the best. Izuku won’t leave as long as there’s someone in need of saving—and that person is Bakugo right now. Izuku’s actual heroism outweighs his (correct) desire to run and get help rather than trying to take down the world’s strongest fighter. But when he powers up to defend himself...
Also Bakugo’s fault! He’s not communicating with Izuku and has made it clear he doesn’t want to, so Izuku has given up on communicating with him. How the hell is he supposed to know what Bakugo is doing behind him? But of course he’s blamed for it. He’s the one who always needs to get out of Bakugo’s way.

And then we get this.
THAT’S... WHAT HEROES DO.

GET YOUR MITTS OFFA ME...

FINE, SURE, BUT FIGHTING HERE ISN’T...
No. Being a hero is NOT about winning. It’s about saving lives, about keeping the peace. Sometimes that means winning. Other times it means leaving a fight to get help. Or rescue someone. Or stepping aside because someone else’s quirk is better suited to the fight. There are a hundred ways you can lose the battle to win the war, so to speak. Couching this in, ‘Oh Bakugo is an All Might fan too!’ doesn’t lessen how warped these views are.

We get more flashbacks to hammer home this idea and no, sorry. Showing me a cute 4yo doesn’t erase how horrible a person Bakugo has become in his teens. Izuku looked at All Might and saw a symbol who saves people. Bakugo looked at All Might and saw someone who always comes out on top, no matter what he has to do to get there. That’s the difference between them and it’s a biggie when put into practice.
DODGE, PUNCH! THEN FEINT...

BUT LOOK! THERE!

SEE!! HE WON!

...HE ALWAYS WINS IN THE END!!
All Might tries to introduce some logic into Bakugo’s life. If you practice with your quirk for a decade and someone else practices for a few months, of course your improvement is going to come in smaller increments. But once again he’s not willing to listen.

And he makes it crystal clear how much he despises relying on anyone, Izuku in particular.
This kid is not hero material.
Izuku has to resort to a language Bakugo speaks—violence—in order to literally knock some sense into him. We get even more flashbacks to reinforce Izuku’s unwarranted admiration of Bakugo (read: abusive brainwashing). Again, we’re seeing the admiration of a toddler for another toddler who had grown into a truly horrible teen. Even this moment with a young Bakugo facing off against bullies is framed as something self-serving. He’s not defending someone like Izuku was at the very beginning of the manga, he’s just defending himself. Yes, a hero never gives up, but that’s not the same thing as always winning, especially by Bakugo’s very narrow standards. Sometimes not giving up means
asking for help.

They finally come up with a plan and Bakugo is hating every second of it. He literally only agreed to work with his partner—the most basic of actions a hero needs to take—after he’d clearly lost and been punched by said teammate/basically dragged off the battlefield by him. That’s... not improvement. That’s being backed into a corner and throwing a fit about it.

Running and hiding’s not gonna do squat against that crazy speed of his. We can’t avoid a fight.

This ticks me off! To think...
I'D HAVE TO... WITH YOU?!
We get a bit of this flashback and Bakugo’s analysis is blatantly wrong? Just last chapter, a few panels ago, All Might was running at normal speed, thinking about how they were hiding from him. Successfully, given that Bakugo manages to attack from behind. All Might ran right past their hiding spot without noticing. If he’d bothered to lay low for all of 30 seconds he’d see that Izuku’s original plan had merit. Especially since they know All Might is slower with those weights on and both Izuku and Bakugo have speed from their quirks. But nope. Listening to Izuku that much isn’t possible. They do run, but honestly? That blast Bakugo insisted on using didn’t do shit. They would have been better served staying low.

Bakugo’s terrible strategy is just there so they can find a “compromise.” Yet as we see Izuku was right from the start. Running is the best option. Imagine that.
No, All Might. *Izuku* did all the work to *force* Bakugo to come to an *unnecessary* compromise. The fact that Bakugo is also getting credit for all the shit Izuku just went through is beyond frustrating.

(Meanwhile, other students are learning how to actually work together.)
...but maybe you should've listened to what she had to say?

Thinking of the girl is nice and all...

Listened to her!?
(If you’re looking for an example of excellent character growth from antisocial ‘bad boy’ to beloved member of the team Todoroki is right there.)

And we’re reminded again of how MINOR it is that Bakugo worked with someone, but it’s also once again framed as being a problem that both of them need to overcome.
No, Izuku was always willing to work with Bakugo. Bakugo wasn’t willing to work with Izuku. It’s an important distinction!

Bakugo continues with his arrogant boasts and his insults towards Izuku. Literally nothing has changed between them.
HE'S NOT GONNA GO DOWN FROM THAT ALONE.

AS IF A WIMP LIKE YOU COULD TAKE HIM DOWN. WHAT A LOAD OF CRAP!
It took Bakugo getting beaten up TWICE in the span of 30mins to realize that the world’s Number One Hero *might* be more powerful than him, a 15yo boy who just started his training. Wow, he’s really something else.

In the end Bakugo comes up with another plan. To his credit, this time he *does* tell Izuku about it, even if that's while it’s happening and while ignoring his protests. And also to his credit, Bakugo does a good job of keeping All Might off Izuku’s back. Not because he wants Izuku to succeed, but because at this point it’s the only way either of them can win. Despite what he said earlier, Bakugo really can’t stand to lose, no matter what it costs him (and lol god knows working with Izuku apparently *costs him a lot*). So...

This bitch empty.
W-WAIT, DON'T...

HATE TO ADMIT IT, BUT WITH THE POWER GAP BEING WHAT IT IS...

...THIS IS OUR ONLY SHOT AT WINNING.

DIE ?!

DIE !!
A few pages later Izuku once again shows his heroism. Running away was the best option when
they were together. Now that Bakugo is unconscious, Izuku can’t just leave him in the hands of the ‘villain.’ He manages to secure Bakugo, land a punch on All Might, and make it to the gate in time. Izuku is the MVP of this story and Bakugo should be taking notes.
We have this moment where All Might equates his smile—smiling even while scared—with Bakugo’s frankly maniacal grin. All Might’s smile has never (just) been about “when you’re up against a towering wall.” Yes, it helps them to Do The Thing even when they’re scared, but it’s also a reassurance. Like Best Jeanist said, half the battle is beating villains, but the other half is keeping the public calm. All Might’s smile is a reassurance to civilians. Bakugo’s is just gonna give them nightmares.
And in case we missed it, we’re told visually who “grew” and who didn’t. The kids who didn’t beat a pro hero “couldn’t push past their limits” (which I think is a little unfair. Not every test is going to result in victory or extreme improvement) are at the bottom while Momo and Bakugo are on top.
Which is HILARIOUS because Momo? Fantastic. Superb. Overcame her self-doubt enough to go back, save Todoroki, and capture Aizawa using a smart combination of both their quirks. Bakugo? Threw a temper tantrum the whole time, attacked his partner, and barely scraped through. There’s perhaps a bit of growth in that Bakugo eventually decided to work with Izuku instead of losing, but compared to Momo? Compared to the emotional level everyone else in 1-A is currently at? Bakugo didn’t achieve shit. He needs to learn how to be a decent human before he works on being a hero.
With training camp on the horizon the kids decide to take a group shopping trip to gather the supplies they need. Despite the fact that I definitely don’t understand why he would, Kirishima kindly encourages Bakugo to join them. He refuses and this time we know the refusal is genuine. He’s not in the group that arrives at the mall and this tells me that he probably didn’t tutor Kirishima either.
I VISIT... SOMEONE ON MY DAYS OFF.

YOU GONNA COME, TODOROKI?

NO WAY IN HELL! WHAT A WASTE OF TIME.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU GUYS? TRY READING THE MOOD ONCE IN A WHILE.

YAP
After Izuku’s encounter with Tomura, Bakugo claims he “should’ve killed him” regardless of any broken bones. And the fact that he’s a very dangerous villain. And the fact that Tomura threatened to kill civilians if Izuku didn’t do as he said. Others in 1-A point out how ridiculous this accusation is, for those reasons and because using quirks in public is illegal, but Bakugo hardly cares. Anything and everything is Izuku's fault. He won’t even use Izuku’s name. OR “Deku.” He’s reduced Izuku to “You.”

I also find it disturbing that Izuku apparently should have killed him. Bakugo is never concerned with saving lives or arresting villains, not even if capturing them alive could lead to important information. Because ultimately he doesn’t care about the world or even those individuals around him. He simply wants to act out his violence in the one way that’s socially acceptable, by being a “hero.”

Training camp begins. We have the trek through the forest... and this absurdity occurs.
I'm sorry, what “past experiences” does Bakugo have that puts him on par with Izuku, Todoroki, and Iida? We know why they’ve lost their hesitancy in battle. It’s because they took on the freaking hero killer, a guy who murdered a number of pros, and they survived. But what has Bakugo done? I find it hard to believe that getting taken hostage by the sludge monster is what we’re talking about here, considering that he didn’t get to fight and this happened well before U.A. If we mean the attack on USJ then EVERYONE would be at the same level because everyone participated in that fight. Bakugo didn’t do anything during his internship. He’s ignored the lessons imparted to him there. And whether or not you agree that his growth during the exam was tiny at best, it’s not like he learned anything in the way of “acting without hesitation” then. He’s always been willing to dive into battle, even when that’s the stupidest decision on the table.

Iida, Izuku, and Todoroki are brave. Bakugo is impulsive. Yet the narrative is lumping them together, letting Bakugo pull from their success against the hero killer. Once again we’re meant to just accept aspects of Bakugo at face value that make little sense once you start unpacking it. He’s as talented as the kids who took down a fearsome serial killer! Because of course he is!
The most tender expression we’ve ever seen on him and it’s in reaction to a kid kicking Izuku in the nuts. But heaven forbid Todoroki point out that he’s similar to a violent toddler. Bakugo doesn’t want to “hear anything outta you,” in the same way that he continually insists that Izuku isn’t allowed to talk in front of him. It’s a form of control.

As we’ve seen with many characters though (Todoroki, Mei, Shinso, etc.) Kota only looks like Bakugo on the surface. He quickly shows that he’s a far better person than Bakugo ever was at that age.
And we see a true example of what it means to act without hesitation. Not instinctually throwing a punch, but instinctually doing something like this
Training begins the next day and Bakugou is working hard. So is everyone else in 1-A though. He’s really not special in that regard.
We get the fun competition between 1-A and 1-B to scare one another (which I really wish we’d gotten to see) and Bakugo is pissed about getting paired with Todoroki. He won’t even work with someone for a silly game, but the teachers think he’s made big improvements about working with people in battle. Yeah right.

Which is a problem considering that he and Todoroki do end up in battle together. Todoroki immediately states the obvious; they need to get back to camp. Bakugo feels the need to bitch about being “ordered around.”
Now it’s important here to keep track of what the kids know and when they know it, so that we can work through what they’re supposed to be doing and how their actions do (or do not) line up with that. At this point the kids know there are villains attacking and that they’re NOT allowed to use their quirks outside of U.A. Their only option is to get back to safety, as Todoroki points out. When they do encounter a villain, rather than trying to flee, Bakugo looks damn excited to be presented with an “excuse” to fight.
Compared to Tsu who understood the situation from the start.

DON’T ENGAGE, HUH...?!
They do get permission though, not that Bakugo ever needed it, and a few minutes later the information changes again. The kids are allowed to defend themselves, but Bakugo should not engage. Because, you know, he’s the one they’re after. It’s stupid to give the villains even more chances to nab him.
KACCHAN NEEDS TO AVOID BATTLE!! AND DON'T MAKE ANY MOVE ALONE!!
“Bakugo needs to avoid battle,” but he doesn’t even bother to try. With Todoroki’s ice wall they could make a break for it. But they don’t.
Who cares if he’s in danger? Who cares if he’s putting everyone else in danger by forcing them to go looking for him rather than getting back to camp? Bakugo is determined to fight so that’s what he’s going to do—and once again his obsession with hitting things head on nearly gets him killed. Oh yeah, and all of this is “that little freak Deku’s” fault. Somehow.

I’ve seen fans point to this fight as more evidence for how much he’s improved considering that he listens to Todoroki about not setting the forest on fire and killing everyone in the process. Except that’s not what happens.
He claims he already understands the problem and is pissed that Todoroki feels the need to remind him. I’d find Bakugo’s annoyance justified if he a) wasn’t so outrageously impulsive and b) if he didn’t pull this shit just a few minutes later.
CLANG CLANG

CLANG

NO!!
He has “no choice” but to blast his way forward. Retreat still isn’t an option in his mind. Bakugo
is so desperate to fight the villain that he’s willing to risk losing their vision and setting the whole forest on fire, the thing Todoroki JUST SAID could make things exponentially worse. It doesn’t matter if he has a “plan” for Todoroki to put it out with his ice. What if he can’t keep up? Bakugo would happily put everyone in danger and would consider the whole thing Todoroki’s fault if it got their peers killed. Bakugo has absolutely no concern for other people. The only thing he cares about here is getting to punch someone and the only reason he doesn’t set a fire is because Tokoyami and the others come crashing through.

Remember though way back during USJ how Bakugo couldn’t stand the idea of the villains escaping because he just had to see them beaten to a pulp? It happens again here. He insists that Todoroki hold back on creating any light so that Dark Shadow can crush the villain they’re facing, which wouldn’t be so bad if he wasn’t ALSO trying to crush Izuku and Shoji. But Bakugo doesn’t care about them. If they get caught in the crossfire, it’s whatever.
He’s also a real stand-up guy when Tokoyami thanks him. “I’m your worst possible matchup.” Really? You’re going to continue threatening him and showing off how powerful you are after what he’s just been through? Fascinating character, yes. Maybe he’s even funny at times. But I honestly don’t understand how anyone can like Bakugo as a person. If all the evidence so far doesn’t convince you that he has no empathy for others, his need to assert dominance after a peer has just been through a trauma pretty much says it all.
We’re reminded that the rest of 1-A communicates with one another and listens when someone has an excellent idea that’s gonna keep them safe.
Bakugo throws another tantrum when the rest of the group decides that they’re bringing him back to camp whether he likes it or not.
People also love to point to this moment as growth. He yells a lot yeah, but he does let them protect him. But... does he? Does he really? How long does it take Izuku and the others to reach Tsu and Uraraka? Long enough to actually give Bakugo time to sneak away if he wanted to? When he first disappeared I 100% thought he’d gone off on his own to fight more villains. A kidnapping didn’t even occur to me and if he hadn’t been grabbed? I’m not convinced Bakugo would have stayed with the group. I think the second they saw/heard another villain he’d have been breaking away and putting them all in danger again. Calmly walk back to camp while the teachers finish the fight? Yeah, good luck convincing him of that.
In fact, I think Bakugo should have run off. It fits his character and if he had, his kidnapping would have been a result of his bad decisions. Horikoshi had the chance to connect Bakugo’s impulsiveness with the trauma he’s undergone, in a way that might actually allow him to grow. It’s what we didn’t get with the sludge monster and sadly we didn’t get it here either.

Instead we get this lovely bit of irony. Izuku getting called an egotist? While defending Bakugo? Boy oh boy.
HE'S HIS OWN MAN, YOU EGOTIST!!
And we have the actual kidnapping.
When Bakugo is released he tells Izuku to “stay back” and if I remember correctly in the anime subtitles he suses “don’t come.” Some people choose to read this in a ‘keep yourself safe, don’t risk yourself for me’ way, but honestly when has Bakugo ever put others before himself? No, we get the real reading from Uraraka later on.
... CONSIDER IT DISGRACEFUL TO GET RESCUED...

LEMME SAY THIS MUCH...

DEKU.
He’s telling Izuku ‘don’t you dare save me.’ Bakugo told All Might during the exam that he’d rather lose than work with Izuku and now he’s telling Izuku he’d rather die than be rescued by him. That’s beyond fucked up and indeed, later we see how sure they all are that he means this. It’s not Bakugo being dramatic or maintaining his ‘bad boy’ reputation. Izuku honestly can’t trust that Bakugo will accept their help. There’s a real part of him that would choose a six on one battle over rescue at the hands of “extras.”
I get that Bakugo/Kirishima is one of the biggest ships and if you ship them? Awesome. More power to you, especially since I’m sure there are thousands of fics out there that actually develop their relationship in fascinating and believable ways. (I might even go read them sometime). But this moment rang incredibly hollow to me. Kirishima is his friend? Maybe, but these two have a very flimsy definition of friendship in my opinion. Having Kirishima yell emotionally that Bakugo is his “buddy” can’t act as a stand-in for actual, compassionate interaction and honestly? Kirishima considers everyone in 1-A his buddy. He’d do this for any of them.
The kids hatch their plan to rescue Bakugo. Iida (rightfully) points out that they’re falling into the same thinking that lead him to confronting Stain. The only thing that bugs me about these scenes is that he’d accuse Izuku of not taking responsibility for his actions.
That’s all Izuku ever does! He shoulders his responsibility and does his best to shoulder everyone else’s too. The fact that he gets this speech when Bakugo exists is real rich. No one is seriously yelling at Bakugo for the shit he pulls on a daily basis. The second Izuku wants to save someone though, the thing that heroes are supposed to do? Oh well THIS is worthy of a lecture. Words aren’t enough either. No, he’s got to punch him too.
Would people please stop hitting this kid?

The only redeeming aspect to all this is that Iida apologizes and we quickly learn that his speeches about responsibility are largely a cover. He’s really worried about Izuku’s welfare, especially considering what happened to his brother. There’s a lot of misplaced grief and anger at work here, but Iida recognizes that. Characters are allowed to make mistakes. They SHOULD be flawed. But we also want to see them grow—especially if they’re meant to be the heroes. Iida consistently grows more as a person *per chapter* than Bakugo has managed in the whole series.
As the kids put their plan together we turn to Bakugo in the hands of the villains. Things go about exactly as you’d expect them to.

Tomura points out how stupid it would be for Bakugo to attack them.
Bakugo attacks them anyway.
And risks himself in the process. Tomura could have easily decided he’s done with him and *disintegrated* Bakugo, like it’s implied he’s going to do here.
Yes, we see that Bakugo is trying to think things through, but trying to find the best *fighting* strategy isn’t necessary the best strategy overall.
Hahaha...

Just so you know...

Technically, I've still got permission to fight back!
They have the television on. Bakugo knows that U.A./the pros are looking for him. He literally just heard Aizawa saying they were working on it. He knows the villains won’t kill him since they want to convert him instead. He knows Warp Gate is right there and can easily prevent his escape. He knows it’s seven on one and that he’s a kid facing off against a bunch of unstable adults. Bakugo knows all of this... but the option of “sit tight” never even makes it to the table. No, better to “beat the crap outta two or three” and risk pissing them off enough to actually kill him.

It’s only by the grace of the plot that Bakugo hasn’t gotten himself killed.

Now the other big aspect to this scene is obviously the question of whether Bakugo can be turned to the dark side. (Insert light saber noises here.) There are two fundamental flaws in the villains’ plan. The first is that they claim he should join the winning side, but they’re not winning yet.
As I’ve mentioned before, I’m not convinced Bakugo would be so driven to be a hero if All Might hadn’t so clearly and cleanly defined who the “best” in the world was. He’s the top and, therefore, heroism is the top. Claiming that villainy is going to be the top at some point doesn’t cut it. Bakugo has spent his whole life believing that one side and one side only will provide him with the power he craves.

The second and far bigger issue is that the villains make it clear that even if they dominate society, Bakugo will never be able to dominate them. Meaning, they clearly have a hierarchy at work here and he’s offered a place at the bottom of it. As a pawn. Kirishim says it himself,
“He’s not the kind of dude to let any villain boss him around.” Bakugo’s not the kind of dude who lets anyone boss him around (even when he’s supposed to be taking instruction). The fatal flaw in the villains’ plan wasn’t trying to turn him bad, but trying to turn him into a pawn—a term that Tomura outright uses in front of him. Bakugo will never stand for being anything other than the most
powerful and right now heroism is more powerful than villainy and All Might is the most powerful of the heroes. So, by that logic, he’s the one Bakugo looks up to. It has nothing to do with All Might’s intrinsic goodness.
He admires his triumphs, not All Might himself.

Despite all this, the interviewer makes some very good points. “We’ve already caught glimpses, here and there, of his mental instability.” Bakugo doesn’t want to become a hero because he wants to help people or because of some morality. He just wants to be a hero because that’s “the best”... and that makes me incredibly uneasy.
...AND SENDS HIM DOWN A PATH OF EVIL?

WHAT IF A SKILLED MANIPULATOR GETS TO HIM...
Aizawa tries to counter...
...but what convictions? What *ideals*? What does Bakugo fight for other than his own enjoyment and his own feelings of empowerment? We’ve seen no evidence of these supposed ideals, but we’re supposed to believe they’re there because this is Aizawa speaking. And we trust him as a character. Doesn’t mean he’s right though.

We see All Might come to the rescue and for the first time since the sludge monster we see Bakugo upset, showing emotions beyond just anger and indifference. Which I’d expect. He’s going through something absolutely horrific here. He *should* be near tears, but him looking like a whipped puppy for one panel doesn’t erase all the terrible things he’s done; certainly not for his victims.
They seemingly capture the villains, AFO helps them escape, and we get another glimpse at Bakugo’s future. All Might dares to ask if Endeavor is okay and instead of just saying yes—which would be quicker all around—he needs to insult All Might in front of the other heroes, police, and nearby civilians.
CAN YOU HANDLE THIS?!
This is Izuku and Bakugo’s dynamic down to a T. Except Endeavor didn’t get his hands on All Might when he was a quirkless kid, so he never got the chance to abuse him outright. No, he had to settle for his wife and kids instead.

And as the fights unfold, we get this:
This is the first time I’ve seen Bakugo express concern for another human being. You want to talk about growth? This is the first thing I’d point to... but even then it’s rocky. Call my a pessimist, but the fact that it’s All Might says a lot. He’s been a pillar for Bakugo just like he has for the rest of the world and the threat of him dying is obviously going to be scary as hell. I’m not convinced he cares about All Might as a person, only as something he needs to conquer. There’s a small part of me that wonders if Bakugo is afraid that All Might will die before he can surpass him, in the same way Endeavor is later furious at All Might’s true form. Still, his emotion seems genuine here. For all the messed up ways Bakugo views All Might’s power, this is still the first and so far only time he’s shown worry for another.

We get a similar moment later when Bakugo’s blast nearly hits All Might with a piece of rubble.
So when it comes to All Might at least he’s concerned. Even if he can’t admit as much.
Caring for other people is obviously uh... important, but it’s All Might’s fight against AFO that confirms how utterly *necessary* this is for a hero. Ultimately it wasn’t brute strength or a selfish desire to come out on top that allows All Might to win a seemingly impossible battle. It’s the need to save even just one person...
PLEASE...

...
...and the strength the stems from friends, family, and fans loving you...
ALL
MIGHT!!
...that allows All Might to stand victorious.

HEROES ALWAYS HAVE SO MANY THINGS, SO MANY PEOPLE TO PROTECT!!
Caring for people and allowing people to care for you is *integral* to being a hero. Saving people is THE reason they do this. And when the fight is over All Might is careful to stand strong, continuing his work of reassuring the people even as he stands there broken and bleeding. Caring
enough to reassure others is crucial.

We’re reminded again of how rescue comes before everything else,

and we see Endeavor losing his shit over All Might.
THE HELL'S THAT BODY, ALL MIGHT!!!
The despair of it *drove you to*? Here we have Endeavor blaming All Might for his abuse. It's his fault because he MADE Endeavor torture his wife and son in order to catch up. It's the exact same thing...
we’ve seen with Bakugo blaming Izuku for his own violent behavior. Izuku forced him to do this because he’s so annoying, so optimistic, or—as Endeavor now says—too pitiful.

As the fight concludes we get All Might’s message to Izuku and Bakugo’s obvious interest in why he’s sobbing while everyone else cheers.
We’re also reminded of how *no* hero can go it alone, even All Might. People around the world are realizing the corner they backed themselves into by putting all their hopes onto a single man and this is the world Bakugo is trying to be a hero in, the one who never spends time with his classmates, never wants to listen to them in battle, and yells every chance he gets about how he doesn’t need any of them.

In the aftermath of the kidnapping we finally get to meet Bakugo’s family. Before I caught up on the manga I heard all about how abusive his mother is. Uh... that’s really not the case.
In the real world I don’t agree with parents *ever* hitting their children, but this is an incredibly common shonen trope and tends to represent a hard but loving parental figure, not an abusive relationship. In the same post-arc stuff we get All Might hitting Izuku.
And later Mei is hit by her instructor too.

(Really though, please stop hitting this boy)

I also don’t agree with her blaming Bakugo for the kidnapping. That’s indeed an incredibly shitty thing to say, but I also don’t think any of this explains Bakugo’s overall behavior, just the guilt we see later regarding All Might’s retirement. We see at the end that Bakugo’s mom obviously loves him and their shouting reads as a familiar, comfortable dynamic. It’s how she communicates with him and we see none of the same indicators we got with Todoroki that would imply Bakugo fears or despises his mother because of this treatment. If anything he emulates her—except that he’s turned her tough love into outright abuse. She hits him and calls him out on his shit, yes, but Bakugo isn’t coming home to stuff like this.
And we see none of the intimidation and degrading treatment that he gives to Izuku. Context is always important, and in this context Bakugo’s mother is a loud-mouthed but loving parent and his dad seems very soft spoken, supportive of his family even if he doesn’t have the same loud personalities as them. There’s even the implication that the dynamic looks more shocking than it actually is (“The teachers... this must be shocking them...”). Abusers don’t worry about how things look in front of company. There’s nothing here to suggest that Bakugo has grown up within a family that manipulates or tortures him. There’s nothing here to suggest that we can explain his behavior through poor upbringing.

She also reiterates what many fans believe: that Bakugo is this way because he was talented and everyone showered him with praise. That’s a part of it, but as I’ve already shown, Bakugo was an arrogant bully before he ever got his quirk. Did that praise make things worse? Sure, but it’s not to blame for his actions. Bakugo already favored himself over the rest of the world and other people showering you with praise and privilege (like Momo) doesn’t turn you into an abuser. This is all on Bakugo.
THOUGHT, “AHH, I'M SO GLAD YUUEI CAN REALLY LOOK AFTER HIM.”
We’re reminded that Bakugo really wants to know what’s going on between Izuku and All Might. *He also says thank you.* That’s big, but again, it’s only aimed at All Might. As we’ll see in a moment regarding Kirishima and Kaminari, his ‘thank you’ to 1-A leaves a lot to be desired. Still, this is more than Izuku got when he saved him from the sludge monster, so in that I’ll admit there’s growth. It’s incredibly limited and right now tied solely to All Might... but at this point I’ll take what I can get.
THEN IT'S FINE.
We see how much other people can change in a short period of time. Kota suffered an unimaginable trauma and still learned in a single night that others don’t deserve to bear the brunt of his anger over that event. When he see him next he’s still playing the tough guy, but he’s stopped being mean. No more kicking people in the nuts.

Ah yes, here we are. The ‘thank you.’
Bakugo gives Kirishima money for the goggles he bought! How kind! Except that a few seconds before this...
The implication here is that Bakugo stole the money from Kaminari. Threatened him or just told him to use his quirk, grabbed the cash after he got dumb. Now some people say it’s just for show. That Bakugo can’t stand the thought of them thinking he’d do something nice so he makes it look like he took the money, even though it’s really his. I mean... maybe? I’ll admit it’s possible, but it’s also completely possible that Bakugo would take it from someone else. It’s hard to say based on what we see here. All I can do is base my reading on what I know of Bakugo so far... and that’s not flattering. Regardless, a bunch of these kids risked their life for him and this is all they get.

Aizawa shows up and gives us this little speech that I find so very frustrating.
Then save for Bakugou, Jirou and Hagakure, I would have expelled every single one of you.
Really? I 100% agree that the kids should face some sort of consequence for running off, but let’s look at the larger picture here. They did a bad thing for a good reason, running off to save someone else. Bakugo consistently does awful things for awful reasons and not even suspension, let alone expulsion, has ever come up. Again, I’m not saying what Izuku and the others did was without fault, only that their motives were good and I think that should mean something. They’re also learning. They didn’t run into battle, they kept their distance and performed a rescue mission when given a chance. Ultimately it just bugs the hell out of me that Bakugo can endlessly treat others like shit and Aizawa never bats an eye (just thinks about how he should do something), but the rest of 1-A tries to do what they’re trained to, be heroes—in a world that is forcing them to take on the mantle early,
they’re not allowed to just be students who safely obey the law anymore—and they’re the ones who’d have been expelled.

The narrative privileges Bakugo so very much. It’s really gotten old.

The kids move into the dorms and we get lots of little moments that show them getting along, learning about each other, having fun and bonding.
We very much don’t see these moments with Bakugo. In fact, we don’t get to see his room. Like going shopping for camp supplies, showing off their new living space is too “stupid” a thing for him to participate in. 1-A consistently tries to include him (even when he doesn’t deserve it) and Bakugo consistently thinks he’s too good to hang with anyone. No, we don’t get any indication that he’s shy and not joining in because he doesn’t know how. Or that he thinks they’ll reject him or something. There isn’t a legitimate excuse like Tsu claiming illness. Bakugo just doesn’t like people. Even Todoroki, antisocial and desperately wanting to sleep, stays with everyone until the end because he recognizes that this is an important moment for the group.
And after a little over a week of training (during which Bakugo tries to warn All Might about the falling rock) we enter the provincial exam! It’s the perfect time to meet other students, AKA the people they may be working with in the field some day. Yet as always Bakugo is an asshole.
达可！

我错了！

达可，

这是他的强心剂！
So what if this guy is actually hoping to beat them? Everyone wants to beat U.A. It’s not going to hurt Bakugo to shake his hand, in the same way it wouldn’t have hurt him to give the athlete’s oath. As Kirishima says, “Dude, rude!”

The exhausted exam guy talks about how it ultimately doesn’t matter why you want to be a hero. The fact remains you’re putting your life on the line.

\[
\text{IN ANY CASE... NO MATTER WHETHER IT WAS FOR MATERIAL GAIN OR FOR THE VALOR OF IT, AT THE END OF THE DAY THEY APPLIED THEMSELVES DILIGENTLY TO RESCUE OPERATIONS AND VILLAIN CLEANUP.}
\]

Which I agree with on the surface. In the sense that yeah, Uraraka wants money. That doesn’t lessen the good she goes. But I still believe firmly that Bakugo’s lack of empathy is a detriment to him and everyone he’s supposedly working to help. As we’ve seen, time and again his behavior puts himself and others in danger. You can’t just wave that away with ‘it doesn’t matter why you want to be a hero,’ because Bakugo’s ‘why’ actively undermines his heroics.

The exam begins. We learn that it’s basically Bakugo’s worst nightmare: working together.
...will be unity and cooperation, as well as whatever information they manage to glean.
So he immediately runs off.
Yes, Todoroki separates too, but that’s in order to protect others. Unlike Kaminair, he hasn’t devised a way to use his powers without risking his allies getting caught in the fire (ha). We saw that moment way back in USJ when he realized that he could have frozen Hagakure and nothing has changed since then. It’s logical for him to work on his own when he can and without hearing Izuku’s reasoning behind why working in groups is so essential here, he leaves.

Everyone else starts working together.
While making sure that they don’t take things too far. Just because it’s a competition doesn’t mean they want to seriously hurt anyone.
AND IF YOU'D KEPT HURTLING DOWN AT THAT RATE, THEN YOU WOULD'VE DEFINITELY HURT YOUR BACK.
Bakugo, meanwhile, only has support because Kirishima followed him and Kaminari followed them both. I’ll admit right out that this is the best I’ve seen Bakugo work with others, but that chance to pass off the grenade to Kaminari—

—only exists because they both realized how stupid it was for Bakugo to run off on his own. Had he gotten his way and fought alone, he’d have been out the second he was captured by the weird... disgusting... flesh... *thing*. So yeah, points for once again choosing to work with someone when absolutely backed into a corner (like when he faced All Might), minus those points for actively working to undermine the conditions that created that possibility in the first place. Kaminari also claims that Bakugo’s blasts were meant to keep everyone on the ground safe, but that’s in contrast to his original claim that he let’s off the new move “with wild abandon,” a way that definitely looks like it’s hitting the ground too.
So idk about that one. Considering the only person Bakugo has attempted to protect was All Might in a brief shout of concern? I’m not convinced of this. Kaminari may well be acting as another mouthpiece for Horikoshi here. We’re supposed to believe that Bakugo is so good and noble because we’re told as much, not because we actually see it.

I’m keeping a mental tally. Bakugo has objectively and unequivocally done three good things throughout the course of the manga, things that are in no way cruel or self-serving: he expresses worry over All Might’s well-being, gives the grenade to Kaminari (even though that obviously helps him too), and this.
Blink and you’ll miss it: “I made the blast weaker for use against people.” It doesn’t even get a full dialogue box, but at least we know Bakugo isn’t out-right trying to kill people anymore. Word’s still out though on whether he’d still give Izuku his full blast without knowing whether it would kill him...

So Bakugo is... better? If by “better” we mean we’ve got incredibly miniscule improvement that’s well below literally everyone else at U.A. Also none of this has made a dent in his impulsive nature.
AAAGH, WAIT, DON'T FORGET THIS IS AN EXAM, DUDE!

DOES HE EVER SHUT THE FUCK UP!? I'LL KILL HIM!
After part one of the exam, in which all of 1-A passes, Bakugo shows that he’s found a new way to demean and underestimate Izuku.
Kacchan! I... yeah...

Oh man... it's been so long since he last picked on me! After all, ever since Kamino, he's done so less than ever before...
WHAT... DID HE JUST SAY!? DOES HE...

WHAAAA AAT!!!
Yes, it’s obviously important plot-wise that Bakugo is starting to put the pieces together regarding Izuku’s quirk, but what stands out to me is that this is heading in the direction of an excuse. Of course Izuku is doing well when he has *All Might’s* quirk. There’s nothing special about useless Deku, he’s just been blessed with a phenomenal power. And I can easily see how this is going to give Bakugo even more reasons to despise and abuse him. After all, why should Izuku deserve such a quirk when Bakugo, the best of the best and lover of All Might, is right there?
This is a recipe for disaster.

At least he didn’t hit him this time. As Bakugo wanders off we have other students apologizing for the rudeness of their peer (as 1-A so often has to do with Bakugo),
and we’re shown the impact that one person can have on a whole group. As I’ve been saying, Bakuo’s actions reflect everyone else in his year. When he’s horrible, people assume everyone else in 1-A is too.

Endeavor is horrible, people assume his son is too.
It’s unfair that Todoroki is judged based on things his father has done. It’s going to be equally unfair if the world continues to judge 1-A based on the shit Bakugo pulls.

But in the here, the now... it’s the rescue mission.

Oh boy.

Izuku is quickly reminded of what he already knew: always reassure the person you’re rescuing.
ALL RIGHT!!
Does exactly what we’d expect.

BUT THEN THERE’S THIS BULLSHIT.
Could it be...? The reason he told us to "act ourselves"...

Is because he was able to judge that in an instant...!?
Everyone realizes this is just an incredibly overt example of what’s been happening the whole manga, right? No one can possibly take this seriously. Bakugo does something horrible (screaming at victims to rescue themselves) and the people around him nonsensically twist that into something positive (he recognizes that we’re not priority victims! How smart!) Yeah, it’s real damn “convenient” for him, time and time again. This moment tells me that Horikoshi knows exactly what he’s doing. He knows that Bakugo isn’t a hero, he knows he can’t logically justify any of his actions, he know he provides the flimsiest of excuses for us to justify them anyway. This is a ‘wink, wink’ moment that’s so frustrating because it tells us that Horikoshi doesn’t know how to actually redeem Bakugo and at this point doesn’t care. It’s easier to just let the fictional world twist to cater to Bakugo, painting things in whatever light necessary to keep in him U.A. and on the path to being a “hero.” I honestly wouldn’t be surprised if Horikoshi eventually came out and revealed that he was pressured into making Bakugo a good guy, or some other situation where he had to find ways of making him heroic when... he’s not. Because the rest of Horikoshi’s characterization is stellar compared to all this nonsense.
While Bakugo screams at people we learn a little more about why Inasa hates Todoroki so much. Yes, it begins with Endeavor, but then solidifies with Todoroki being rude to him during their first test to get into U.A. As we know, Todoroki still had a lot of growing to do back then and he’s improved immensely, but of course Inasa doesn’t know all this. Todoroki’s past actions combined with Endeavor’s shitty behavior come back to haunt him, causing the fight that results in him failing the exam.
Again, the difference between Todoroki and Bakugo is that a) Todoroki is trying to overcome the abuse he suffered at the hands of Endeavor and b) he continually takes responsibility for his actions and makes serious, overt attempts to improve. *Seconds* after Izuku calls them out on their fight, Todoroki realizes that he's partly to blame for this, he puts aside his anger to capture the 'villain,' and after the fight both boys apologize and demonstrate respect towards one another—even if they still don't like each other. That's an important lesson to learn. You don't need to like someone to respect them and for heroes, working with people you don't like is a necessary part of the job. It's a necessary part of MOST jobs.
I'VE... I'VE GOTTA MAKE THINGS RIGHT!!

MY ACTIONS ARE WHAT INVITED SOMETHING LIKE THIS TO HAPPEN.
YOU'RE THINKING THE SAME THING....!!

AND MAYBE, JUST MAYBE....

SCOOPE UP MY
Meanwhile, we get a brief glimpse of Bakugo, notably not carrying anyone to rescue and thinking only about how he "wanted to fight the villains."
Presumably he continues to fume until this:
It's no damn surprise that he fails the exam. Except it actually *is* a surprise considering this is the first time we see Bakugo facing consequences for his actions. It's the first time he wasn't 'punished' for entirely unrelated reasons (sludge monster, kidnapping) and the first time he didn't come out on top despite his horrible choices (festival, fight against All Might). Finally, after over a hundred chapters he did shit things and got a shit result in response.

Finally!!!

And it's a real good thing he wasn't given his license. As the examiner says, the license will "grant you the authority to exercise privileges equal to that of pro heroes...combat against villains, conducting disaster relief, and the like... Even without orders from pro heroes, you are now able to act at your own discretion." Bakugo? Act at his own discretion? I mean he does that anyway, but making that legal? No thanks.

Izuku says it in a nutshell:
Bakugo hasn't grown. He doesn't get a license.

We then move into the aftermath of that exam and... uh...
"Noble beast"? That's what we're calling Bakugo now? Alright...

More seriously, Bakugo demands that Izuku talk to him later that night and we all know what it's about. We know that Bakugo knows how Izuku got his quirk, so I'm more interested in how he responds to that knowledge. Let's break down what we see here.

First of all, prior to this we didn't see Bakugo going over his score results like everyone else, implying that he didn't pay them much mind. He failed. He doesn't care about why. Or rather he does, but in an incredibly warped way. Rather than focusing on his own shortcomings, Bakugo has immediately latched onto Izuku again and how he is somehow at fault for all this. Rather than focusing on why he failed his exam, Bakugo focuses on why Izuku was given All Might's power instead of him.

They head outside. We see Bakugo (or both?) of them mentally comparing this to how Izuku has always followed him around. In a few minutes he'll complain about this extensively. Funny how right now he's the one who demanded a meeting and he's the one who refuses to tell Izuku where they're going. That kinda demands that he follow behind...
HEY...
Anyway, they arrive at where they had their first fight way back during day one and Bakugo prefaces the reveal about Izuku’s quirk with plenty of insults.

Izuku tries to point out that he got his license through hard work and actual heroics—it's not and has never been a matter of who is physically stronger—but Bakugo won't listen. He doesn't want to hear about how he needs to improve, he wants to focus on why Izuku supposedly doesn't deserve this power.
He states that Izuku got his quirk from All Might. Izuku then asks a very important question: If I reveal the whole story to you, how are you going to benefit? How is that possibly going to help you, either to actually help you emotionally, or “help” you in the sense of using it against me?
Bakugo refuses to answer. Instead he once again tries to solve everything through violence. He demands a fight.
RIGHT NOW!
Specifically, he wants a fight where he can go all out on Izuku without anyone interfering. He doesn’t want to risk anyone stepping in like All Might tried before (even though now he’s the one letting this happen. Jesus.) Remember, the point is not that Izuku is now strong enough to defend himself, but rather that Bakugo still wants to beat him up, whether he’s quirkless or powerful. Again, the fact that Izuku can stand up to Bakugo now doesn’t negate the fact that he has always happily tried to dominate others physically and he’s still doing it now. I’ve seen a lot of people claim, “But Izuku can fight back now” and that fact doesn’t have any bearing on Bakugo’s desire to hurt him. Just because the victim can punch back doesn’t make the bully less of a bully.

The only real difference is that now he's not only fighting Izuku because he wants to, he's fighting him because he needs to figure out why All Might would give "useless Deku" his power. But Bakugo is already primed to not understand this because he's unwilling to listen to traits like empathy and kindness that Izuku possesses. Everything still comes down to raw power in his mind and when Izuku loses the fight that's "proof" that he's not good enough yet and he has to become good enough to smooth out Bakugo’s logic. Everything is topsy-turvy because how the hell can the most powerful quirk finally made his own fail to win? Even after everything, Bakugo is still thinking in terms of “The best person is the person who can throw the strongest punch.” His view of Izuku is incompatible with that, so he has to test his strength again. Bakugo is dealing with a supposed
paradox here.

THAT ALL MIGHT HIMSELF WOULD GO THAT FAR FOR YOU.
Again, it's easy to go, “Aww Bakugo” because he looks like a whipped puppy here, but his thinking is still so very selfish. Circular too. ‘I wanted to be a hero the most, but All Might didn’t give me power. He gave it to you. Which implies you wanted to be a hero more’ (warped logic) ‘but I wanted to be it more, so how does that make sense...’” His thoughts are basically in a tailspin and it all comes down to whether he realizes that no, not everything has to be about him.

So the fight starts, despite Izuku begging him to wait.
I SAID WAIT...
Please note that Izuku says this many, many times and if he’d outright refused? Bakugo would have attacked him anyway. Keep that in mind in regards to the punishments and how the rest of 1-A responds.

During the fight we get confirmation that Bakugo wants to use Izuku as his personal punching bag and Izuku (because he’s played this role his entire life) is willing to indulge him—to a point. He’ll take on Bakugo’s anger like the self-sacrificing, abused kid he is, but he’ll fight back at the same time. He says straight out that he won’t be a true punching bag, one that stands still and just takes it, and that absolutely speaks to *Izuku’s* growth. Not Bakugo’s. Again, Izuku defending himself doesn’t make Bakugo’s actions okay.
IF YOU wanna go... then there's no holding back.

embracing those feelings head on!!!
(Note though that Izuku still believes defending himself to be “selfish.” A part of him still honestly thinks he has to stand there and let Bakugo do whatever he wants to him.)
We see more flashbacks with Bakugo continuing to blame Izuku for his own actions. Izuku kept being kind and trying to be his friend despite how much Bakugo hurt him, so that required that Bakugo hurt him even more. All of this is Izuku’s fault for daring to “tag along.”
He made the egregious sin of remaining optimistic in a world determined to break him. Bakguo was at the center of that attempt, so Izuku essentially beat him even back then by remaining hopeful. And of course, since Bakugo is still almost entirely self-centered, he reads Izuku’s hope as disdain. In order to look up, Izuku must be looking down on him.
Even though you were just some asshole who never had a damn thing!

And you were always looking at me from above with those damn eyes of yours...

And truly aiming to surpass me because you knew you could! It's that god damn attitude of yours...

You were looking down at me with disdain,
When Bakugo takes a nasty hit during the fight and Izuku once again dares to worry about him, he responds predictably. Bakugo always responds violently when someone tries to show him tenderness (see him slapping away All Might’s hand each time he puts it on his shoulder), but Izuku gets a particularly vicious kind of anger because he’s always been the “weaker” one. Bakugo still won’t lower himself to accepting a hand up.
Bakugo harps on this for a bit, going so far as to use the exact same phrasing as Endeavor. How did
he end up “chasing the back” of someone weaker than him; how did Endeavor end up chasing the weak back All Might’s true form?

And then we finally hit the crux of the matter.
FOR ALL MIGHT'S END!?
Now let’s make something clear: Bakugo obviously has feelings beyond anger and disdain. Of course he does. I’m not arguing that he’s a sociopath and like I mentioned back during the sludge incident, you can be scared and upset and still be a terrible person. So many people read this scene and immediately jumped on the ‘hug Bakugo’ bandwagon. The poor baby! He’s been blaming himself for All Might’s retirement this whole time!

Is that awful? Does it need to be addressed? Yes. However, you know who else is carrying misplaced guilt?

_Literally everyone else in 1-A._

Izuku also blames himself for All Might’s retirement. We get a whole internal monologue on how if he hadn’t crushed his arms again he might have reached Bakugo in time and then none of this would have happened. Todoroki and Shoji also blame themselves for not reaching Bakugo in time. Tsu blames herself for not stopping her friends from walking into danger. It’s implied that other kids blame themselves for not tagging along. Everyone wonders what else they could have done to change things.

I could go on. The point is, misplaced guilt is horrible but it doesn’t make Bakugo special. It’s not a free pass to excuse his behavior, especially when this all just happened. All Might’s retirement has no bearing on everything that came before that. When Tsu felt guilty about her roll in all this she called everyone together to speak with them. Bakugo drags Izuku out to try and pummel him. Everyone is suffering in one way or another, but only one of these kids is dealing with that by hurting others.

Izuku thinks more about their relationship, specifically about how Bakugo still represents “victory” to him.
(Yeah, because your whole life Bakugo bowled over anyone he needed to in order to achieve that victory.)

While at the same time acknowledging that whenever he emulates Bakugo he acts in a way he dislikes.
And settles on how Bakugo is *still*, supposedly, “amazing.”
God almighty.

Bakugo wins the fight and All Might shows up, revealing that he let them go at it and has been eavesdropping the whole time. He says that Bakugo needs to stop obsessing about winning and Izuku can’t be entirely focused on rescuing people, but if they find a balance between the two they’ll be great heroes.
AND IN THE WAY THAT YOUNG BAKUGOU FEARED YOUNG MIDORIYA'S SPIRIT...

IN THE WAY THAT YOUNG MIDORIYA LONGED FOR YOUNG BAKUGOU'S STRENGTH,

YOUR FEELINGS ARE ALL OUT IN THE OPEN NOW, AND NOW... YOU BOTH GET IT NOW, DON'T YOU?
YOU CAN BECOME THE BEST HEIR WHO BETS ON WIN AND RESCUE
Heeeere’s the problem with that. Izuku is already focused on winning. He *already* has that balance. We saw it in the very first page of the manga, his willingness to stand up and do whatever it took to win a fight. Yes, he was protecting another kid then, but he’s never backed down from inconsequential fights either (like the sports festival). This would make sense if Izuku was super timid and too afraid to fight villains, preferring only to engage in disaster rescue missions or something... but he’s not. At all. Bakugo is the one who needs the perspective check here, but once again Izuku is lumped in with him. He’s already heading down a good path, getting physically stronger *while* using that improvement to help others. Bakugo is physically strong, but he STILL needs to learn to care about other people. But somehow they’re both equally at fault here?

I’m not buying it anymore.

Hell, that’s a lie. I never bought it to begin with.

We get more about how Bakugo feels guilty for his involvement in All Might’s retirement and he gets some kind words to the effect that it wasn’t his fault (and as I’ve said, it wasn’t). He promises not to reveal the secret, unlike “shithead deku.”

...who only revealed it because you were throwing a fit about his quirk, but okay.

With the fight over the punishment begins and once again Izuku’s actions are implied to be equal to
Bakugo’s. I’m not saying he’s blameless. I’m saying Izuku agreed to talk to Bakugo, pointed out that they shouldn’t be doing this after hours, that they shouldn’t be leaving the dorms, and said multiple times that he did not want to fight him. He did everything he could except outright run away and though maybe he should have, Izuku stayed in an attempt to help Bakugo. Bakugo coerced Izuku into breaking the rules so he could fight him. No one else cares about context or intent though. Except Aizawa. He at least gave Izuku one less day of house arrest.

But everyone else seems to focus their ire on Izuku, no doubt because he’s the good one who should ‘know better.’ There comes a time with bullies and abusers where their actions become so commonplace that people just shrug and say, “What are you gonna do?” allowing them to keep getting away with that behavior. But when someone normally well-behaved steps out of line the response is far harsher. It’s the Good Kid who complains about getting kicked by a bully every day and hears, “Well, they’re going through something” or “Well, they’re trying” or even “Well, they didn’t mean to,” and when the kid finally snaps, kicking back, they’re the one sent to the principal’s office.

Iida in particular is mad and has apparently been told to punish Izuku by keeping notes/pertinent information from him. Wtf.
It’s announced to the whole school that there was a fight and everyone knows that Izuku was the one who “did a bad thing.”
By the time he comes back to class he’s apologizing to everyone. Bakugo, of course, doesn’t apologize. Izuku is the only one who should feel ashamed here because he’s the only one of the two
who ever feels ashamed.

1-A tries teasing Bakugo again and though they’re obviously meant to be humorous, I’ve never laughed at these moments. Because of course Bakugo blames Izuku and of course he apologizes and moves to do more work. They have too much history for this to be just teasing between the two of them.
People continue to try and have civil conversations with Bakugo. Bakugo keeps refusing.
SHUT UP... IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS.

BAKUGOU, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT THE PROVISIONAL LICENSE SUPPLEMENTARY LESSONS?

Except for this.
Even with your speed-up, I was able to just barely react in time.

It's not well-suited for a slug-fest.

Your wind-up motions are too big.

It pisses me off.

It doesn't mix well with punches.
And later this.

These? These are good conversations. With the exception of “it pisses me off” Bakugo is calm, respectful, and helpful. If we’d see him treating Kirishima like this at any time before now I’d be a little more willing to buy into their friendship. Regardless, this definitely constitutes growth of a sort.
I say “of a sort” because as I pointed out right at the beginning, abuser don’t look like abusers 24/7, 365 days a year. It’s because of this that they’re able to claim that they’ll change this time, they swear, and victims can rationalize that they didn’t really mean to act this way. Basically, two civil conversations don’t erase the last 100+ chapters of abuse—especially when we’ve yet to hear an apology from Bakugo to Izuku—and I’m highly suspicious that this civility will continue.

Growth isn’t linear (no one can achieve perfection), but it does need to be consistent enough to be worthwhile. Given all that Bakugo has done, I’m not willing to claim he’s changed until we see enough consistency to demonstrate that he understands the problem with his behavior and is actively making an effort to fix it. As opposed to brief moments civility the results in kind, out of character words. Remember, even the worst of the villains have moments of softness:
I’m not saying Bakugo is an outright villain. I’m saying these two moments aren’t proof that he’s really changed. We’ll have to see more to determine that. A lot more, during moments where he’s stressed and afraid and feeling weak. Not just safe in the dorms.

For now the kids are thinking about internship. We’re given another example of how mentors speak harshly to their charges—it’s not just Bakugo’s mother.
OH, THAT'S RIGHT! OTHER THAN ME, NO ONE ELSE REACHED OUT TO YOU AT THE SPORTS FESTIVAL, RIGHT, YOU NO-GOOD SUCCESSOR?

ERMMM ...!
While Todoroki and Bakugo undergo their extra training, the rest of 1-A meets Mirio. I really wish Bakugo had been here for this lesson, because he of all people still needs to understand that it’s not the power you possess, it’s what you choose to do with it that’s important.
The rest of 1-A still stands in stark contrast to Bakugo, asking others for help and thanking Mirio for beating them. Because that provided an invaluable lesson. Their pride isn’t the concern here.
FOR YOUR GUIDANCE
In fact, as Bakugo takes to the sidelines after his kidnapping we’re reminded time and time again of the traits great heroes possess—the things he’s lacking.

Like the drive to help people regardless of whether you’re getting something in return.
Inspiring others to new heights.
THOSE DAYS WHISPERED TO ME...
"YOU HAVE TO LIVE!"
Putting the lives of others above everything else (the “victory” side of heroism has no meaning without the “rescue”)

And being mindful of what’s important to other people. Yes, Izuku obviously cares about Nighteye’s tapestry too, but he was mindful of all Nighteye’s things, even though he said not to worry about the room, even though it made his fight that much harder. This is a small example of Izuku being respectful and caring towards others—a choice that helps him achieve his goal (getting the internship). A larger example would be him worrying about Uraraka (really Toga in disguise) falling during the provincial license exam. The risk of permanently hurting her back outweighed the fact that it was a competition and the fact that Izuku had already figured out that this wasn’t Uraraka. I’m not sure Bakugo will ever reach a point where he considers peoples’ well being like that.
No, Bakugo is still screaming at Todoroki and, interestingly given those flashbacks to his childhood, telling him to walk behind him.
I TOLD YOU TO SHUT THE HELL UP! WHY DON'TCHA WALK BEHIND ME, FUCK!!

(We see it again later.)
Or complaining about the progress Izuku makes.
Or anyone else, for that matter.
He stays up to see if everyone made it back from the mission, but obviously won’t acknowledge being “worried” and leaves immediately afterward. In fact, it’s unclear whether he was worried or just... there.
Admittedly, Bakugo’s subtle growth becomes harder for me to praise when it’s occurring during the introduction of two other characters; characters who have an *actual* childhood friendship.
AND THAT WAS WHEN YOU...

YOU CALLED OUT TO ME.
SUNEATER!

The name his friend gave him lights his way!
Another timid/outgoing pair. Another hero name deriving from a childhood nickname. Why stan Bakugo and Izuku when Mirio and Tamaki are *right there*?

We go through that whole long arc rescuing Eri and, building off of All Might’s fight against AFO, seeing more overtly how friendship and support connects to battle. It’s no longer just a matter of inspiring the hero to victory, Nighteye believes that the wish to save another is strong enough to *twist fate*.

I mean holy shit.

(Also RIP Nighteye you were the stern, strangely humor obsessed character I never knew I needed.)
The most we see of Bakugo during all this is his supplementary training and *theoretically* the teachers hit the nail on the head with this.
That is 'Heart'.
The problem is that 99% of these scenes are treated as jokes.

Yes, Bakugo has had some of the most dramatic arcs so far and the story needs moments of humor, but not during the one time everyone overtly acknowledges how much his attitude and perspective needs work. I’d have MUCH preferred a serious treatment of Bakugo’s issues as opposed to ‘lol let’s stick him with a bunch of rambunctious grade schoolers that’ll be fun.’
With maybe 75% of the humor stripped away the ridiculous premise could have been treated more seriously (as is common in manga) and we could have thought through Bakugo’s legitimate desire to harm the kids to keep them in line.
BAKUGOU HAS STATED HIS... UH... UNIQUE POINT OF VIEW!

SO... WE JUST GOTTA GET ALONG WITH ALL THE KIDS, RIGHT?!
(Side note: he tells Todoroki that this was “how he was raised” but again, there’s no evidence of this. I’m convinced Bakugo—given his naturally violent nature—translated a fairly common hit from his mom into stuff like this. Even if he was hit beyond playful slaps, that’s not an excuse. Todoroki was abused and he’s not trying to hurt his peers. Izuku gets angry hits from Iida, All Might, etc. and doesn’t turn that on anyone else. Bakugo is the only one who wants to stone people...)

We have his obsession with uncovering the one “strongest” kid and communicating through fighting.
AND HE'S ALREADY DOOMED TO FAIL!

His hypocrisy.
Whether there were teachers other than the one we saw who allowed Bakugo to use his quirk however he pleased.
And we’re reminded that Horikoshi knows how much Bakugo doesn’t fit within the hero community.
There’s a lot we can infer from this scene, but what everyone focuses on is this:
He speaks! Kindly! Imparting an important lesson he’s still working to learn! Yes, this is legitimately Good, even if it is undercut with more humor.
My problem is that Bakugo is now given these ‘soft’ moments, but when he really speaks his mind? Nothing has changed. Skipping ahead just a bit, take this moment during the cultural festival prep.
OR RATHER-

BAKUGOU, PLEASE!
NOTHING WILL COME OF IT!
DON'T SPEAK ILL OF US IF YOU DIDN'T EVEN PARTICIPATE IN THE CONVERSATION.

ISN'T IT SICKENING?

DOING SHIT LIKE THAT ALL IN THE NAME OF "STRESS RELIEF"—WHAT ELSE IS IT OTHER THAN SELF-GRATIFICATION?
DON'T DESERVE MY COURTESY.
WHY DO WE HAVE TO CONCERN OURSELVES WITH PEOPLE'S FEELINGS?
IT'S NOT ABOUT INDULGENCE, IT'S A BATTLE...!! IF YOU'RE ON BOARD, THEN GET READY.

YOU'RE ALL SO INTENT ON PLEASING EVERYONE, THEN JUST QUIT!

BECAUSE I'M GONNA FIGHT!

EVERYBODY IN U.A,
I'LL KNOCK YOU DEAD WITH MY CONVY!!
I kept this nearly in its entirety because it tells us a lot about Bakugo’s views, despite the “growth” we’ve seen. Honestly I don’t put much stock in the fact that he decided to play in the band. I always keep form in mind (what the story needs to happen) and it’s clear that the cultural festival is a thing that everyone participates in. The story needs all the classes to participate for unity and so Bakugo’s sudden acceptance reads less like growth and more like a really OOC moment. Especially given how much he’s avoided interaction up until now.

Rather, think about what he’s saying here. Nothing will come of being a good person. Why do we have to concern ourselves with peoples’ feelings? Everything is still a battle... I’m made just as uncomfortable by this speech as I was with his views back at the very beginning of the series. This tells me that Bakugo hasn’t learned ANYTHING about how important being considerate, working together, enacting kindness, and being creative is to winning the battles he’s so obsessed with. Just a few chapters later Izuku succeeds in using his air gun because he remembers Ashido’s advice from dance lessons. This is the sort of stuff Bakugo will never take seriously, let alone learn.

Furthermore, he still honestly believes that kindness isn’t a thing that even exists. He’s a selfish person, so obviously 1-A must be selfish too. They’re only doing this for “self-gratification.” Really? This class specifically molded their activity with the hope that their choice would let everyone else have fun and blow off some steam. The closest we get to “self-gratification” is Ashido wanting to involve her favorite thing, dancing.
Bakugo’s speech here tells me a lot: he’s still selfish, he’s still violent, he still considers himself better than everyone else (“People that sicken me don’t deserve my courtesy”—which is apparently his entire class), and he still thinks about the world in this warped way where doing something nice for your school is somehow “indulging the enemy.”

“If you’re so intent on pleasing everyone then just quit.”

*Bakugo still doesn’t care about other people* and three incredibly brief conversations isn’t going to change my mind about that. When push comes to shove this is the shit he believes and molds his life around.

These are not the beliefs of a hero.

These are.
Around the time of the cultural festival we learn more about Aoyama. He provides another excellent contrast to Bakugo because he’s introverted while still being heroic
HE'S NOT THE TYPE OF PERSON WHO ACTIVELY GETS INVOLVED WITH PEOPLE.
and when he decides not to join in, it’s for reasons beyond just hating other people.
We see that at least now Bakugo is *asking* to shoot dangerous explosions at people.
And during the cultural festival he lets out some of that vicious rage on the drums,
but is focusing once again on how they “won” while a bunch of minor characters experience growth. These two upperclassmen even had similar ideas about how 1-A was being selfish/stupid in their presentation, but they changed that tune real quick—pun intended.
WE WENT TO WATCH BECAUSE WE WERE GOING TO RIDE THE YOU GUYS!
We see more parallels with Endeavor that completely encompass my feelings about the series’ treatment of abusers. No, a guy remembering a flower you like doesn’t make up for years of emotional and physical abuse. No, I don’t feel worried for Endeavor just because we quickly had him chatting with All Might and telling Todoroki he’s proud. BNHA has a habit of saying, “You should feel/believe this because a sympathetic character feels/believes it,” even though these feelings aren’t justified. I’m not buying it. Don’t tell me it’s “wrong” to hate someone who has entirely earned that hatred.
At this point, he basically feels like a complete stranger.

But, I can't forgive him... for how he treated you and Shoto, as though you
DIDN'T EXIST.

IT FEELS LIKE HE INTENDS TO LEAVE IT ALL BEHIND.

WHETHER IT'S THE PAST, OR HIS BLOOD TIES,
I TOLD HIM I LIKED IT.

THIS FLOWER...

? 

I'LL BECOME A HERO YOU CAN AR-AREN'T THERE ANY S-STRONGER-ER HERO-ROES?
And that’s about it. Anti-climatic, yes, but that’s where we’ve left off. Will Bakugo turn into a legitimate hero? Will the series last long enough to allow that to happen, especially given the snail’s pace he’s moving? These are questions I obviously can’t answer. I do think it is a snail’s pace though. People latch onto moments where Bakugo speaks civilly or agrees to team up when working alone has finally proven to be completely impossible—really, REALLY simple things—and read them as enormous, fantastic feats. But it’s only because he started off at the lowest point that these appear wonderful on the surface. It’s all comparative. No one else has as much to learn as Bakugo and no one is resisting their lessons like he is. We’ve reached a point where three times now he’s said a sentence without yelling it. Whoohoo? Just because he’s reached a state where he’s sometimes, randomly bearable doesn’t mean he’s anywhere close to being a hero.

And I don’t think he ever will be. I’ve written a goddamn *novella* explaining why and my
concluding summary is the same as my beginning, he doesn’t care about people. We’ve never seen him rescue someone. We’ve never seen him sacrifice himself or something he loves for another. We’ve seen him 1. be scared at All Might dying and 2. say some encouraging words to Kirishima and Izuku, but as I’ve explained multiple times, unexpected moments like these don’t suddenly cure someone of being an abuser. At the end of the day Bakugo wants to be a hero so he can be the best; so he can be *powerful*. That mindset—to that extent—is the exact opposite of what it means to be a hero.

Nearly 200 chapters and Bakugo only cares about one person: himself. I don’t care how many more quiet words of wisdom we get, or how often Horikoshi wants to give us those ‘wink wink’ moments where he acknowledges how horrible his character is while insisting that we should root for him anyway. Bakugo is selfish and as such is the exact opposite of a hero.

I hate Bakugo. I hate him because he’s a horrible person who isn’t appropriately *acknowledged* to be horrible by the narrative. I hate him enough that I spent all this time compiling a meta that, I hope, will help explain why a lot of us still hate him despite this supposed growth. You love Bakugo? Identify with him? Think he’s hilarious? An integral part of the story? Desperate to watch him succeed? I’m glad! As I said at the start of all this nonsense, I’m happy that you enjoy his presence in the story. But for me, sadly, Bakugo is the only thing that makes reading BNHA a chore.

Peace, friends
The call came in at 9:38pm. Aizawa read the message on his phone and stood, calmly retrieving his jacket from a nearby chair. Shoji asked where he was off to this late—weren't they all watching a movie?—but Aizawa reassured the kids that he'd be back in just a bit. He'd even pick up snacks. Cookies? Fine. Iida, Yaoyorozu, you're in charge until then. Don't let anyone blow up the dorms.

Aizawa promised Ashido he'd pick up something sour and the second the door shut behind him he broke into a run.

*Damn* the problem child.

Not really. Never that, but Aizawa needed to turn fear in a specific direction and his fear almost always manifested as anger. He knew he shouldn't have allowed the boys a night away. He'd cautioned against it, vehemently, but Nedzu insisted that the kids needed time away from the dorms, time spent with their families and non-hero friends. They'd go out no more than three at a time and always with a hero guard. Fat lot of good that had done them.

The moment Izuku, Kirishima, and Todoroki had approached him about a sleepover at Todoroki's place—Endeavor conveniently out of the country—Aizawa had started preparations of his own. He'd vetted the pro, Thunderclap, well aware of the kind of damage Kaminari could inflict when he put his mind to it and imagined that in the hands of an adult. He'd personally searched the Todoroki household before saying goodbye to the boys just hours ago. And before he went Aizawa had introduced them to U.A.'s newest form of security. They'd be rolling the app out to all the students later that week, but for now his kids were the test subjects. A single button got them in contact with their teacher. A single press would send out an alert.

The alert Aizawa had gotten just moments before.

He was out of the dorms and across U.A.'s fields in a flash. One hand looped his capture weapon off his neck, connecting it to a tree branch and swinging effortlessly over the gate. His other hand gripped the phone in his pocket, pressing re-dial again and again and again. Torodoki wasn't picking up. Neither was Kirishima. Or Izuku. The landline went to voicemail. If one of them had mistakenly
sent the alert Aizawa would expect at least one of them to pick up and explain themselves. Teenage boys could be incredibly stupid when it came to things like this. His weren’t.

Aizawa was three blocks down his route when he gave up and started calling All Might instead.

***

Heroes got used to the thrum of adrenaline in their veins. They never stopped being scared—at least Aizawa didn’t—but they learned to turn what felt like panic to their advantage. How to sharpen eyesight instead of letting it tunnel; throwing harder kicks with the shaking energy in their knees. Aizawa knew fear well. He lived with it every day of his life and never expected it to go away. This though...

... this he didn't know how to handle. Fearing for himself had nothing on fearing for a child.

Aizawa bit into his tongue and landed next to Todoroki's place.

"Shota," came a whisper and he just kept himself from throwing his quirk at Yagi. Not that it would have done him much good. Stepping out of the shadows was a skeleton frame, the lines of his face dug deep with worry. Of course. A smaller form was easier to hide, more suited for scouting the area, and if anyone spotted the familiar All Might silhouette out their window there’d be panic. Or there’d be mobs of fans. Or both. Aizawa felt a shiver crawling up his spine and told himself that it was only at the imagine of manic civilians cornering him on a Saturday night.

"Mm," was his only response. Less than two true words between them, but it felt like they'd held an entire conversation. Yagi’s eyes snapped to the front of the Todoroki household where a prone form was just visible, propped carefully against the fence. Thunderclap. His gaze then moved to the light shining from the second story windows, a happy yellow that contrasted the hero's prone form out front. There were no sounds of distress that Aizawa could hear and no other signs of struggle. If anything, the quiet of the street made him fear the worst. Danger brought forth tell-tale screams. Tragedy often passed unnoticed.

Yagi had his fist balled so tight that Aizawa could see the tendons in his arms shaking, even in the darkness. His head jerked once and Aizawa nodded. Yagi took the front door—straightforward, prominent, brave. Aizawa swung himself onto the roof and kept out of the window’s light—hidden, lithe. If anything was still inside that house it wasn't getting out.
From the corner of his vision Aizawa saw familiar whips of smoke and took that as his cue. As All Might knocked in the door—"I am here!"—Aizawa used the noise to cover the sound of him breaking the window.

The room was just that, a room. Mats, table, a few potted plants. A jacket hanging over the back of the chair was the only sign of life. It was all too sterile... but what he thought of Enji's habits wasn't the issue here. What was important was that there was no one else in the room and no signs of a fight. Aizawa eased around the door just as All Might came bounding up the steps.

The light was emanating from the room between them. It sounded like a TV was on.

All the noise All Might was making should have drawn out whoever was in there. Which was entirely the point. They came crashing out, cowered at the sight of the #1 hero while Aizawa attacked from behind. It was a simple and effective strategy that they'd pulled off numerous times since they'd started working together. No one crashed through the door though. There were no panicked, whispered conversations coming from inside. That could mean only one thing and for a moment All Might's grin was replaced with a fury born from fear. Aizawa dug nails into his palm and left blood on the door when he eased it open.

Both of them were expecting the room to be empty, their kids kidnapped. The silence, stillness, and Thunderclap's unconscious form outside all spoke to it. It what was logical, even right—as much as the thought churned his stomach. Kidnapped U.A. heroes made sense to him.

Not this.

Izuku, Kirishima, and Todoroki were seated calmly around the television. Backs straight, heads perfectly—identically—aligned. They didn't seem to be aware of anything except the screen in front of them, despite the fact that it played nothing but static. If Aizawa had a chill down his spine before it was a full blown arctic now.

All Might seemed much the same. As he crossed the threshold he stumbled right out of his muscled form, mist briefly obscuring their vision. Aizawa waved it away, his hand shaking and frantic, but when his vision cleared the kids were still just sitting there, their faces hidden. When Yagi opened his mouth to speak Aizawa had to tramp down on the urge to stop him. It was stupid and instinctual, too many nights watching horror films convincing him that if they broke the peace in any way the kids would turn, their faces gruesome and deformed. They'd be monsters, and Aizawa hated himself for thinking that because it was clear some other, true monster had already been through here.

"Midoriya? Izuku?"

He did turn. Izuku looked exactly as he should... except for the fact that there was nothing Izuku in his expression.
"Hi," he said. "Is everything all right?"

It wasn't. Not at all, and when Aizawa met Yagi's eyes he could see that he knew it too.

***

Two hours later Aizawa walked numbly into the convenience store three blocks from U.A.'s entrance. He picked out two packages of cookies and grabbed one of every brightly colored, vaguely sour candy on the rack. After a moment Aizawa took up a handle of chocolate as well. It wasn't a stiff drink, but it would have to do. He needed something. Anything.

Walking back into the dorm common room proved to be an exercise in carefully crafted indifference. The kids wanted to know why he'd been gone so long and luckily a grunt about hero business was enough to distract them. That and the mound of sweets he dumped on the table. As they took advantage of the gifts Aizawa crept towards his room. Only Tsu seemed interested in his departure and he carefully avoided her eyes.

He couldn't look; couldn't compare them.

Instead Aizawa locked his door with a note protruding, written in a shaky hand that made it abundantly clear he was only to be disturbed for an absolute emergency. He popped in his headphones, drowned out the sound of happy chatting outside, stuffed chocolate in his mouth, and sat back to watch his notifications. Aizawa let his eyes drag between his phone and his laptop until early morning light finally filtered into his room.

No one called. There'd been no change.

***

In the end there wasn't much to say. Kirishima, Izuku, and Todoroki arrived back in class Monday morning. Aizawa had his hand casually looped into his capture weapon and his gaze trained on the rest of the class. They noticed it too and the collective halting of breath was somehow so loud that it made his ears ring.

The boys who sat down in those seats weren't the boys who'd left them.

Oh, Izuku and the others looked like their counterparts, but that wasn’t fooling any of them. Aizawa didn’t care if the kid had the exact same flyaway strands of hair and messy tie he was always telling him to take care of; that the one who looked like Kirishima had been able to demonstrate his quirk on command; the the third had nodded calmly when Recovery Girl—an unusual strain in her voice—admitted that he sported all the expected injuries, from the scar on his face to the ache in his bones. None of that meant shit. They didn’t act like his boys. One look in their eyes and Aizawa knew that they were being duped. Still, it was reassuring to see the rest of his kids stiffening as well. They felt
“Sensei,” Iida said, for once his voice a cracking whisper instead of the normal, boisterous command. He was staring at the Izuku across the room with a horrified expression, one that—unless you knew them both—wasn’t justified by a kid just sitting there. Aizawa had to resist the urge to tie these… things up and wipe that look off Iida’s face.

Instead he gripped tight to his pant leg hidden behind the desk and said, “Settle down. Or did you forget how to attend school over the weekend?”

Uraraka’s was blinking rapidly, looking more shell-shocked than he’d ever seen her in battle. “But, Sensei… that’s not—”

“Anything worth getting excited about. Your friends left, now they’re back. I don’t see why any of you need to point that out.”

Never let it be said that his kids were stupid. Though it took some of them an extra moment, by the time Aizawa had fully looked up they’d gotten it, seen through his words and were working to obey him. They knew that he knew and although it didn’t lessen the tension in any way, no one was foolish enough to push the issue.

With a wrench of his head Iida tore his gaze away from Izuku. Kaminari still gapped open-mouthed at Kirishima, but didn’t actually speak. Yaoyorozu tried to share a smile with Todoroki and when it didn’t work she subtly shifted her desk away with a haunted expression.

The real Todoroki would have smiled back. It would have been awkward and even a little strained, but it would have been there.

With heart beating like a jackrabbit, Aizawa began his lesson.

He was careful not to mention anything they didn’t have time to go over again later because no one was really listening. Aizawa never turned his back on them and he was feeling particularly fidgety today, allowing him to keep a continued hold on his weapon. When Ashido gave a quiet, heartfelt sob in the back everyone turned… except for those three. Aizawa grit his teeth and, taking a chance, pointed a finger at Izuku’s raised hand.

He smiled, benign and hollow.

“That particular protection act was passed in ‘93, Sensei,” he said. “It requires that any pro hero be at least 18 years old before they apply for a permanent license. It’s seen as a way of protecting childhood as well as the community from heroes not mature enough to take on that responsibility yet.”
“Fuck that!”

Factual information, but given with none of Izuku’s pleased embarrassment; the rambling divergences that punctuated anything he had to share about heroes. That, more than anything, seemed to push Bakugo over the edge.

There were cries of alarm as Bakugo blasted himself right out of his seat. With a curse Aizawa used his weapon to grab hold of the window latch, slamming it open and letting a Fall breeze blow through the room. When the smoke had cleared Bakugo had Izuku pinned to the floor, one hand knotted in his shirt while the other sizzled fire near his cheek. The smile he bore was… different than the one Aizawa was used to seeing.

“Who are you?” Bakugo hissed. Across from him half the class lay sprawled on the floor, his explosion having caught their desks in the crossfire. Jiro raised a hand as if to stop him and quickly clamped it over her mouth instead.

“Hm? What is it then? What the fuck did you do with Deku?”

Izuku looked up. His expression—if one were generous—might be described as slightly perturbed.

“Kacchan…”

“Don’t call me that!”

Aizawa reacted just in time. Foregoing his weapon he leapt across the space to grab Bakugo in a hold—loose, but binding. A quick activation of his quirk kept Bakugo from burning him and Aizawa turned his stare on the rest of his stunned class.

“Back to your dorms!” he barked, making eye contact with Iida and Yaoyorozu. They were already helping others to their feet and guiding the rest towards the door. Tsu looked as if she might vomit any moment. Koda was openly crying. “Stay there until I come for you. You three—”

Aizawa cut himself off, something cold coiling in his stomach. Kirishima stood calmly next to his ruined desk. Todoroki, all the way in the back, hadn’t even bothered to stand.

He swallowed. “You three, Principal’s office.” Aizawa didn’t let his quirk up until they were all the way out the door. If two tears streamed out it was only because he’d held it so long.

It felt appropriate though.
“Who are you,” Bakugo seethed, still struggling as Aizawa dragged him away from the prone Izuku, the one who watched them passively from a pile of wood. When they cleared the door he turned his attention to Kirishima’s receding back instead. “What are you!”

Aizawa wish he had an answer.

***

“That’s not them,” he said, voice a stunning imitation of Bakugo’s.

“I know,” Yagi whispered.

Nedzu, Hizashi, and Nemuri sat around the table with them, each showing their disquiet in small, personal ways. Their investigation of the Todoroki household hadn’t yielded anything beyond what Yagi and Aizawa had already seen for themselves. There was no sign of a struggle beyond an unconscious Thunderclap and he claimed to have no memory of the event. He’d been guarding a quiet street one moment, he’d seen a light... and then he waking up to All Might’s hand on his shoulder. A quick meeting with Tsukauchi’s younger sister proved his innocence.

Whatever they were dealing with had the ability to take out a pro in an instant. Or perhaps erase his memory of the attack. They attacked quick enough that none of his kids got an attack off—no melted ice on the walls, broken furniture, the dust that Kirishima sometimes shed—yet they’d been slow enough that Izuku could get off an alert. There were no ransom demands and the League hadn’t boasted about any victories. In short, there were plenty of questions and absolutely no answers. Aizawa ground his teeth, feeling the ache all the way up into his temple.

And then there were the things left behind.

Preliminary tests showed that, biologically speaking, those were the same kids who’d left Saturday afternoon. Same DNA, same scars, same, same, same. More alarmingly, they appeared to possess the same memories as well—or at least the same objective knowledge. Sunday was devoted exclusively to testing them, but no matter what questions the pros tried there was always a steady, reliable answer. The names of Todoroki’s extended family. How many points Kirishima earned in his entrance exam. Izuku’s old home address. The private talk Todoroki and Recovery Girl had after the Sports Festival. Where Kirishima hid his keepsakes in his dorm room. All Might’s secret. No matter what they threw at them there was always an answer. If anything, these three remembered too much. There was no reason why Kirishima would remember the color of Nemuri’s shoes when she'd popped into the dorm three weeks ago, but he’d smiled, said pale yellow, and group picture proved him right.

Aizawa had even gone out of his way to contact Mrs. Midoriya. Oh, he didn’t dare tell her what had happened—not yet anyway—but he’d asked for personal information under the guise of beefing up security. Is there anything unique between the two of you? Something only Izuku would know?
Over the phone she’d hesitated, then gave him an old password Izuku had used as a child. Anyone who claimed to know Inko or said they were picking Izuku up in her staid would have to provide the code first. Prove themselves.

April 13th 2:30pm. The day of All Might’s debut.

No one doing research on the kids would dig that up. Yet the thing sitting across from Aizawa knew it in a heartbeat.

The police manhunt across the blocks surrounding Todoroki’s household revealed nothing. All their tests and interrogations, nothing. In the end they’d had no basis—other than feelings—for keeping the three out of school. They were returned to his classroom with the hope that being among friends might lend them some insight.

And that had ended just splendidly.

“It’s obviously a quirk,” Nedzu was saying, paws pressed tightly under his chin. “Though I cannot think of one that would allow an imposter to take on both a physical form and that level of knowledge.”

“Unless it’s the League,” Hizashi said. “I can’t be the only one remembering that their little Nomu had more than one quirk at its disposal.”

“You’re not,” Aizawa growled.

Yagi shook his head though. “I can’t see what any of them would accomplish with this. Why not simply kidnap them as they did Bakugo? Why the replacements?”

“And the Nomus we’ve seen are hardly intellectuals,” Nedzu said. “They could, theoretically, copy both a person’s looks and their memories, but function as these three are…? No. I hardly think so.”

“They’re creepy like Nomus,” Hizashi muttered, sliding lower into his seat.

Nemuri’s hand came down to pat his shoulder. “We’re overlooking a possibility. Perhaps these three are our boys, just… changed somehow. We might need to heal them, not find them.”

“No,” Aizawa snapped and then immediately shut his eyes at the mistake. He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Sorry. You’re right, it’s sound logic, but it’s not them. I can’t explain how I know,” he spread his hands in defeat. “But I do.”

Nedzu’s eyes homed in on Yagi. “You agree?”
A short nod was all they got. Yagi’s eyes glinted like steel.

“Then I’m willing to continue working under that assumption. Out of us all you two know them the best—particularly when it comes to Midoriya.”

“That’s true,” Nemuri said. She mustered up a shaky smile and Aizawa blinked back, any tension forgotten. That didn’t mean any of them knew what to do though.

“I have students out there;” Aizawa said softly, staring down at the wood of the table. “Most of them are no doubt in a panic wondering what the hell happened to their classmates. One is currently sedated with Recovery Girl.” He grit his teeth and bore the memory of Bakugo screaming at Kirishima’s back; shouting for the fake Midoriya to fight him. “The other three are now under 1-B’s watch and the rest are missing. So what are we going to do?”

Nedzu always had words to spare, even in situations like this. He spoke about how they would continue the investigation, the interrogations, the search. There was mention of friends and allies that could be of use in this situation, rare quirks that might get the job done. Whatever exactly their job proved to be.

They were all meaningless to Aizawa.

He stood from the table and made an excuse he wouldn’t remember five minutes from now. Though Aizawa had his gaze buried somewhere in his capture weapon he still managed to make eye contact with Yagi. He stood as well and they left the room together, moving just as easily as they had two days ago. Aizawa even thought he spotted a few wisps of smoke coming off Yagi’s shoulders, though he didn’t fully transform.

“What’s your plan?” Yagi asked, voice barely carrying the few inches between them. A second year passed by and he quickly broke into a smile, waving and continuing to wave until they’d rounded the hall corner. Then his smile dropped. “Aizawa?”

“I’m getting answers,” he growled and picked up the pace.

***

In all honesty Aizawa wasn’t sure he had a plan. A part of him was convinced that he would take the interrogations to their natural conclusions; do something unmentionable in the name of finding his kids. A snide voice reminded him that, eerie or not, he could never do that to someone wearing their faces. One look at Yagi told him he was thinking the exact same thing.
In the end it was just a staring match: Yagi and Aizawa shoulder to shoulder in support, the three others sitting across from them, also shoulder to shoulder—though with none of the warmth.

“Where the hell are they?” Aizawa was past coersion and threats. His voice was brittle.

Kirishima tilted his head. “Where are who, Sensei?”

“Stop—”

Yagi landed a hand on his arm before he could explode. When Aizawa looked he found Yagi with his eyes closed, completely still. There was silence for one minute… then three, the tension in his shoulders slowly easing away. Aizawa was amazed to feel the fingers around his wrist loosen into a gentle touch.

When Yagi opened his eyes again there was peace. Or at least a convincing imitation. The smile was back.

“Perhaps we’ve been going about this the wrong way,” he said. “After all, it’s not very nice of us to break down the door, cart you back here, say all sorts of terrible, nasty things… it’s not like you’ve hurt us.”

Aizawa opened his mouth to say that they very much had hurt him, but was shushed again. To his shock Yagi stood and went to kneel beside the Izuku copy, his hand moving to lay atop his knee. If there was hesitation, Aizawa didn’t catch it.

“It’s a failing of ours, isn’t it?” Yagi whispered. “ Responding with violence. Jumping to conclusions. We’ve been conditioned to protect ourselves and those around us for so long… it gets easy to see threats where maybe there aren’t any. You look like children to me…” he swallowed visibly. “I think maybe you are children and regardless of what role you might have played in our students’ disappearance, if I were a kid I wouldn’t be very happy with how I’d been treated these last two days. In fact, I think I’d be really scared.”

The three of them were notable for their lack of expressions. A complete indifference to everything going on around them. Aizawa had watched them sit calmly as they were thrown around by the heroes, threatened in every way meaningful, attacked by a classmate, stuffed away in this classroom with a vigilant Kan right next door. Nothing had fazed them. Yet here they were, oddly attentive to Yagi’s words. In synch the three of them leaned forward and seemed to fill with something like life,
responding more to a little honesty than they had to a school’s worth of anger. Izuku’s hand moved to grab hold of Yagi’s in turn. He jumped a little, but didn’t pull away.

“You’re scared?” Yagi confirmed, but the Todoroki shook his head.

“We’re not scared of you,” he said. “We’re scared for them.”

“Them?”

Them. The only ‘them’ that had mattered in the last 48 hours. Aizawa suddenly felt claustrophobic in the large, sunlit room and knew that it was entirely due to the heavy gazes turned on him now. They still seemed blank, unblinking, and yet paradoxically accusing as well. Aizawa resisted the urge to growl that he took care of his students. He was doing his best—they all were—to keep them safe. He wanted to yell that it was their doing that had sparked this response and all they needed to do was leave for everything to smooth back over.

…except a vision of Shigaraki rose in his mind and Aizawa knew that wasn’t true.

“There are no guarantees,” he said instead and for whatever reason that had Kirishima nodding. Then just as quickly he shook his head.

“That’s not the kind of safety we’re worried about.”

Until now it hadn’t occurred to Aizawa to think about who had been taken. He knew well that there was strength in these three boys, but also vulnerability as well. Out of all of 1-A they were some of the most damaged, with Kirishima hiding it the best. It was there though. If anyone had asked him who was in the most emotional danger… he might have named them at the top of the list.

“You want to guard them?” Todoroki asked and the “Yes” was out of Aizawa’s mouth before he’d even registered the question.

“You love them?” Kirishima asked and Yagi blinked rapidly.

“Of course,” he whispered.
“Good. That's all we wanted. It’s easy to forget. Harder when you miss them.”

Yagi collapsed fully onto the floor as Izuku and the others stood. Aizawa watched, numb, as they headed in a straight line towards the door. Right as Izuku’s foot hit the threshold there was a light bright enough to blind them. Aizawa was already conditioned for things like this and he had his eyes open again just a second later… but they were already gone.

In the next breath a call came through: Izuku, panicked, yelling about how he thought someone was inside the house. With shaking fingers Aizawa put them on speaker and listened to the three go from asking for backup to pausing, confused about the sudden sunlight streaming from their windows. He didn’t have any words for them yet. Aizawa just listened.

As did Yagi, flat on the floor and wheezing with relief. He might have been crying, but Aizawa sure as hell wouldn’t have pointed it out if he was. He wasn’t that much of a hypocrite.

When the kids—their kids—were back at school and in the arms of their classmates, a chaos of confused yet relieved greetings, Nedzu would pull the two of them aside, asking what it had been. How had they gotten them back?

Yagi could only shake his head. “We just… talked to them.”

It didn’t appease Nedzu, but that was alright. Aizawa thought he understood.

Chapter End Notes

"An act to reflect the human soul,
Will light the darkness of shadow.
By living life of higher mind,
A changeling thee will never find.
In thy cradle a bundle of love,
Your child protected by God above."

- Chris DiSano Davenport

(This is what happens when you stumble across random Goodreads quotes!)
Support

Chapter Notes

Sorry it’s a short one, folks. Sadly they're probably going to be short and slow for a long while. The semester has officially begun.

But this little slice of nonsense is for Wolfsrainrules who asked for pro hero Deku in casual clothes/his friends' merch. Hope you like it! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“—in other news, pro hero Deku was spotted outside of a gaming shop in the Akihabara district earlier this afternoon. Though lacking his uniform and obviously off duty, Deku—civili name Izuku Midoriya—was quickly recognized by his distinctive scars and was mobbed by well-wishers looking for autographs and selfies. There was also a great deal of excitement involving a particular hat, said to bear the logo of hero Froppy, that Deku was wearing. The crowd halted traffic for a good ten minutes, but the delayed drivers only had this to say.”

“Why’d I be mad, man? You wanna be mad at Deku? Jeez.” The teenager raises both hands as if to hold off the very thought. “Guy can’t help it. Not his fault. And I get everyone wanting an autograph an’ shit. Deku’s fierce. In a, you know, in a cute way. He’s got them dimples. Girls love dimples. Guys too!”

“Traffic was restored to its normal function after three other pro heroes calmly encouraged the crowd to disperse. Deku denied us a comment on his increased popularity since the incident at the Oak Valley Community Hospital, but here at the JNN we believe that blush speaks for itself.”

***

“Hey, hey, HEY, listeners!! It’s 1:00 am by my watch. Time to ROCK AN’ ROLL with your favorite radio host. I’m Present Mic, bringing you the latest in hero news and gossip. More gossip than anything else, but then I know why you faithfults are tuning in, ehh? On tonight’s agenda we’ve got an exclusive interview with up-and-coming Red Riot, the preliminary popularity polls for this season’s hero ranking, and finally an update on the new line of merch coming out this July. I’ve got a whole slew of info for you listeners as well as some TO DIE FOR photos.

“Wait, what’s that you say? But Mic, we’re your listeners. What are we gonna do with a batch of photos, huh? No matter how utterly amazing and difficult to come by? Well. If you go to www.raisetheroof.com—our neeeew domain—you’ll find these photos uploaded and organized for
you to browse through at your leisure! I do encourage that browsing because—ah! HA. Some of you have already found them and are lighting up our notifications! Yes, listeners, that is absolutely pro hero Deku wearing a Uravity sweatshirt and matching sneakers. Stylish, isn’t he? I love this guy! And there’s a whole lot more where that came from. Check out the album for our dear Deku sporting Uravity shorts, bracelets, athletic gear, and even a swimsuit! How did I get these amazing photos, you ask? Well, I’d have to kill you if I told you. BUT let’s just say that as a former teacher of his, years-old blackmail has a very long shelf life. Vote now on what other merch you’d like to see Deku in and I swear by all the gods of music that I’ll make it happen. One way or another, folks!!"

***

For years you all have been faithful readers of this blog and you know that I would never lead you astray, right? Well, okay. I totally would. It depends on what exactly ‘leading you astray’ means and exactly how funny it would be if I did it. But the one thing I would actual never ever do is endorse something I didn’t like just for a buck. I’m not that poor. What I’m saying is that the new Ingenium racing game is THE game of the summer and you can take my semi-honest, addicted as hell word for it.

It’s like an open world MMO but without all the grinding. Kinda like Grand Theft Auto except you’re a goody-goody hero instead of some lowlife crook. It’s still got that adrenaline rush though. You play Ingenium—duh—racing through the city streets and searching for people to save. You’ve got a limited amount of energy before your quirk gives out though and you’ve got to balance that among rescue, villain, and publicity work, all while doing little side quests that help boost your overall fame. Will you become the world’s Number One Hero? Can you rid each district of the villain infestation? Will you, like me, spend half your time escorting little old ladies across the street and fetching their groceries because honestly that’s totally what the real Ingenium would do? You decide!

And no, it’s not cheap. That’s probably the only real downside considering how fast the bugs are getting fixed. I swear to you though, if you’ve got some extra cash lying around you have GOT to add this game to your inventory. Still don’t believe me? Then please head on over here for a vid of the epic DEKU HIMSELF playing this game with Invisible Girl. It’ll make you laugh. You’ll cry. You’ll 100% be buying this game.

Come. Join the cult. Only your bank account and productivity time will regret it. It’s fine.

Deku wants you to!

***
ARE U THERE?

omfg pick up ur phone

READ. UR. TEXTS.

NOW GIRL

I GOT PHOTOS

fucking

nat i’ve got DEKU PHOTOS

I’VE GOT DEKU

IN A FREAKING SUIT

A SHINING HERO SUIT

(holy hell i’m gonna murder you what are you even doing rn)

okay just
deku. suit. (hnngggg his SHOULDERS). but a shining hero suit (IIIIIII CAAAAN’T STOP TWWIIIIINKLING) so it’s just the most obnoxious most BEST thing I have ever seen there were jewels and?? sequins?? so many sequins???? my eyes. they burn. so worth it though he had the BELT ON TOO this massive thing it had to be gold or something i swear. idek where this hot asshole was going - WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS JUST WALKING THE STREETS LIKE THAT? - but it was like a fever dream. i am dead and gone. just carve that into my gravestone: killed by deku’s sequined ass

ANYWAY

there are pics. and maybe a vid. i can’t believe ur abandoning me right now

(for real though would’ve sent ‘em already but lol data? who’s that. gotta find wifi first)

THEN CALL ME

***

“—it’s years since your retirement. Everyone’s curious about what you’ve been up to.”

Yagi shrugs, his skinny fame self-conscious under the cameras’ glare. “I’m afraid my schedule is pretty boring now.”
“Nonsense!”

“It’s true. I teach. Train some of the younger heroes… not that they need it anymore.”

His bashful smile is infectious. The live audience awws without needing any cue-cards. The host chuckles.

“Oh we know all about that training. Bit of a mess with Anima last week, wasn’t it?”

“Ah… we–we didn’t mean to call that many cats…”

“Ha! The twitter world got a kick of it though. Speaking of…you have something to show us tonight don’t you? It wouldn’t be a new line of Deku shirts, would it? Hmm? Something for our faithful audience, not to be released until 2019? Why, it would be a real treat if you did have something like that…”

Yagi’s smile is entirely different now when he stands, listening to the laughter at their antics, undoing the top button of his jacket to let more of the shirt peak through. “I’m afraid I couldn’t wear all of them.”

“One is more than enough, All Might!”

It certainly is for the fans. Seeing their favorite hero in a peer’s merch is always a treat.

Seeing their old fave in the new one’s white and emerald green? That was something special.

Chapter End Notes

Edit: So many new Pokemon Go friends! Holy moly I met my 3 requirement times like 16 you guys rock!! Also I will try to send gifts but lol I don’t get that many... it'll be on a rolling basis :D
Izuku found Shinso down in the cafeteria.

This wouldn’t be strange except that 1. it was nearly 2:00pm and 2. he hadn’t been looking for him. Rather, after discovering that Thirteen had (mistakenly) kept their section training through the lunch hour, Aizawa had grumbled something about calories and puberty, something else about nutrition, something-something-I’m-not-gonna-listen-to-you-brats-whine-all-afternoon (none of them had said a thing) and had sent Izuku down to the kitchen for a class-wide snack. So he’d expected an empty room with maybe Lunch-Rush hanging about. Not this.

“Hi, Shinso.”

He didn’t bother responding. Didn’t look up either. Izuku swallowed hard and nodded—mostly to himself—before making his way between the tables. He kept Shinso on his left the whole time and took tiny baby steps across the linoleum, like he was afraid of rousing something terrible. He’d made it almost halfway, feeling like he was failing some sort of test when he heard,

“Why’d Tanaka send you?”

Shinso was staring at him now. One eye glinted with sunlight, the other was hidden by the hair his hand pressed down across his face. He looked like he was gripping it and Izuku thought he could just make out the roots from here—tugged painfully tight.

“He didn’t.” A squeaking drew Izuku’s attention down to his own feet. He stopped their shuffling. “We were just hungry.” He waved a hand vaguely at the counter.

“The great 1-A gets food whenever they want now, huh?”

“The great 1-A cares too much about Thirteen Sensei’s feelings to remind them that they’d kept us late. Again.”

Something like a rough laugh emerged from Shinso’s throat and he kicked at the chair across from him, sending it skittering back. Izuku figured that was the closest thing to an invitation he could expect. Abandoning the food he sat primly in the appointed spot, feeling very much like he was on trial.

It always felt that way with Shinso. The few times they’d seen each other since the tournament, anyway. Not that he was mean. He just had an intense way about him, like he knew exactly what he wanted of people and often found them lacking. Izuku often got the same sense from Aizawa Sensei, except that his disappointment was always directed at someone else. Never 1-A. It was disconcerting to have that feeling turned on him now and Izuku sat up straighter, determined to help in whatever way he could.

Because you didn’t hang out in U.A.’s cafeteria all alone while the rest of your class had math
without there being a pretty bad reason. You just didn’t.

“Got a knife?” Shino asked.

Izuku startled. “Um… no?”

“You should. They’re useful.”

With that he flipped a small pocket knife out from the depths of his uniform and released the blade, immediately turning it one handed so that it pointed towards the ground. With a violence Izuku wasn’t expecting Shinso drove the point into the wood of the table. Tiny flakes came up as he started dragging it downwards and for a few breaths there was nothing but the slightly nauseating scritch-scratch of the metal.

“You’re mad,” Izuku observed. He felt a little wide-eyed.

“No.”

Huh. Didn’t sound sarcastic.

“Frustrated?”

The knife rose to point at him, Shinso clucking his tongue in an approving manner. Still pointing he leaned back, closed his eyes, and seemed to be wrestling with something Izuku couldn’t hope to tease out. That done Shinso went back to his carving and as he did he said,

“Think I’ve been expelled by now. No reason why Tanaka wouldn’t. He’s had plenty of time since this morning and if he hasn’t bothered to send anyone out looking for me…” The last of it ended in a shrug so large it sent the knife skewing off course.

Privately Izuku thought there were Swiss cheese sized holes in that logic. There were plenty of reasons why Tanaka wouldn’t expel one of his top students, just as there were plenty of reasons why they wouldn’t think to look for him in the hero courses’ cafeteria. It seemed pretty clear that this had happened before. The indifference towards expulsion though? That was new. Izuku found himself leaning forward against the table, squinting as he tried to find the boy who’d be getting into the hero course no matter what. If he was still there he was buried down too deep to see.

“Why would you be expelled?” Izuku asked. Something in his tone must have rankled because Shinso scowled, abandoning the knife to mirror him—the two of them now breaching one another’s space.

“You’re not that dense, Midoriya.”

Izuku felt a smile tugging at his lips. “I don’t know. Iida says I can be pretty dense at times. So why don’t you just explain it.”

“You really need me to spell it out?”

“Yes—”

No sooner had the syllable left his mouth than a familiar fog descended across Izuku’s mind. His body went pliant against the chair. His eyes glazed over. Oh. Shinso’s quirk. Yeah… he really should have picked up on that.

Whoops.
“Smack yourself for being a dumbass.”

Izuku lightly whacked the back of his own head and came out of the fog laughing. Shinso looked at him like he was crazy and yeah, Izuku knew that look. It was fine coming from Shinso though.

“I get it,” he said, letting his laugh taper off into something softer. “The teasing I mean. It wasn’t… I wasn’t like this in middle school. Not at all. I get that…people can be cruel.”

It wasn’t often that Izuku let himself think back to those times. Loud jeers from a whole class at once, various quirks used on him in private, the ones who’d gone old school and just shoved him down the steps, breaking his arm in the process… what was the point of dwelling on it? He was here. He’d made it. Or rather, so many others had led him here. It seemed silly to waste their gift being sad all the time, even if Izuku sometimes wanted to.

It seemed especially bad to dwell on something that Shinso was still dealing with.

Izuku came out of his thoughts to the sound of more scratching. Shinso seemed able to carve—if he was really carving anything at all—totally blind because he was staring at him with an intensity that once more made his stomach drop down into his knees. Thinking back on his words Izuku realized that he should be bracing for anger next. Isn’t that how things went down? People always got angry whenever Izuku claimed to understand them because what did a quirkless kid know, huh? Nothing. That’s what. Nothing at all. Who was he to understand them?

Except Shinso wasn’t them and Izuku wasn’t the him he used to be. If anything, Shinso’s whole body seemed to drop a little at the admission.

“It’s not just teasing. Ever thought about hurting someone?” he asked, the non-sequitur throwing Izuku for a loop. “Like really hurt them? I do. Sometimes. And I can make that happen if I wanted to. Teasing is the least of my problems.”

Izuku reached across the gap to pause the knife still working incessantly at the wood. “What happened?”

So Shinso told him. Or rather, he provided a few monotone sentences and Izuku put his dumbass-ness aside to fill in the rest. Apparently a group from General Studies had picked a fight with the Support Course off school grounds, something small enough that it would normally be shrugged off as an adolescent squabble… but loud enough that it drew media attention. At least for a time. Izuku wondered what kind of strings Nedzu had pulled in order to keep something like that quiet—Izuku himself kept tags on every ‘Hero’ hashtag out there—especially when the public was poised right now to turn against them. A lack of precautions on the school’s part since USJ. Inadequate lessons in temperament and responsibility. Even though U.A. had clearly been able to squash it that didn’t suddenly let the kids involved off the hook. When questioned about why they had attacked their peers the General Studies students only had one thing to say:

Shinso made them do it.

“Everyone knows it’s bullshit,” he muttered, wrenching his hand away from Izuku’s so he could resume his carving. “Or at least they should. My quirk doesn’t work that way. I can’t control a whole crowd like that and I never even saw those boys once school got out. How the hell was I getting them to answer me, huh? But no,” Shinso started a laugh that he then aborted. “I managed it. Somehow. There’s more than one teacher here who’s willing to believe that.”

Izuku felt like he’d swallowed something slimy. His knee-jerk reaction was to protest—a U.A. instructor would never do something like that—but the truth was that he didn’t know many of the
teachers here. None of the hero kids did. Their education was restricted to a few choice pros and Aizawa Sensei had full control over whether they took lessons from anyone outside the program. From what Izuku understood, General Studies had a whole mess of teachers covering a wide range of subjects; a whole lot more than just their History and English. If there were people here that didn’t live up to U.A.’s reputation, Izuku had never encountered them.

…and that was probably the point.

He’d been silent too long. Shinso was staring at him strangely.

“They’re not really going to expel me,” he said. “Not without proof. Which they’re never going to have. Obviously. Plus some of my classmates joke about it, you know? ‘Oh Shinso, you made me spill my drink.’ ‘Did you tell me to forget this math lesson?’ Stuff like that. It’s fine, Midoriya. I’m just… tired.”

Why did it sound like Shinso was trying to reassure him?

Izuku stood, his chair scraping across the linoleum with a violence that made them both wince. Hardly waiting for Shinso to join him he started a quick pace towards the door and only belatedly caught the shhh of a knife getting pocketed and the scrape of a second chair. They were halfway back to the main hall before Izuku spoke again, his voice tight.

“I think about things,” he said, letting just a little anger slip through. “Not often and never in depth, but just… fleeting ideas, you know? What if I pushed back? What if I hit them? I’m good for it too,” and Izuku let some of One for All thread from his fingers up into his arm. “I think that’s normal. Like, um… what if I pulled the fire alarm?” He nodded at one as they passed it. “Thinking that doesn’t mean I’m actually going to do it and I don’t believe just thinking things makes you a bad person. You can think about brainwashing people, but if you don’t actually do it that’s fine. And—and—there’s a difference between thinking and fantasizing. I mean…”

He’d been talking too long. He was rambling. Izuku snapped his mouth shut and glanced a look at Shinso. He wasn’t responding, but he wasn’t walking away either. And Shinso would absolutely walk away if he felt they were done with this strange conversation.

They reached the classrooms in silence.

With some awful timing on Izuku’s part. They were just passing 1-A when Aizawa wrenched the door open, the tips of his hair beginning to float and the end of his capture weapon scrunched between a fist. He looked like he was fully prepared to march down to the kitchens and murder whatever had kept Izuku from returning—even if that thing was Izuku himself. Because yep, Aizawa took one look at his non-mutilated body, his hands empty of their snack, and seemed to rise right off the floor with indignation…

Then he caught sight of Shinso.

Izuku put a lot of stock in his ability to read people; expressions examined down to the most minute detail. He did this now, watching Aizawa move from surprised, confused, resigned, and then… proud? Izuku wasn’t sure he wanted to commit to that last one, but whatever it was, it was a whole lot better than where he’d started out. With a distinct roll of his eyes Aizawa slid the door back shut.

They could faintly hear him telling Izuku’s friends that they’d just be feeding themselves when they got home. Ignoring the heat in his cheeks, he knocked on 1-B’s door.

Right.
Kan Sensei was tall. Very, very tall. A part of Izuku would have loved to just melt into the floor as his eyes flashed between him and Shinso (the latter leaning cool as anything against the wall). Izuku held his ground though and even mustered up a smile.

“Hi, Sens—”

“Is someone dying?” Kan interrupted, crossing his massive arms and—god help them—seeming to grow taller. Izuku could just make out the heads of a few students peering from the back to try and see who’d interrupted their class.

“Um,” Izuku said eloquently, but it must have been translated as a ‘no’ because a millisecond later Kan was running over his words again.

“Have villains broken into the school?”

“Well…”

“Are you currently dying?”

Meekly Izuku shook his head and a few giggles drifted in from the classroom. Kan rolled his eyes (was he copying Aizawa?), though none of that good humor was shown to him. For Izuku his gaze was as hard as ever.

“Then why the hell are you interrupting my class, Midoriya?”

Shinso seemed just as curious (though he admittedly hid it better) and Izuku was well aware that he’d lose them both if he didn’t talk fast. Which he did. He was good at talking fast. Thirty seconds later he’d spewed a whole lot of words that held numerous repetitions, apologies, and vague self-drags, but essentially boiled down to, “Can I borrow Kaito?”

She’d already jumped up and hurried to the door halfway through his speech, apparently happy to escape a lecture no matter the reason why. Kan seemed less sure, opening his mouth to say something, but closing it again when Kaito swept under his arm and nearly tackled Izuku with a hug. He squeaked, stumbling a little under her weight.

“We’ll be back in a jiffy,” Kaito chirped, giving Kan a sunny smile. “Right, Midoriya?”

He swallowed hard. “R-right. We just wanted to chat for a second. It’s important.”

“Heart, huh.” Kan’s eyes slide to Shinso. “How’d you get wrapped up in all this?”

Shinso shrugged in a very, ‘Hell if I know, Sir’ way which Izuku didn’t think was entirely fair. He began none too subtly edging them away from the door and out of Kan’s shadow.

“Aizawa’s told me stories,” he said, making Izuku freeze. Stories? “You bring my girl back in one piece.”

“Sensei.”

“It’s not—we’re not—I literally just want to talk—”

But by then Shinso had snatched the back of Izuku’s shirt and was dragging him away.

The three of them ended up in a small alcove at the end of the hall, Izuku with the distinct impression that both Aizawa and Kan were somehow keeping any eye on them, despite that being impossible. Maybe.
“So what’s up?” Kaito asked. She flung herself onto the window ledge and pulled a lollipop from her pocket. “I’ve been waiting forever to eat this but Kan has this thing about letting us eat too many sweets…”

Izuku’s lips twitched. “Aizawa Sensei is the same. He says it’s bad for our health and—”

“Our teeth!” Kaito finished. “He’s one to talk with all those juice packets and I swear Kan is the one who got him hooked on those cookies. The ones covered with chocolate? Yeah. They spend too much time together.” The rest of that was muddled by strawberry flavored goodness.

“Why are we talking about sweets?”

Shinso had replaced the far wall with this one, leaning in a way that Izuku couldn’t help but think he’d practiced at some point. He didn’t look mad, though then again Shinso never looked mad exactly. At least he wasn’t stabbing things anymore and Izuku kept the distinct impression that he’d just up and leave if any of this was actually pissing him off. So asking long-suffering questions were an improvement in his book.

“Kaito,” Izuku said. “This is Shinso. Shinso, Kaito. Kaito’s quirk is really, really fascinating.”

“Aww you say that about all the quirks,” and Kaito leaned back, hand over her heart like she might faint at the attention.

Shinso just blinked. “Oh?”

“She tells time.”

It came out quieter than Izuku had intended; a little hopeful. He spread his arms as if to encompass all the possibilities. “I mean, actually, she can see times—right, Kaito? All sorts of information about an object providing she’s touching it. Like when it was last picked up, or when it was made—”

“You were born at 8:23pm fifteen years ago,” she said, hand now curled against the skin of Izuku’s wrist. Her eyes were a little glassy. “You last slept yesterday from 11:44pm to 7:00am, last ate at—jeez, Midoriya—9:32am today…” Kaito removed her hand and seemed to shake herself out of a daze. “Stuff like that. I can find out super specific things too if I’m given time. Ha. Time. But no really I want to go into information heroics.” Her grin turned a little feral around the lollipop. “Gonna intern in interrogation next year.”

“I didn’t know I was born then,” Izuku muttered. Mom would love that if she didn’t have it recorded already. “But yeah—yeah! It’s super cool…right, Shinso?”

Right. He didn’t need Izuku to spell it out for him. If accusations against him ever did get serious they could ask Kaito to prove when he’d last used his quirk. Or when someone else had last been under its effects.

Izuku was willing to bet that for most the answer was 0:00. Maybe outing a few liars would change things up a bit.

They could hope.

Shinso was staring at them both, gaze focused in the middle as his pointer finger beat frantically at his thumb. He finally shoved his whole hand at Kaito and she shook it, bewildered.
“So am I interrogating someone?” she asked, still cranking her arm up and down.

“Not yet,” Shinso said. He dropped her hand but mustered up a genuine smile. Kaito grinned.

“Awesome.” She kicked her legs against the sill. “But let’s just pretend I’m doing something super serious right now. Gotta finish this up before Kan sees. Want one?”

They could swing that. And when Kaito pulled another lollipop out and offered it to Shinso, when Shinso offered it to Izuku instead…

That felt a lot like ‘thank you.’

***

The next day Aizawa bustled them to lunch early with orders to eat their fill and Izuku found himself at that same cafeteria table. Uraraka was across from him, trying desperately to get her milk open.

“We train non-stop and they still make these things impossible to—oh thanks, Iida. Now you! Where did you disappear to yesterday? Aizawa Sensei wouldn’t say.”

Iida was already shaking his head. “Only you could find adventure on your way to the cafeteria, Midoriya.”

Maybe he deserved that, but Izuku looked down at his section of the table, the one with a ragged PLUS ULTRA carved into the wood, and felt absolutely no regrets.

“Oh, um… I was just helping out a friend.”

Chapter End Notes

Back at it with my OC bs. Yeah, we know 1-B and their quirks but it's just too easy to slam dunk whoever I need into that class. What can I say? Kan is a Dad just as much as Aizawa. Class size restrictions? What are those??

(Also I've now realized that at some point I'll need to do a Lunch Rush drabble)
Babysitting

Chapter Notes

It's inevitable that I throw all my faves into this situation at least once :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I honestly don’t understand what the problem is.”

Liar. Naomasa might have been able to run circles around a suspect but he’d never been able to hide his emotions from Yagi. He could see that smile peaking out from the corner of his lip and the twinkle that had lit up both eyes. Naomasa was well aware of what the problem was and now tortured Yagi with ignorance as well as this fostered off insanity. There were some things that a friendship could survive… and others that left the once strong bond in tattered, fragile pieces. This instance easily belonged to the latter. They’d never recover.

Probably.

In all honesty, Yagi wasn’t sure he wanted to label this as a problem per se. Oh, he was most assuredly a problem within the overall equation, but the topic itself?

…she was too cute for such cruel labels.

“I don’t know what I’m doing,” Yagi said, twisting worry around his words as he watched little Yui on the couch, propped against a mound of pillows and sucking on her own fist. It was apparently a very absorbing endeavor. “Naomasa you wish to leave me with this infant when I have no idea what I’m doing. I’m pretty sure that is the definition of a problem!”

“Pretty sure you’re dramatic,” he muttered, still focused on fixing his tie. A little louder he said, “She’s a toddler, Yagi. You’ve dealt with kids your entire career. How is this any different?”

It took him a moment to realize that Yagi was staring at him. Sprawled on the floor, leaning against the couch, his gaze bore into Naomasa with a kind of disbelief he’d have been offended by coming from anyone else. It was clearly a ‘Are you really that simple?’ expression and Naomasa was briefly tempted to give into the desire to grab his phone and record it. Because this was the exact kind of nonsense that no one ever believed him about. Flawless All Might? Endearing Yagi? Nooo. He’d never be biting or sarcastic. How can you think such things! Are you sure we’re talking about the same guy?

Please. Naomasa had memories of this man that would send half his fanbase into the hospital. Whether that would be due to shock or excitement though was anyone’s guess.

He settled for pointing a stern finger in Yagi’s direction. His phone was all the way in the other room—far too much of a hassle to retrieve it. But the intent was there. “You know you’re being ridiculous.”

“I’m—!? Yagi spluttered a moment before recovering. “Naomasa I think you’re forgetting that there’s a very big difference between kissing babies for photo-ops and taking care of one for an entire day!”
“You teach children all day don’t you?”

“You teach children all day don’t you?”

“Children that can feed and dress themselves.”

“She’s dressed.” He nodded at Yui’s little orange onesie. The master thief who’d stolen his heart had better look the part, right? “And she’s already on solids. Toss her some crackers and you’ll be her favorite person ever. It’s really not that hard and honestly? It’s one day, Yagi. If you feed her nothing but ice cream and cartoons it’s fine. Even real little ones need vacations once in a while, right sweetie?”

Yui gurgled as Naomasa passed on his way back to the bedroom, leaving an open-mouthed Yagi behind him. He hadn’t been kidding about the whole holiday thing. Reina and her wife had needed a break, big time, and Naomasa had been more than happy to watch his niece for a few days. He’d forgotten about the police conference entirely, but that’s what friends were for. Supposedly. So long as they didn’t have a meltdown about watching a kid for a measly 24 hours.

“You’re really abandoning me,” Yagi whispered, watching with something like horror as Naomasa closed up his bag. He had to turn away lest he reveal how very close he was to cracking up.

Naomasa was beginning to wonder who the child here was.

“Really. You and Yui will both be fine,” he said, patting Yagi on the shoulder. “You know my number, but—” he interrupted. “If you call me every hour just to panic I’m going to be mad and I will lock you up for harassment.”

The last was said with a sunny smile and another pat. Yagi faintly mouthed ‘harassment.’ Naomasa returned to the living room to scoop Yui up, gracing her with enough kisses to draw out laughter before depositing her in a wooden Yagi’s arms. He had his bag, his jacket, and the distinct sense that he might come home to some sort of disaster—but Naomasa tried to leave that last thing at the door.

“Who better to watch over her than the world’s Number One Hero,” he called, waving as he left. “You two have fun!”

And with that Naomasa was gone.

Yagi had faced a lot of threats in his time. Conflicts, corners he’d been backed into, almost unimaginable odds. There were many who would call him one of the bravest men who’d ever lived and others who’d emphasize his ingenuity. No matter who you spoke to—ally or foe—there was an agreement that All Might could do absolutely anything. After decades of heroing and literally thousands lives saved, Yagi looked down at this one, precious life and did the mental equivalent of an emergency stop.

Nope.

“We’re calling Shouta.”

***

“I don’t understand what the problem is.”

Yagi stared open mouthed at the prone form, mostly hidden by that ridiculously colored sleeping bag. He was looking for traces of amusement in the small bits of Aizawa’s face he could see. Something to tell him that this was a joke.

Surely he was joking.
“Why do people keep saying that?” Yagi whined, well aware that his tone was more juvenile than anything they’d actually hear in these halls, but honestly. He’d spent ten minutes panicking that he wasn’t holding Yui properly—once he’d fully registered that he was holding her at all—and another ten trying to figure out how to call Aizawa without breaking her neck or something equally horrible (weren’t you supposed to support infants’ necks??). He knew there was some sort of voice activation that would make calls for him, though good heavens Yagi had no idea how to use it, to say nothing of his realization that he only had Aizawa’s number in his personal cell, the cell he hadn’t thought to bring with him in the panic of hearing Naomasa’s request and rushing over to his place. What a disaster. A disaster that no one seemed to consider a disaster except for him!

He’d decided to simply come over himself and ask for advice in person. That had been another exercise in endless worry and self-guessing. Naomasa had never said what exactly Yui would need for taking Yui out of the house. Who in their right mind left a man caring for a baby without providing a detailed itinerary of everything he might possibly need?

Naomasa, apparently.

Still, he’d managed. Yagi had found his precious 1-A off at lunch and their teacher curled on the floor, catching a quick cat nap of his own.

Aizawa didn’t look too pleased to have it interrupted.

Then again, Aizawa always looked a little displeased. With everything. Except when he suddenly split into these manic grins that still had Yagi’s heart pounding, even after years of having the pleasure of seeing them. Aizawa didn’t grin now though. He just stared at him so long and so hard that Yagi found himself squirming, once again feeling an age that he’d long since left behind. Finally—after parsing through thoughts that Yagi couldn’t even hope to decipher—Aizawa let out a dramatic sigh and shuffled into a seated position.

“Put her here,” he muttered.

Yagi did just that, carefully (oh so carefully) depositing Yui on the floor, propped between the wall and Aizawa’s sleeping-bag clad hip. She didn’t seem to mind the new position. In fact, Yui didn’t seem to mind much at all. She still sucked persistently at the binky he’d found on his way out the door, gazing wide-eyed at all the new and exciting things around her. Yagi suddenly found himself envious of that gaze. That she could so easily find awe in an empty classroom and two tired men. Without consciously planning to he sat beside her so that Yui was safely sheltered between them both.

Yagi’s bag fell heavily on his other side.

Aizawa eyed it around a yawn. “How much did you bring?”

“The essentials…?” Why did that sound like a question. “Just some diapers and wipes and crackers—Naomasa mentioned that she likes crackers—her blanket, her bottle—there’s still milk down in the faculty fridge right?—an extra binky, a few changes of clothes—”

“A few changes,” he thought Aizawa muttered, but honestly it was too muddled by sleeping-bag for him to be sure. He’d curled farther in on himself, though never once listed towards either side. For all that he was supposedly sleepy, Yagi could tell that Aizawa would remain rigid and careful so long as Yui was in his midst. If anything, his closed eyes seemed more pained then restful and Yagi felt a sudden stab of guilt.

“I suppose I’m overdoing it,” he said, trying to imbue a chuckle into the words and only halfway
“She’s just so small.”

With that they both turned to Yui. God, but she was a marvelously happy child, wasn’t she? It was only looking back that Yagi realized his frantic search for every possible thing he might need could have upset her more than being caught without a blanket in 80 degree weather. Or how seating her on a dirty slab of floor, beneath the bits of chalk that rained down over her hair, next to a stranger with a less than welcoming face, might not be the greatest way to start off their day. Yet here she was, staring wide-eyed at it all. It reminded him excruciatingly of pictures he’d seen of Izuku as a child and Yagi sighed at the comparison, feeling drained.

Aizawa was lolling his head side-to-side. He finally opened his eyes and let his gaze rest on Yui. “They’re all small,” he muttered.

“Yes.”

“Fragile.”

It wasn’t a condemnation—though it might have sounded like such if 1-A had been around to hear it. No, Yagi understood what Aizawa meant because he felt exactly the same way. They were all fragile, but the children in a manner entirely different from his peers. It wouldn’t matter if they reached adulthood (please, please, please) or if they surpassed them all in terms of power. Yagi would never be able to look at them with anything other than protective anxiety.

Aizawa seemed to agree, if the hand he’d wormed out to gently stroke Yui’s cheek was any indication.

“I knew that was you.”

Yagi jumped—a strange feeling when he was already seated on the floor—and turned to find Yamada with his head sticking into the classroom, fingers drumming an excited beat along the frame. It took Yagi a moment to realize that what had startled him wasn’t just Yamada’s voice, but its softness. He wasn’t sure he’d ever heard the man whisper before.

Indeed, it was even stranger to see him creeping quietly across the floor.

“Ayyyyy,” he bent exaggeratedly to get a look at the bundle between them, immediately perking when he found that Yui awake. She started kicking her legs and waving her arms. Yagi blinked. She seemed to know him. “There’s the little tyke!!” Yamada winked at their confusion. “Heard a rumor that a certain #1 Hero was panicking, running around with a baby like a chicken with his head cut off.”

Yagi scowled, but Yamada just bent and scooped Yui into his arms, somehow looking motherly despite all the black leather and the voice box now obscuring half Yui’s head. He immediately began bouncing side to side with Yui on his hip, humming something that sounded suspiciously like classic rock.

“This is Reina’s kid, right?” he asked, laughing at the thought of grabbing hold of the wrong child, continuing to bounce her anyway. “Yeah we know each other a little. Enough for me to recognize these baby cheeks.” Yamada pinched the ruddy circles that framed Yui’s face. “How could I forget them, hmm? I couldn't. That's the answer we're lookin' for!”

Yagi felt something warm growing in the center of his chest. “You two are friends?”

“Acquaintances.” Yamada shrugged. “Not close like you and Naomasa. Reina was downtown during that fire last Fall. We got to chatting while waiting for the paramedics and I had the pleasure
of meeting this cutie. YEAH I did!"

Ah. Yagi had known that Reina had gotten caught up in that unfortunate confrontation and that Yamada had been the one to take down a woman wielding an impressive fire quirk, he just hadn’t put two-and-two together. Now he watched, pleased at how easily he handled Yui and maybe just a little bit jealous.

“You need to teach me how to do that,” he said, whine creeping back into his voice. Though there was a playfulness to it that had Yamada snorting.

“Teach shit outside,” Aizawa grumbled, sliding back into a horizontal position now that Yui was safe.

“For shame, Shouta! Language!”

“Let me sleep.”

Yagi nudged him in the shoulder. What he thought was his shoulder anyway. “This is a classroom. Perhaps you should be the one to leave?”

The mumble that emerged was inarticulate, but vicious all the same.

“I say we teach Yui how to ride before anything else. Crawling, in my expert opinion, is totally overrated...”

It was 12:37pm as Yamada carefully laid Yui atop Aizawa’s prone back, announcing that he would teach her all the intricacies of riding a slug-person. Said slug continued to mutter obscenities at the floor and Yagi wasn’t at all surprised that a few seconds later the door slid back open to reveal Sekijiro and Nemuri, drawn in by all the hubbub. The former rolled his eyes and immediately turned on his heel, saying something about cleaning up the staff room for them to ‘make fools of themselves’ in there once lunch was over. The latter scurried in to coo and ahh, telling Yagi that she’d help Yui fall asleep once the excitement was over. The mild form of her quirk was oh so useful.

Yagi could only nod, the hot thing in his chest having wormed its way up into his throat. He’d been in charge of Yui for a measly three hours—in the company of his friends for just a handful of minutes—and already he didn’t know what he’d been so scared of before.

His bag of supplies made a surprisingly good pillow. Yagi stretched out beside Aizawa and watched as he reluctantly let Yui use his hair as reigns, Yamada chortling as Nemuri snapped her pictures.

Suddenly, twenty-four hours didn’t seem like nearly enough.

Take your time, Naomasa

Chapter End Notes

Also I THINK I’ve just met a personal goal! Once I realized I had a lot to write for this series I set myself the challenge of getting 100k down (which is a damn lot for me given my energy level and attention span). Ended up being a combo of fiction and meta, but
here we are <3
One day about two months into their stay at the dorms Aizawa went on the offensive.

The students of 1-A would later use this phrase to tell the story to their peers and they’d get eye rolls in response, their listeners assuming that Aizawa was finally pushing back against their ridiculous antics. But no. Quite the opposite. It was an antic of his own—though granted one better served to help them on their way to becoming heroes. One minute he’d been sprawled out on the couch with Ashido, Jiro, and Koda at his side. The next the three of them were hanging from the ceiling, strung up and held tight by his capture weapon. Hands, ears, and mouth respectively were carefully bound or covered.

“Sensei what the hell!”

It was one of the few times Ashido wasn’t reprimanded for her language.

Because Aizawa was already coming at Shoji by the entryway, dodging one arm, then another, succeeding in kicking him hard enough that he stumbled into the hallway closet. A quick lock on the door did the trick and then he was tearing down the hall, catching Mineta off guard as he exited his room. Aizawa pulled the shirt off his back, using it to briefly blind Ojiro, catching his tail before any damage was done. They both went down hard. By that point the rest of the class was stumbling out of their rooms and flying down stairs, wondering what all the commotion was about—and Ashido’s yelling.

Five minutes later the exercise ended with Iida rounding a corner to find the majority of his friends disabled. He got the clearest picture of the room: a sea of kids sprawled on the floor or in the air, groans loud in his ears, Aizawa standing in the middle of it all, bare chested, his extra capture weapon in hand. Three heartbeats passed between them until Aizawa grinned.

“Why are you hesitating?”

Iida went down a few seconds later and Aizawa was left to clean up the mess.

“Objectively speaking that was abysmal… yeah on the couch is fine. Everyone squish together. Midoriya, help Koda get down. Mineta, do you need any ice?”

He sniffled, cradling his arm where a bruise was starting to form under the cuff of his Kawaii Kitty pajamas—a fashion choice that had not gone unnoticed by Jiro, snort-laughing behind him. Mineta paused only long enough to scowl at her. “N-no.”

“Then stop crying. You didn't go down that hard. All right, everyone here? Good. What did we learn?”

Aizawa had gone from surprise enemy back to instructor, his shirt reclaimed from Ojiro and his arms
crossed sternly. He waited. And waited. Tsuyu was the first to respond, a playful smile gracing her features.

“That you’re not to be trusted, Sensei?”

“Yeah!” Ashido was quickly shushed by Yaoyorozu, ploughing Ashido’s head straight into her lap.

“No one can be trusted,” Aizawa said. It was so blunt, so straight-faced, that everyone immediately settled down. There was more than one uncomfortable look between them and everyone started shifting a little closer together. There was no air of suspicion though—just a stubbornness to prove him wrong.

Aizawa sighed. “You know what I mean. Even if you trust me, specifically, we’ve all had dealings with various types of copy quirks. Or mind control. Or good old fashioned blackmail. Quit looking at me like that, Iida. None of you know me well enough to say for sure whether I could be coerced. Make no assumptions. Now. Would you like to explain why you failed to attack the man who had so clearly incapacitated the rest of your class?”

Put on the spot Iida went from indignant to flushed. His gaze dropped to the floor as he instinctively curled a little closer to Izuku and Uraraka. “I have no excuse, Sensei.”

“Sure you do,” Aizawa grunted. “You thought you saw an ally. That’s why I’m trying to teach you to second guess those assumptions. Look at your surroundings, wherever you are. Draw your own conclusions. Better that you apologize for a punch than sit through a funeral.”

Everyone winced.

“Bakugo.” All eyes turned his way. Leaning against the back wall he didn’t give Aizawa any more than a blink. “Good reaction time… but your blast knocked out two of your classmates.”

From the floor Sero muttered something unpleasant under his breath. Aoyama continued trying to scrub soot off his clothes.

“You’ll have more practice with your quirk indoors from now on. Midoriya—you’ve got the opposite problem. You were so focused on the impact your kick might have on the building’s structure that you didn’t attack at all. Yes, I could hear you muttering. No, that wasn’t the right call. There’s a difference between foolish risks and calculated ones. Start thinking through which is which.”

Izuku started spluttering apologies but Aizawa had already moved on.

“Ashido, Koda, Jiro—you three admittedly had the most challenging set up, but I still gave you time to react. You need to learn to watch your movie and pick up on changes in your environment. Like the guy sitting next to you reaching for a weapon.”

Jiro scowled. She’d been the one directly beside Aizawa and no, she hadn’t noticed.

“Ojiro, good response but we need to work on your hand to hand. Uraraka, well done landing that hit. Tokoyami, I realize that getting surprised after a shower is uncomfortable in the extreme, but any true enemy doesn’t care if you’re naked or not. You’re dead anyway. Might as well use that surprise to your advantage.”

The “Yes, Sensei” was so soft that only those directly beside Tokoyami managed to hear him. The blush, while mostly hidden under his feathers, was still definitely there. Suddenly laughs erupted and then just as quickly petered away, helping to break the last of the tension. Aizawa merely rolled his
eyes and continued going around the room, pointing out what his students had—or had not—managed to accomplish during their impromptu lesson.

No one noticed Hagakure seated on the couch arm. Of course they didn’t.

That was the point of being invisible.

***

It occurred to Hagakure later that night—long after Aizawa had hesitated (almost unnoticeably brief) about where she’d been and what she’d done during the skirmish—that she’d been just as naked as Tokoyami and no one had cared about that. Sure, she’d had her whole life to get used to it, but that didn’t mean it suddenly got easy. Especially with an audience. Getting caught stepping out of the shower was one thing. Being told to strip in front of your peers and instructors for a grade was totally different.

It didn’t matter if they couldn’t see her, or even that Hagakure couldn’t see herself. She could feel her body and knew well what people were imagining when they failed to find it.

Where were her supportive words, huh? When did she get comforting laughter?

“Ugh, stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid.” Hagakure whispered it to the ceiling, beating her hands and feet against the mattress. Mom always said that she shouldn’t be so rambunctious all the time, but Hagakure liked to feel things against her. She’d made sure there was nothing but soft carpeting and fuzzy stuffed animals in her room. Things that let her know she was there.

“It’s fine, it’s fine! Totally cool and whatever! Now. Sleep.”

She didn’t sleep though. The rest of 1-A would have been surprised to see her like this (ha)—bubbly Hagakure curled into a mopey ball, the threads of her quilt seeming to pluck themselves. But it happened sometimes. More than she’d ever let the others know about. And that was easy enough when people couldn’t see that there was a frown contradicting her chipper tone; growing bags under her eyes. It was just… weird sometimes. Like not being seen had made her invisible in other, totally confusing ways.

Which made sense. Kind of. Her Mom also said that no one should like a girl just for her looks—it’s what we had on inside that mattered. No, Hagakure. Not your guts—but at least the outside got the ball rolling. It was amazing how much interaction depended on others seeing you. Not seeing some “real you” nonsense, but literally seeing your body. Especially when hanging out with other girls. They were going shopping over the weekend? Fun, yeah, but Hagakure found her mouth drying up whenever Uraraka talked about skin tones and blouse colors that matched her eyes. Doing each others’ hair was always fun, though it wasn’t like Yaoyorozu could see the fruits of her labor, no matter how fantastic the braid felt beneath her palms. Eating out could get awkward when curious onlookers stared, endlessly fascinated by floating forks and food that suddenly disappeared in midair. It was amazing to Hagakure how there could be so many quirks in the world and some people still thought they had the right to judge. Sometimes they played around with makeup and that was fine… until the day they realized that on Hagakure it was terrifying rather than beautiful. The memory might have left something sour within her if Tsu’s laughter hadn’t been so uproarious and heartfelt. She was laughing with her, not at her, and when Hagakure bothered to think about that night at all it was laughter that dominated, rather than the pieces of her own blush-covered face in the mirror.

Annoying. Stupid. Turning onto her stomach Hagakure punched her pillow into a better position before flopping back down. Too many covers. Not enough covers. She settled for wrapping the sheets around one leg and letting the other hang over the side of the bed. And while that was perfect
temperature-wise… monsters. Oh boy. That was another thoroughly stupid thing to think about because what high schooler was still afraid of monsters under their bed? More than that, Hagakure knew monsters. The real ones. The kind that didn’t bother to hide but instead blew into your school and did everything they could to murder your friends; the ones made of flesh instead of smoke and who spoke too bluntly instead of in riddles and rhymes. Real monsters were nothing like the ones from Hagakure’s childhood nightmares… but she still pulled her foot back from the edge of the bed.

An action that made her more frustrated.

For twenty minutes thoughts seemed to pile on top of each other, nothing distinct, just meandering from one to another as Hagakure drifted on the murky edge of sleep. She kept her eyes slit open, staring at the green light of her teddy bear alarm clock, drowsily marveling at the fact that she could see at all. Because that had been a Big Thing when she was a kid. Quirk scientists were still trying to reconcile evolution with what they previously knew about physiology. Biological possibilities and stuff like that. Hagakure didn’t really understand it. Something about light and retinal cells and how hers were absorbing enough to see but not be seen. The scientists didn’t understand it either—and that was okay. They wanted to know if they’d be able to see her sweat so they made her run a lot. Whether she’d cast a shadow. If what came in contact with her became invisible too. There were lots of tests—some short, others forever—and none of them answered the questions Hagakure was actually interested in.

Things like dating. Or kids of her own someday. Fleeting, morbid thoughts about being trapped and no one finding her. Nebulous questions about her identity that Hagakure didn’t even know how to formulate yet, let alone demand answers to. And how could she get made about something she couldn’t articulate?

Now, lying in bed, Hagakure sluggishly moved her hand in front of her face. She felt it, but couldn’t swear it was there. Her tired mind insisted that was true. Things scared her more at night when there weren’t others around to remind her that, you know. She existed.

Oh well.

Turning onto her back Hagakure worked to find a smile. She’d talk to Aizawa Sensei tomorrow, tell him that she’d been tending to Sero while he was off fighting the other students. Maybe, if she was feeling brave enough, she’d even point out that she’d done the best out of the whole class. After all, he hadn’t found her (nothing but a pair of socks and an oversized shirt to slip off, once she’d realized it was a test) and if things had gone on she’d have been the one to go get help; bringing a whole force of heroes down on the villain she couldn’t take alone. Being invisible helped her to win, even if it also made her a little sad.

Although, Hagakure guessed they all felt like that. Sometimes.

It was while staring at the stars on her ceiling—poised somewhere between comfort and annoyance—that Hagakure finally slipped away. One second she was curling her toes against the blanket, back and forth, back and forth… the next sunlight was speckled across her face. She grimaced and swallowed a bad taste in her mouth. Yeah. Hagakure awoke exactly like she knew she would: groggy, achy, her skin sticky from sweat and in need of a wash. Outside the room she could hear Iida’s booming voice rousing them all with an exuberant “GOOD MORNING, CLASSMATES!” and someone else—Jiro?—yelling that they’d gotten attacked by their teacher last night, for god’s sake let us sleep in for once. Iida’s only response was something about justified training. Various voices chimed in, far better at waking her than the alarm that went off three seconds later.

The covers felt heavy as she pushed them aside. The floor, at least, felt safe. Hagakure hadn’t bothered to put her PJs on again last night and she didn’t bother now, opening her door to stare
blearily out at another chaotic morning. More boys had made their way into the hall and more girls had tumbled out of their rooms, everyone a mess of bedhead and pre-breakfast grumps, sniping at each other even as they shuffled close together. She was debating helping Tsu chuck Mineta back downstairs when something brushed against her foot.

Hagakure jumped, but it was only a piece of paper, wedged halfway under her door sometime during the night. It was clearly from just a standard U.A. notebook, but was folded so neatly that Hagakure found herself unwrapping it with care. A familiar black scrawl covered the inside, dead center.

*Can you give me some pointers?*

Hagakure knew the feeling of being watched and she caught it now, drawing her eyes up to the far end of the hallway. Tokoyami was standing next to the staircase, watching a piece of paper float in the air. Watching her. He inclined his head, inquisitive, the moment their eyes first met.

Huh. Hagakure wondered how he’d managed that.

She didn’t register the smile until it was already there; instinctually bouncing in place until those below her looked up at the sound. Hagakure let out a bright, bubbly, “SURE!” that was lost amongst all the chatter. From this distance Tokoyami could no more hear her than he could see her.

The paper said it all though: waving high in the air like some strange victory flag; a symbol both noticed and understood.

Chapter End Notes

Final edit: There's now [a blog for the exchange](#)! Because I decided that yeah, I'd just go ahead and do it :D

So check it out, see if you're interested in doing a gen BNHA secret santa this year, and spread the word to your friends!
Treats

Chapter Notes

HAPPY HALLOWEEN, EVERYONE! If Halloween is your thing, that is. It's totally a thing in Japan as per the rules of this story ;)

Also I've got some news: two good one bad. The bad news is I probably won't be uploading any new drabbles for the next month. The good news is it's because I'm attempting NaNo (god help me) and if I succeed they'll be a new 50k BNHA fic to upload!

The additional good news is that I am doing the Secret Santa and sign ups start tomorrow! So if you like exchanges, like gen fic/art, like fun things to do during the holiday season, consider signing up. The blog is here and I'll have a post up about signups tomorrow.

I think that's it. Onto the fic!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Don’t you have anything other than All Might merch?”

In a rare moment of disorganization Iida was tearing through Izuku’s closet and tossing everything over his shoulder, letting it fall where it pleased. Most of it ended in a heap on the floor, a few pieces draped over a chair, and a few others landed square on Jiro’s head. She tugged off a pair of boxers with a noise of disgust and Izuku dove, shoving them quickly under the bed.

“Sorry! Sorry about that—ah. Iida. C’mon.”

“Let him,” Uraraka said. She stretched until her socked foot nudged the bowl and, remembering candy, dove back into her sweets binge. “Though we really don’t have time to come up with another costume.”

“We will make time, Uraraka!”

As Iida continued judging Izuku’s sad clothing options the others turned up the TV to try and drown him out. It was a small, portal device that Kaminari had snuck in weeks ago since they weren’t supposed to have TVs in their rooms (as if Aizawa didn’t know about it…) and as such everyone was forced to pile together on the floor in order to get a decent look. Uraraka absentmindedly handed fistfuls of chocolate to Yaoyorozu who neatly divided them up for everyone in the back. Jiro opened hers up before handing it to Koda. Ashido snatched up Tsuyu’s… and then lost it again to a very quick tongue. Sero seemed more interested in the growing mound of All Might stuff than he was the cartoons.

“This doesn’t even fit,” he marveled, holding up shirt that Izuku had easily outgrown halfway through his pre-UA training. He snatched it up and stuffed that under the bed too.

…after carefully folding it first.

“It’s not about wearing it,” he muttered, plucking at the fabric of his jeans. “We’re heading out in an
hour, Iida. Just let me go as All Might. It's been a tradition since I was four!"

Tsuyu pinned him with a smile. “That’s sad, Midoriya.”

“Wait, no. No it’s not—”

“I’ve been a princess since I was five,” Ashido piped up, fluffy the full pink skirt she wore. Some of the tule’s sparkles landed on Koda and sent him into a sneezing fit. “It’s clearly the superior costume here.”

Numerous voices protested that. Izuku raised his hands in defeat.

“How come Ashido can be a princess every year but I can’t be All Might?”

Uraraka scoffed, stuffing more chocolate into her mouth. “It’s not the same.”

Yaoyorozu gave him a pitying look. “It’s really not.”

“Mm?” Jiro paused with a lollipop in her mouth, watching Koda sign. Then she flushed. “Is not. My costume is a total mess…and Sensei is going to kill me when he sees it.”

“Either that or give you some kind of extra credit.” Kaminari grinned.

When they’d first congregated in Izuku’s room for TV and pre-trick or treating snacks it had been with the expectation that everyone would already be in costume. That… was very far from the case. Jiro had been the first to bear Iida’s wrath, wandering in dressed in her trademark band t-shirt and an open hoodie to ward off the cold. After a brief spat she’d been dragged into the bathroom with the other girls and emerged an hour later in all black except for the long white scarf looped four times around her neck. She had a belt, thick boots, and sucked periodically at an empty juice box when bored with the lollipop. Yaoyorozu had dyed her hair temporarily black and teased the normally straight strands into something with a bit more wave. There wasn’t anything they could do about the length at this point, but she made for a passable Aizawa.

Sero considered the getup, then nodded. “Definitely gonna be murder.” Others voiced their agreement.

Koda stuck his head between Jiro and Uraraka. “Murder is perfect for Halloween,” he signed, chuckling softly.

“You should be murdered for your lame-ass costume.” Kaminari tugged at the sheet Sero hid under, finding invisible feet kicking him away. “Ow! C’mon you can’t just rip holes in your sheet and call it a day. That’s so predictable.”

Izuku slowly raised his hand like he was in the middle of class. “I could do that…?”

“No.”

A shoe flew out of the closet and Iida’s strangled, now seemingly distant voice said, “If I find one more novelty t-shirt…”

“And what are you supposed to be, huh?” Sero flapped a sheet-laden hand at Kaminari’s getup. He looked like a messed up cross between Yaoyorozu’s skimpy wardrobe and the goth faze they all knew Tokoyami once had. Arguably still had, really.

Kaminari lifted his chin into the air. “I’m a rockstar. Duh.”
Jiro snorted as Yaoyorozu laid a hand delicately over her mouth.

“I think Present Mic would have some criticisms,” Uraraka said, the words garbled by chocolate.

As Kaminari and Sero continued bickering Ashido rolled her head to scan the room, pointing at everyone in turn. “Princess, Aizawa, ghost, supposedly a rockstar, witch…witch.”

Uraraka scowled at the change in tone but Ashido only grinned, wiggling her fingers. Yes, she and Yaoyorozu had both decided to go as witches this year, with the exception that Yaoyorozu had about a hundred times more money to spend on her costume. An artfully ruffled top had been paired with a full skirt, decked out in intricate stitching made to look like webs. Yaoyorozu had delicate tights on that she’d said—quite proudly—were fleece-lined despite looking easy enough to tear, and her kitten heels were probably the cutest thing that any of them had ever seen. There were bangles on her wrists and a whole collection of necklaces overlapping one another. Her hair, piled high in an intricate twist, had more decorative cobwebs weaved through it with a staggeringly detailed hat propped off on the side.

Uraraka had an old black dress from middle school and a half-priced hat of her own.

“Your tights are better,” Ashido whispered, pointing at the bright strips criss-crossing her legs. After a moment Uraraka broke, smiled, and tossed her more candy.

“Thanks.”

“I like your sun outfit,” Jiro said, lightly touching the paper mache sticking out from Tsuyu’s shirt. “Tokoyami is going as the moon, right?”

Tsuyu bobbed her head in agreement, one finger tapping at her chin. “We worked so well together during our exam that we thought paired costumes would be fun. I haven’t seen his yet though. He insists it’s going to be a surprise.” She ended with a hiccup.

Kaminari rolled his eyes. “You mean he put it off until the last minute and now he’s sequestered in his room trying desperately to pull something together.”

“…Yes.”

“Heh, I’m surprised you even know what ‘sequestered’ means, Kaminari. Maybe you haven’t fried all your braincells… yet.”

Tsuyu had to quick dodge to keep herself out of the ensuing fight, snatching the bowl up before more of their treats could be crushed underfoot. The TV was largely ignored now, the news coming on and no one bothering to change it. Ashido had moved herself to Izuku’s bed, laughing at his decor (or lack thereof) as the man himself pleaded with Iida to just let it go already. Checking her watch she saw that yeah, there was only about half an hour left before Aizawa expected them downstairs. He’d been one of the most vocal about not letting them go out tonight, but at Nedzu’s instance he’d laid out detailed plans to keep them all safe, including—but far from limited to—sticking to them with the tenacity of a leech. This would begin before they ever set foot outside.

Ashido had moved so that she was draped upside down over the bed, booted feet resting on one of the many All Might posters gracing the wall. She continued her catalogue of the room, eyes pining Koda where he fretfully watched Jiro trying to steal Kaminari’s spiked collar.

“I still don’t know what the hell you’re supposed to be.”

“Language!” came a call from the closet.
Tsuyu considered the question carefully. Koda had chosen khaki pants and matching shirt, both of which looked like they belonged somewhere far from their urban lifestyle. He had a stuffed crocodile tucked lovingly under one arm.

He finger-spelled something quickly, smile bright.

Ashido stared, looked for Jiro, found her still occupied, went back to staring. “Um…”

“Steve Irwin,” Sero translated. He didn’t even bother looking up from his phone. “He’s this quirkless zookeeper in Australia.”

“…Oh?”

“Total animal lover. Like, obsessive. But in a cool way.”

“Oooh,” Ashido gave Koda a thumbs up.

“Utterly deplorable!” Iida finally emerged, stepping over the small mountain of clothes and glaring hard enough that Izuku ducked his head. “You have nothing that can be turned into an appropriate costume in,” Iida furiously pulled out his phone, clicking madly. “Fifteen minutes!”

“You know I could just,” Izuku started, but with met with a loud chorus of “No!”’s before he even got his suggestion out.

Iida had hands on his hips, making his police officer’s outfit look even more authentic. He’d insisted that the rest of society deserved praise on a night when the vast majority of children were dressed up as heroes. It was a choice not every pro was going to respect. “We have been given the privilege of participating in the festivities, despite the danger it may pose to us, and I made it very clear last month that we would show our appreciation by developing respectful, theme-appropriate costumes. As a class! Even Todoroki put forth effort.”

All eyes turned to the shadow in the corner flipping idly through his phone. Todoroki peeked beneath the brim of his hat.

“I think his is a little on the nose,” Ashido giggled. All gazes scattered, lest they let loss the mad cackle that had been building since they’d all first seen him.

Todoroki had dressed as a firefighter.

“I was motivated,” he said, the slightest smirk lifting his lips.

“Even Bakugo—” Iida cut himself off though. Bakugo was passing Izuku’s open door, shoulders hunched, glaring at them all, but he wasn’t dressed as Iida had initially assumed. He stopped in the hallway. Everyone else stopped their eating. There was a stretch of awkward silence, until:

“…Where’s your costume, Bakugo?”

He grit his teeth and looked like he wanted to spit. “I’m an assassin.”

“You don’t look like an assassin?” Izuku seemed to immediately regret speaking up, ducking again when Bakugo turned his way.

“Well an assassin doesn’t look like an assassin. Idiot! That would defeat the fucking purpose!” and muttering something about “useless deku” he shuffled off, leaving the group in another unfortunate silence.
“…He kind of has a point,” Yaoyorozu said and Iida threw up his hands.

It was Jiro who rolled her eyes, gesturing for Iida to calm down. “We threw this together in ten minutes,” she said, pointing at her shirt. “Okay, okay, way longer for the hair, but we’ve still got twelve minutes left. We must have something he can wear. I mean, who else is your hero, Midoriya? Besides All Might.”

He opened his mouth to answer but Kaminari’s hand came out of nowhere, landing halfway between Izuku’s cheek and his mouth, flapping against his skin like an excited fish. Making little noises in the back of his throat he pointed at the television screen. It took the rest of them a moment to see what he’d spotted.

The news was still on and a generic story was running about the holiday, the camera panning over a large crowd of celebrators. And amongst the goblins and ghouls were some costumes that looked… familiar. Not just the All Mights and Eraserheads though.

…there was a Froppy. An Anima. A Chargebolt and a Creati. As the camera cut through dozens of crowds in various parts of the city, the kids spotted an Earphone Jack, Ingenium, Pinky, Uravity, Cellophane, and a toddler clearly meant to be Shoto.

A Deku too. They didn’t outnumber the pros by any stretch, but they were there.

“Wow,” Ashido breathed. A few others nodded in mute response, hands reaching out to clasp or touch knees—seeking contact to prove that yeah, this was real. They’d achieved something… and it felt massive.

The grin lighting up Kaminari’s face was far brighter than his quirk. “So. Who is your hero, Midoriya?”

Two hours later they were out on the streets, one massive group moving from house to house, their excitement palpable in the chilled air. Iida and Yaoyorozu kept to the front, trying to move through each area in an orderly fashion. Aizawa took up the rear, his extra capture weapon looped around his neck. He’d given the original to Jiro. For authenticity. Izuku was somewhere in the middle, his everyday clothes a sharp contrast to the rest of the group’s bright, flamboyant costumes.

When asked what he was for Halloween, Izuku smiled and said he was a civilian. The reason that heroes exist.

He didn’t mind the strange looks he got. Izuku’s smile only grew as he caught sight of green bunny ears down the street. There were other heroes out tonight. All he needed to do right now was gather candy and enjoy the company of his friends.

That, no doubt, was the best treat of the night.

Chapter End Notes

Steve Irwin is a constant in every universe pass it on
In retrospect he should have dodged left.

Counterintuitive, considering that to his left there was nothing but the remains of the cafe—the (thankfully empty) tables and chairs reduced to piles of semi-melted plastic, a Dali painting come to life in the middle of an otherwise normal, Wednesday afternoon. What wasn’t melted floated in the red ooze of the woman’s quirk, various objects and belongings—now entirely unidentifiable—sizzling in the acid-like substance. The floor was gone. The walls were leaning precariously in on themselves. When she’d shot the stuff, pouring like endless vomit out of her hand, Aizawa had been briefly stunned not just by the skin-crawling revulsion of it, but because of the amount too. The human body couldn’t hold that much liquid. Supposedly. It was a reminder of how foreign quirks still were to them…and how difficult they were to fight against.

Ashido’s acid couldn’t compare to that. The mere thought set Aizawa’s heart beating three times as fast.

“Stay down!”

So yeah, he’d banked right, because heading left would have been a death sentence. The primal part of his brain insisted on it, despite the fact that a more rational Aizawa knew that he could keep to the walls, use the tops of un-melted chairs, find a sturdy enough foothold and just swing himself over the entire mess. But no. He’d hesitated. Panicked even…and threw himself directly into the line of the woman’s partner.

The guy was more beast than man now. His hands were gone and in their place were flesh-colored blades with jagged, rather terrifying edges. The kind of detail best left to the horror movies. Aizawa registered one of those hands swinging directly at his head—too close to his eyes—and only just managed to twist out of the way.

A simple enough maneuver. Too bad he was already off balance.

The blade plunged into his shoulder, the force behind the stabbing so strong that it drove the tip all the way through muscle and into the concrete of the building behind him. Aizawa screamed. He noticed it dimly, a little shocked, because it took a lot for him to scream, and the parts of him not marveling at the fact that some no-name villain had ripped a shriek out of him were calculating where the kids were, how much he could still move, and that god-awful smirk the guy was now sporting.

…with good reason, apparently. With a twist of his arm his hand came off and Aizawa watched,
woozy, as another immediately grew in its place. It was like silly putty; like a mud pie forming into something grand. The blade kept him pinned to the wall (feet slipping on blood now, gravity dragging at the wound) as another one, newly formed, took aim between his eyes.

“Back off!”

*Smack!* went the sound of metal against flesh and the villain howled, spittle flying in Aizawa’s face, his breath positively rancid. He’d flinched from the oncoming blow but now had his eyes blown wide, watching as Uraraka went in for a second swing. She managed a glancing blow across the man’s right ear. With an animal-like roar he made a swipe at her, but Uraraka was already using the momentum of the hit to her advantage. Made lighter by her own quirk she drifted up, away, and before the brute could even think to jump for her a familiar tongue had wrapped around her waist, dragging her to safety.

“Run—” Aizawa tried to say, but it came out as no more than a whisper. With a hiss he found that he couldn’t move without blinding pain throughout his shoulder and arm, couldn’t manage a position sturdy enough to try and wrench the blade from his flesh. This was what came of not being able to use his quirk as long or as frequently. He knew there’d be a price for his actions at USJ.

But of course, if he hadn’t pushed himself that day then Tsu wouldn’t have been here at all. Danger or no danger.

Funny how that was almost comforting.

“Yaoyorozu!”

Aizawa watched as Uraraka managed to slap hands with her as she passed by, lightening the heavier girl so that Tsu could easily pick her up next. Within a moment—far faster than most pros could have managed—they were situated on what was left of the bank’s rooftop, crouched there as two villains stared up from the street. Civilians were still screaming, but at least they’d cleared the area. The six of them might as well have been the only people in the city given how Aizawa’s hearing was starting to go wonky. Like if he couldn’t see them then they weren’t there and oh, wait… things were fuzzy now too.

*Blood loss,* he thought distantly and dragged his gaze down to the growing pool at his feet. His toes weren’t touching the ground. The tearing weight on his wound made it hard to think. But there was something reflected there, in the blood, murky, and it took Aizawa a moment to realize he was seeing his kids, smudgy versions that skittered in and out of a circular frame. It was hypnotic and the trance only broke when a booted foot slammed down on it all.

Some of his blood came back to him, splattered across his thigh.

“I’m sorry it took so long, Sensei, I’m sorry, I—”

Yaoyorozu cut herself off before the babbling could get worse, pulling something long and heavy out of the skin of her neck. It caught on the edge of her turtleneck, drew a frustrated whine from between her teeth, and then finally came to rest in her hands. It looked like a weapon though and Aizawa instinctually flinched away, despite the fact that Yaoyorozu only used the bolt cutters to cut him free of the wall. He fell hard and white hot pain flashed through his head.

He still had a blade through his shoulder. Still, Aizawa felt a little better.

“Call,” he managed, but Yaoyorozu was speaking again.

“Tsuyu already called in the attack, sir. The other pros should be here any minute. I made the phone.
The one she used, I mean. To call. Tsuyu.” Yaoyorozu clamped her teeth shut and forcefully shook herself. A massive gauze appeared from beneath her sleeve and she bent to press it hard around the wound.

“We need to pack it,” she muttered. “But not pull it out. Right?”

“Right.”

His voice was steady yet his body was anything but. Aizawa knew he wasn’t fully healed from USJ, no matter that he’d gotten the outer layer of bandages removed and the bruising had finally faded to a dull yellow, almost invisible against his shallow skin. The weakness in his limbs would take longer to overcome though; the blow he’d taken to the head even longer than that. The four of them were supposed to pick up some goddamn supplies for training, not get involved with more villains.

But they were here now and Aizawa needed to make his body move—move dammit—because there was no one else here to protect them.

Except, perhaps, themselves.

Because Uraraka and Tsuyu were holding their own. More than that. They were winning. Aizawa’s fuzzy thoughts conjured up scattered justifications like how they’d caught the villains off guard and the fact that this was clearly one of their first attempts at a heist, but honestly that would have been a disservice to his students. Yagi had insisted on his boneheaded scheme of playing dress-up as a villain, claiming that showing them the endless dangers of the world would keep them from freezing up the next time they encountered one… and maybe he’d been right. Because Yaoyorozu was babbling, Tsuyu was shaking, and the tear tracks on Uraraka’s cheeks were visible even from here, but they were still fighting.

“Sensei?”

He’d grabbed hold of the blade and wrenched it, just a little. The way it had cut him ensured that he’d keep bleeding regardless, but that flash of pain was just enough to knock a bit of sense into him. Aizawa felt his head clear for a second—agony that was familiar and welcome after years of survival—so that he could blow his eyes wide, focus, and activate his quirk.

The woman with the acid threw out her hand directly at Tsuyu’s face (no, please, not again), but nothing came out. She stood there, dumb, staring openly at her palm. When she wrenched her gaze towards Aizawa—eyes still wide, tearing now and burning—Tsuyu wrapped her tongue around her shoulders and used the momentum of a kick, wrenching the woman forward with all her might. She hit the wall of the bank with a satisfying crunch and fell, unconscious on the sidewalk.

At the same moment Uraraka came around the man’s back, using his own distraction at his teammate’s defeat to finally brush her fingertips against the back of his neck. With a panicked yelp he rose, bladed arm hooking into the building’s side, but that would only hold him for so long. With a small whimper of effort Yaoyorozu managed a long string of rope, tossing it to Tsuyu. In less than a minute the three girls had the man’s arms bound—crisscrossed so he couldn’t saw through the bindings—and his ankle tethered to a fire hydrant. He bobbed there like a furious balloon.

Aizawa had just enough of him left to hear Tsuyu ask if Uraraka could keep her quirk going until the authorities arrived. At her determined “Yes” he finally slumped against the pavement.

“Sensei!”

What a pain. Shuzenji was going to lose it when she saw the rest of his blood soaked bandages and
Aizawa was fairly sure Hizashi would have a heart attack…to say nothing of the three ashen faces now hanging before him. Aizawa opened his mouth to say that it looked worse than it was, he was lucky on the whole, most pros never made it this far…

And found that he couldn’t say anything at all. Less because of the world going gray; more because of the sheer, protective relief on the kids’ faces.

Oh.

There might have been someone checking on his wound. Something soft placed beneath his head. A hand tentatively taking his… and then another. Hours later Aizawa wouldn’t be sure of these things. The only thing that made it through the fog of pain and blood loss was the one thing he omitted from the police report:

“We’ve got you, Sensei.”
Resolutions

Chapter Notes

HAPPY NEW YEAR, EVERYONE!

Please accept this very short drabble in honor of the holiday. December is always a hectic as hell month, but I should be getting back on my normal writing schedule now that exams, Christmas, and Secret Santa fics are behind me :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Here! We! ARE!”

Aizawa blinked sleepily at the small package that had been shoved into his face. Yagi—muscled form and megawatt smile—stood before him, arms extended as his hands flapped that teeny, tiny parcel. Aizawa eventually took it, suppressing a sigh, and found a pocket notebook under the wrapping. It was black with a pink bunny on the front. ‘Cruel but cute so I’m worth it.’

“I thought of you,” Yagi said. There was absolutely no joke here.

Aizawa loved it.

With a snort he flipped through the pages, finding that it was actually a lined planner. Each page had another bunny dispensing creative insults, wielding a smile that reminded Aizawa of another adorable fool. This idiocy would take him through 2019 and, childish drawings aside, he couldn’t deny that the gift was a practical one. Especially given how hectic their lives had become.

Aizawa raised the planner in thanks and tucked it into his back pocket. “You always give people calendars for the New Year?”

There was a explosion of smoke and the metallic smell of blood. When both cleared Aizawa’s preferred Yagi stood before him, twisting his hands.

“Actually yes,” he said. “It’s appropriate, isn’t it? And there’s space in the back for you to write any New Year’s resolutions you might have.”

All Might had never been known for his subtlety and Yagi had yet to develop those skills. It was a clear opening for Aizawa to…open up, or something. The man before him practically vibrated in place, eager to know what his peer intended to make of himself now that they’d all been granted this supposedly new beginning—like the 1st wasn’t just another workday, same as all the rest. Aizawa knew that Yagi had taken his kids through some sentimental exercise though, having them all think through and list what changes they planned to make this year. He’d walked back into class to find everyone talking about how much stronger they’d become, they’d secure their provincial licenses, take down the League, find time for more community service…

It wasn’t all bad then. Aizawa wondered if any of his kids had made selfish resolutions. They certainly deserved to.

“Like joining a gym?” Aizawa quipped, going back to packing up his stuff. Yagi’s smile never faltered and he wondered what it would take to put a dent in that positivity.
Probably far more than Aizawa was willing to do.

“I have a lot,” Yagi chuckled, undaunted in the face of Aizawa’s indifference. “There are many things that I hope us heroes can accomplish in the coming year, but personally? One of my resolutions is to treat you better.”

Aizawa paused.

“I realize we were never the best of friends, but we are colleagues now, and I like to think that we’ve grown closer. This year I have every intention of supporting you, Shota. In whatever way you might need!”

Yagi was beaming by the end of his speech. He even had his hands on his hips—the iconic All Might pose that read quite differently when done by a living skeleton. Aizawa had flashbacks to all the ways Yagi had tried to help in his months since starting at U.A., from designing training exercises with near apocalyptic fallouts to thinking he could give everyone 100s on tests without Nedzu noticing. Support from Yagi outside of the battlefield was… questionable.

Aizawa leaned against his desk, feeling the outline of the planner in his pocket. Instead of saying any of his thoughts he smiled—just a small thing—and extended his hand.

You’d think Aizawa had given him the world in that handshake.

When Yagi had left (still spewing compliments and holiday well-wishes), Aizawa slipped the planner back out and flipped to the back. There were indeed blank pages there, perfect for a single sentence that no one else would ever see. The only thing he really cared about.

*Make sure they see the next new year's too.*

Chapter End Notes

Btw the bunny on the cover of Aizawa's planner is [here](#). I absolutely loved these things back in middle school lol
Influence

Chapter Notes

I have been over taken by meta-ing recently. Gotta slip in the fic writing somewhere though :) This is partly a response to kopycat_101's prompt of Endeavor getting pissed at how much All Might donates, partly an evolution of a hilarious conversation had with a friend...

“You realize you’ve started a war, right?”

‘Started’ didn’t feel accurate though. Aizawa had a feeling, given the age of the two pros and their stubborn, pig-headed natures, that this had been going on for many, many years. Hell, it might have even started before he was born. Today’s headline had caught his attention only because of its blatant, excessive nature and Aizawa chucked the paper in Yagi’s face the moment he walked through the staff room door.

He fumbled it a moment, all lanky limbs and spluttering embarrassment. Not a hint of the hero in sight. Beside him Yamada smothered a laugh and Aizawa knew he wasn’t the only one who found the display oddly endearing. It was as comforting as it was frustrating.

“How wonderful!” he exclaimed. Some of the paper’s innards fluttered to the ground, a victim of exuberance.

Hm? About war? Yes, but I don’t really know what you mean, Shouta.” His grin was cheesy, bony hand rising up to tug anxiously at his hair. It was all so innocent that anyone who didn’t actually know the man might have been convinced; overlooked that glint in his eye. “Enji should be proud of himself. It’s a truly heroic gesture.”

The ‘but’ hung in the air, unsaid. Aizawa stared unblinking at Yagi’s stupidly bright expression. Yamada pulled a bit of the stuffing out of the couch. Both were patient—in their own ways—and sure enough Yagi caved.
“Did I mention?” he said suddenly, voice sickly sweet. “I’m actually have plans to fund a whole new hospital myself next year—”

“There it fucking is.”

The rest was lost to more of Yamada’s uproarious laughter. Aizawa shook his head. “Of course you are,” he muttered and snatched the paper back out of Yagi’s hands. There were no plans for a new hospital. Not until three seconds ago, anyway. What was previously an idle thought was a promise now though. With surprising (and enviable) speed Yagi had calculated something that spread another grin onto his face, shot off a series of texts, wrote something unseen on his arm that couldn’t be missed, and then commandeered the desktop to start a twenty-tab research project.

“Oh, this has promise,” Yamada said, leaning forward and stamping booted feet on the ground. “Hey Shouta, hey, hey—you think I can convince Yagi to fund my podcast if I claim Endeavor did it first?”

Aizawa remained happily hidden behind the finance section. “He can hear you.”

“You know, I’m really not sure he can…”

Indeed, Yagi was chatting blithely into the cell pressed against shoulder and ear, his long fingers flying expertly across the keys, pausing only to cough or write something else on his now ink-laden forearm. Aizawa had the distinct sense that nothing short of a kid’s cry could pull him out of whatever focus he’d fallen into. Good. It would keep the former hero busy…and the rest of them entertained.

Aizawa turned back to Yamada with a smile. The sort that 1-A had grown used to seeing—and knew to fear.

“I think if there was ever a time to ask about a donation, now’s it.”

Cackling quietly (or as quietly as he was ever able), Yamada stood and jogged on over to the computer Yagi still poured over. On his way he went in for a rare and dangerous fist-bump.

For once, Aizawa obliged him.

***

“I’m used to it,” Todoroki said, two days later when the new hospital was officially announced and the paparazzi had caught pictures of Endeavor throwing an absolute fit through his window. They might all be living in the dorms now, but Izuku and the others had cornered their friend immediately after class, reassuring themselves—if not him—that he wouldn’t be going home this weekend. Todoroki shrugged. “He’s dramatic.”

Uraraka spluttered out a laugh…then stopped when he didn’t appear to be joking.

“Isn’t it a little mean?” Hagakure said. The sleeves of her uniform turning back and forth as her body twisted. “I mean, All Might is the number one hero and all. Does he really have to try and out-do Endeavor in everything else too?”

Iida’s mouth unhinged. “Hagakure! I’m surprised at you.”

“Eh?” She swung his way, arms moving to her hips. “What’d I do?”

“All Might is everything us heroes aspire to be. To suggest that he would deliberately engage in
some…some…some childish one-upmanship is an insult to him and this institution!”

“Oh no. It’s definitely deliberate.”

Everyone pulled their gaze away from Iida to stare at Izuku. He didn’t seem to notice, immersed in the four (four) notebooks he’d pulled out of his bag to review. Curiously, Uraraka leaned over to get a look but was met only with a mess of code and the occasional, cryptic sketch. Izuku’s finger flew rapidly, confidently, across the lines though and came to stop about halfway down the page. He tapped a passage, victorious.

“2012,” he read. “Endeavor rescued a cat from a burning building but was unable to locate an owner. The heroes on the scene eventually decided it must have been a stray that got in right before the fire started.”

“That’s horrible!” Hagakure cried.

Izuku nodded. “It sounds like such a little thing, but sometimes it’s the little things that matter the most, you know? Like All Might’s smile. Or Present Mic being seen as approachable because of his show. Endeavor got a ton of good publicity for taking that cat in. The pics of him turning off his own flames so he wouldn’t scare her went viral.” He flipped his journal to show a printed article pinned inside, the top photo highlighting Endeavor as he knelt before a scraggly Maine Coon. Uraraka leaned close.

“I didn’t know you had a cat growing up, Todoroki,” she said.

He breathed out a sigh. The rest of the group only caught it because they were head to head over Izuku’s journal and the exhalation ended up passing over their cheeks. “I didn’t. My father got rid of her the next day. I… don’t know what he did with her.”

Uraraka flinched and Hagakure was right there, saying brightly that there was a shelter nearby your house, isn’t there? That’s it! Iida looked less convinced and Izuku quickly turned to the next page. There, prominently displayed, was a picture they could all smile about.

“Oh my god,” Uraraka breathed. She touched her finger to the image of All Might utterly covered in cats. They were piled in his lap, seated on his massive shoulders, atop his head, clinging to the front of his shirt as he posed with that trademark smile. The picture’s edge fluttered up a few inches before settling back down.

Izuku grinned. “Yeah. I don’t know about your neighborhood, Todoroki, but there’s a shelter just a few blocks from where the fire started and All Might adopted all the cats there. A bunch of the dogs too.” Izuku tapped his finger against the pages, skimming text. “And a parakeet. No one knows where All Might’s private residence is, of course, but he posted pictures for ages afterwards, reassuring everyone that the pets had a good home with him. Over the years he’s let others adopt them—I think he, uh, may have been a bit hasty in grabbing,” he checked his notes. “Twenty-two cats at once.”

“Hasty is putting it lightly!” Iida cried. “What was the man thinking?”

Everyone else stared.

“Iida, I think the point is he wasn’t thinking. Or that he had some other priorities…” Iida just stared at the hand Uraraka laid on his arm, blinking in confusion. Beside him Hagakure sighed.

“Next?” she asked.
Izuku dutifully flipped pages.

“2007. Endeavor was spotted volunteering at a local food bank—”

“Spotted,” Todoroki said, giving massive air-quotes. His face remained as impassive as ever.

“Right… anyway, that got him a lot of good prep too. Later the same afternoon All Might walked into a grocery store and announced that he’d be paying for everyone’s shopping for the next five hours. Wow. I know he’s rich, but that must have cost a lot. He’s so cool!”

Todoroki leaned his arm on Izuku’s head. “Focus.”

“Okay, okay. Here’s another one. 2014. Endeavor gave a rare autograph to a child involved in a villain attack. Upon reading the news All Might promptly refused to leave his own scene until he’d signed anything and everything the crowd wanted, which of course kept growing. He—oh god,” Izuku suddenly scrambled not to drop his notebook, face flushing bright red. “I’d forgotten that there was an… incident involving a woman who wanted All Might to sign her… never-mind.”

“Sign her what?” Uraraka eagerly grabbed at the pages, hoping that she could somehow look beyond the code and dig up some dirt.

“Never-mind! It’s, uh. Not appropriate. The point is that All Might’s PR team got angry that he did this right before a meet and greet, thus drastically lowering the value of his signature. Actually, I think that’s just All Might. He signed my journal before I could even ask him to.” Izuku promptly switched books and proudly displayed the signature in question. The journal had been laminated to properly preserve the keepsake.

“You worry me, Midoriya.” No one needed to see Hagakure to know the expression she wielded. Her body language said it all.

“Well I still think it’s childish,” Iida said, worrying at his lower lip. “Though I suppose so long as it always leads to a good cause… Do you think Endeavor is aware of what All Might is doing? The purposeful nature, I mean.”

A thump sounded as Todoroki kicked the bag next to his seat. “He’s aware. I’m staying with my sister this weekend after our training.”

Uraraka winced. “Yeesh. Sorry…”

“Not your fault. Or All Might’s. I’m actually looking forward to delivering villain victims to his hospital someday,” and there might have been a smug smile tugging up the corners of Todoroki’s mouth.

Izuku carefully replaced the journals, keeping only the latest out to write in. “There are other examples,” he said. “Journal #7 is almost exclusively devoted to their rivalry—”

“Of course it is,” Iida muttered.

“And there are whole pages on the good All Might has done solely to get back at Endeavor. Allegedly,” Izuku emphasized. “I kinda of wonder if there’s a line he wouldn’t cross, you know? Something he’s not willing to do, or an amount of money he’s not willing to spend…”

Hagakure’s shoulder bumped his. “Nah. You know better than that. All Might would never back down!”
“Not when it’s for a good cause and petty revenge,” Uraraka grinned.

Todoroki nodded. “They’re both great motivators.”

It was Iida who pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to hide a growing smile. “Is that what we’re going to aspire to be now? Great U.A. students whose good deeds coincidentally line up with ridiculous, selfish goals?”

“There are probably worse things,” Izuku said, laughing at Iida’s expression.

He closed his last journal with a snap, All Might’s signature now hidden from view. His influence was always at work though.

In more ways than one.
You all want to hear a surprising and astounding secret? I'm still alive! Love it when that happens. Here, take the iffiest of drabbles that took me an embarrassingly long time to pull together...

“I’ll only be a moment—very sorry about this, young Midoriya—but please, make yourself at home!”

An opportunity. Teenagers everywhere, had they known of this moment, would have bemoaned the fact that as All Might left the room there was no one else to snap a picture of Izuku’s expression, preserving it online for the rest of eternity.

It would have made for the perfect reaction image.

After all, what graced his features was an unholy mix of disbelief, panic, and overwhelming awe. The exact sort of expression Iida could have written a paper on and Uraraka would have turned into a meme. The world lost something that day when Izuku settled on unbridled happiness and started hopping in place.

“Make yourself at home,” he whispered, the words bringing literal tears to his eyes. “Oh my god, but I can’t just do that…”

Admittedly, All Might’s personal apartment wasn’t much by most standards, but the plain entryway with shoe rack, umbrella stand, and a picture of a smiling man in a detective’s uniform may as well have been a palace to Izuku’s eyes. He toed off his sneakers and grimaced at the bits of mud he left behind, despite the fact that All Might had already left a thin trickle of blood along the wood floor. Izuku was sure he’d never intended to bring him here. Not so early in their training. But he was here, now, sickness driving them to an early finish, and though the sounds of faint retching he now heard twisted Izuku’s own stomach in sympathy, the rest of him fairly vibrated with excitement.

He was in All Might’s home. How cool was that?!

“The coolest,” Izuku whispered, catching sight of himself in a mirror and noting how his freckles stood out even more than usual. His mouth hung open like a happy dog’s. He couldn’t be bothered to care. Izuku tip-toed towards his reflection and examined the mirror at the end of the hall with the same care and attention he’d give to a museum piece. It was a simple, round thing hanging over an equally simple table. Brown frame. What might be finger smudges all along the edge. It looked like the same kind of mirror that Mom had in the guest bedroom. Which was to say, cheap.

In fact—poking his head around the corner—Izuku was surprised to see exactly how frugal the rest of the apartment appeared. Not that anyone knew exactly what All Might made from his various merchandise, film deals, and the occasional donation from wealthy victims, but it was obviously enough to warrant more than this selection of furniture implied.

The entryway led into an open sitting room: well-worn sofa in front of a modest television, attached dining area, a kitchenette that looked positively pristine compared to everything else. With a quick
glance behind him (All Might would be a while, right?) Izuku scrambled over to the counter, bottom lip pulled tight between his teeth. Huh. It actually wasn’t clean. It did, in fact, have a thin layer of dust marring the whole surface… but then, Izuku supposed All Might didn’t cook much.

There weren’t any appliances tucked into the corner. Just a bag with vaguely medical looking supplies poking out from the top.

Another sound of pain drifted through a closed door. Izuku winced, but didn’t stop his exploration. It was like someone had hooked him through the chest and was leading him by his heart. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity. Surely All Might wouldn’t mind if he just took a quick peak around…

Which was exactly what he continued to do. Except, the more Izuku looked, the less there seemed to be anything to peak at. The kitchen held no interesting food options—the cupboards were near bare—and the fridge’s door was devoid of any mementos. The dining space was just as plain and sparse, the table another cheap knock-off that seemed to suck any potential personality right out of the room.

All Might’s curtains were a standard white. His couch, while on the ratty side, didn’t hold any memories that Izuku could see. If he’d been home he might have pointed out the stain on their middle cushion: That’s where I spilled juice as a toddler and then flipped it over so mom wouldn’t see, letting it set. The small tear down the side: That’s where I had the villains hide their stolen goods before the heroes came on the scene to apprehend them! Or the tiny grooves set in the couch’s left foot: That’s where we had a mouse. Mom screamed.

There were a lot of good times on the Midoriya couch. All Might’s? Izuku couldn’t even be sure anyone had sat on it recently.

Turning on the TV was tempting. The potential to see what kind of shows All Might enjoyed in his free time nearly overwhelming…but no. The noise would surely give him away. Instead Izuku turned on his heel and scammed back into the hall. The door to the right presumably led to All Might’s bedroom (the distant sound now of a toilet flushing) and down the hall was a side door Izuku had missed at first glance, probably connecting to a powder room. Like where he’d been, it was probably small and simple and all around felt more like a hotel room than a home.

Everything seemed used. But nothing was… lived in.

Izuku stilled. He looked back at the framed photo. Hung awkwardly by the door, the picture of that man would have been the last thing All Might saw leaving every day and the first thing he’d see coming in. The one object—as far as Izuku could tell—that was actually personal.

There had to be more in the bedroom.

As if hearing his thoughts, the door across from Izuku suddenly opened and he performed an excellent impression of an idiot boy swallowing his own tongue. Luckily, All Might didn’t seem to notice. He leaned heavily against the doorjamb, the shake in his arms conveying that he was trying to do anything but. And failing. Because there was a shake in his legs too, messing with it all. Izuku took in the bluish tint to his lips, the rosy stain on his shirt where All Might had obviously, hastily tried to wash out blood…and knew that it was time to leave.

Funny that Izuku wasn’t sure he should.

“All part of my lesson plan,” All Might said, mustering up a smile that managed to distract Izuku from every drop of sweat on his brow, the jutting of his collar bone now visible on an already worn out shirt. “I assure you, young Midoriya. This little detour was a crucial part of your training today.”

Despite it all, Izuku’s lips twitched. “Well, we did have to walk pretty far to get here. Plus the beach!
Running on sand is very difficult.”

“I’ve always thought so.”

“And every hero needs to know how to navigate a new environment.” Izuku’s eyes moved comically side to side. “I’d say this area is secure, sir.”

“Good, good. Excellent observation.”

A little steadier on his feet now, one hand rose up and swung down, slowing at the last moment to gently settle in Izuku’s curls. He instinctually pushed up into the fingers there, shaking aside.

“You’re a good boy,” All Might said. It came out in a rush. Like he was holding something back. “I’ll tack on an extra hour tomorrow, alright?”

“You don’t have to—”

“What’s this? Trying to get out of work? Hmm. Maybe you’re not ready to be my successor after all.”

“What? No! I—” but All Might was already laughing. It was wet and filled with phlegm as he steered Izuku back towards the door.

“I know what you meant and it’s appreciated. But not necessary. I’ll be just fine by tomorrow.” All Might’s hand was still in his hair, the plain walls passing them by, only that photograph breaking it all up. He was about to leave a sick All Might here and somehow that made Izuku more queasy than the sound of vomiting had.

At the last second Izuku ducked beneath the arm that held him and came back up with fingers twisting in his shirt.

“Actually, I’m sorry, really, but before I leave can I use your bathroom…?” He shifted side to side.

*Of course, of course,* was the answer. *Go right ahead. Though perhaps not the one just used…* All Might instead pointed Izuku towards the powder room behind them and blinked, a little befuddled as Izuku immediately scurried off. His heart was in his throat and his legs shook a lot like All Might’s now.

He didn’t need to use the restroom.

Instead Izuku shut the door with a solid click and breathed against it, hard. White toilet. White sink. Another cheap knock-off mirror hanging above it. A second Izuku stared back at him, cheeks flushed from the earlier exercise, his hair an absolute mess. Izuku watched himself lift a hand and place it on top of his own head, mirroring All Might.

He didn’t like this apartment. As much as he loved it for being All Might’s, Izuku still felt sick standing in it. *Truly* sick now. There were no brightly colored decorations to match All Might’s costume history. No knick-knacks from his travels, or evidence of his intellect through books or art. It seemed downright irreverent that the most beloved man in the world would only have one, old photograph to show off to his guests. Based on the bits of dust in this bathroom though, All Might didn’t have many of those either.

All at once the twitch in Izuku’s fingers became a violent itch—a need to change something. Anything. Line a stack of cereal boxes on the kitchen counter. Fresh wild flowers picked for the table. Put a small, secret sticker on the back of the TV. Shoes strewn across the bedroom floor
because yes, Izuku’s small glimpse of the room had shown it to be as plain and sterile as the rest. All Might should have more pictures for his entryway, all with mismatched frames and one hanging slightly crooked, bugging you each time you walked by it. But that was the point.

Stain the couch so you could look back at the how and when and even a why years later.

Not that Izuku had access to any of these things. He carried with him a sweat-stained shirt, sand-encrusted sneakers back at the door, an old pair of shorts held up with dying elastic… and literally nothing else. Not even his phone. After all, every day after school he was training with All Might. Who was Izuku going to call in an emergency? He was already in the safest company on Earth.

So, with nothing else available to him, Izuku decided to be uncharacteristically rude in an effort to be a little kind.

“Right. Mom will kill me if she ever finds out,” he murmured, searching beneath the sink.

Five minutes later he emerged. Izuku figured All Might wouldn’t call someone else out on how long they spent in the restroom, especially not today of all days. Indeed, he didn’t seem to have noticed the long stretch at all, sprawled as he was on the couch with a wet towel curled around his neck. Still, Izuku was glad he’d briefly run the sink and flushed the toilet, despite not using either. He frantically waved All Might back down when he moved to stand.

“I know my way home,” he said, already moving back towards the door. He slipped his sneakers on as All Might collapsed into the cushions, gracing him with another smile. “And I won’t tell anyone about this place—of course I won’t!—and I’ll see you tomorrow? Maybe? I hope so. And I hope you feel better! And also I think your sink might be leaking so you should probably take a look at that soon…”

All Might admonished him for nervous rambling with more fondness than Izuku knew how to handle just yet. So he fled, calling out one more jumbled goodbye, weighted down by the lie he’d just told. There was absolutely nothing wrong with the sink, with the exception of what Izuku himself had done to it.

At six, bored one summer morning, Izuku had once written his mom a (horribly misspelled) message on the bathroom mirror. In permanent market. After the knee-jerk freak out, she’d thanked him with kisses and an extra large breakfast—his intentions the most important thing after all—before showing Izuku how to achieve the same effect with steam from her shower. Something a little less damaging.

There was no shower in All Might’s powder room, but he had an extra tube of toothpaste squirreled away. Walking home, Izuku wondered what All Might would make of the finger printed ‘THANK YOU’ smeared onto the glass, along with a giant smiley face complete with bunny ear strands of hair up top.

He’d get mad. ...Wouldn't he? Wouldn’t anyone get mad? A guest making such a big, ridiculous mess like that? If two months ago anyone had told Izuku that he’d get to see the inside of All Might’s home and then proceed to defile it with toothpaste finger painting… well, he probably would have died on the spot. From which part Izuku couldn’t be sure, but he definitely would have died.

Now there was just a strange sense of relief. He’d already done it after all. Left something for All Might—a stupid, silly something that helped distinguish a mere house from a home. That was too important to worry about the consequences. Izuku would face any anger as it came. Because it wasn’t really about him.

Being a hero never was.
Three blocks from home now. Izuku straightened his shoulders and walked with a slight spring in his step, eager now to reach his own front door. Of course, Izuku had no idea that just a few hours from then All Might would muster the strength to check on his sink and instead find a message that (though he’d never admit it) briefly reduced him to tears. Izuku couldn’t know that All Might would keep that stupid doodle up until it grew dry and flaky, and even then he’d already taken pictures for prosperity’s sake. Izuku wouldn’t know until nearly seven months later, when he unexpectedly had reason to visit All Might’s home again, that he’d begun actively shopping in the last half year. It had been a while since he’d had reason to.

That apartment would be a place of reflection; somewhere Izuku was happy to stay.

All Izuku knew now was that All Might was indeed up for training the next day, standing on the beach with his inspiring smile, and the first words out of his mouth were, “I think it’s about time you called me Yagi.”
Izuku’s mom says she’s proud of him an average of two times a day.

It’s not exactly publishable statistics, but Izuku did the best he could based on the information available to him. Mom always says it before bed—while kissing his cheek, smoothing the covers, running a hand through his hair, squeezing his leg. The gesture differs each night, but the words remain the same. “I’m so proud of you, Izuku.” He figures it’s more common for moms to say, “I love you” while sending sons off to sleep and Izuku always squirms a little with happiness at his particular gift. Because isn’t that obvious? Of course his mom loves him. He can see that in every meal she cooks him, each mended shirt, every smile. Izuku doesn’t need any reminders of that…but pride? A part of him thought he’d lost that the day a doctor told them he was quirkless.

Izuku’s mom says she’s proud of him every night before bed. She sprinkles the second gift somewhere throughout the day, normally when talk of his upcoming entrance into U.A. comes up. Sometimes he’ll even get a third if the day is going well—remembering to tidy his room, or politely greet a guest, the one time Izuku managed to help cook dinner without burning it—and some days he only gets the gift at night, but that’s okay. Averages make it so much better. Like the spontaneity makes it more… real.

On rare occasions his mom has said she’s proud of him over four, five, six times in the same day. Even rarer is when she doesn’t say it at all. Sickness. Separation. But whenever life goes back to normal there’s an emphasis to the words that hadn’t existed before, like she’s trying to make up for the time lost. Izuku marks all these moments in his journals with little tallies, perfectly straight lines up in the corner, indistinguishable from his other notes and doodles. For him though they always shine out on the paper. They burn even brighter than All Might’s signature.

Izuku’s mom says she’s proud of him an average of two times a day. Izuku only started noticing this when he began keeping secrets.

“How was training today? You haven’t hurt yourself, have you? Any more pain in your back?”

“No, Mom. I’m fine—”

“I read that it can take weeks for a pulled muscle to heal, but here you are, going off each morning anyway. I’m so proud of you, Izuku. You work so hard.” There it was. A hand reaches up to cup his cheek, soft from lotion and the soapy water of their dishes. “You just rest now. I’ve been looking over the nutritional information you gave me and I think I’ve found a tasty way to incorporate more protein into your diet…”

She always does that. Most wouldn’t think it looking at Inko Midoriya, but she’s a font of ideas packed into one small frame. A chatterbox, as others had less flatteringly put it. Izuku has always loved the sound of his mom’s voice though, the grace with which she flowed from endearment to opinion to practical suggestion. He hadn’t realized until he’d begun this journey that her tendency to jump from one idea to the next was going to work in his favor. After all, if she was already talking about dinner he didn’t have to try and answer her, “How was training today?”

Because what could he say? Izuku wasn’t built for lies. He got all flustered and tongue-tied, so wrapped up in the fear of They already know that he ended up sabotaging himself, each and every time. He could say his day was fine because that was true. He could even admit that it was great. But if Mom decided to press for details Izuku wasn’t sure what he could give her. If he mentioned running on the beach she might want to walk down and visit him someday. If he mentioned running
with weights around both ankles and wrists she’d want to know where he’d gotten the money for something like that. If he mentioned the skinny man yelling encouragement from the sidelines… oh god, that was just a disaster in the making. Yes, Mom. I’m training under a presumably quirkless man who coughs up blood every twenty minutes or so, and there’s no way I can explain to you why that would make me look on him with pride instead of just fear, concern, disgust. How did we meet? You know, just ran into him after school one day. It sounds worse than what it actually is because he’s—

Izuku’s fake conversation always cuts off then. He can’t even reveal the secret in his thoughts.

He sinks back into the cushions of the couch. He’s sticky from sweating, drying, then sweating again and though normally Mom tries to keep it all neat and tidy she’s never once complained about him sitting here. Izuku gently turns his wrists and then his ankles, still feeling the burn that the weights left behind. There are red lines indented in his skin and she’d have questions about that too if she looked more closely.

But that doesn’t happen. Mom is out in the kitchen cooking dinner, humming along to a jingle they’ve both heard on TV, though Izuku can’t remember the product right now. His shoulders ache and his head pounds. There’s a jittery quality to his limbs that he’s only ever experienced the last few months, after pushing them harder than he could have dreamed. They’re all good pains though because he *earned* them. Mom’s whistling is soft and subconscious. Easily interrupted. It’s on the tip of Izuku’s tongue to tell her how he went even further today, yards past the dock he normally stops at. That he was so focused on more—just a *little* more—that when his foot caught a buried stone he didn’t even realize until his cheek burned with the impact and he started inhaling sand. How Yagi had scooped him up under his armpits (surprisingly strong even without his transformation) and started swinging him with giddy congratulations.

*I’m proud of you* had been spoken there too. Not verbally, but in the press of Yagi’s chest to his back and the vibration of his laughter.

Izuku wished he could tell Mom about it.

No use moping though. That sort of thing just led to her worry—or extra, unwanted attention if Kacchan was around. Besides, wasn’t he always supposed to smile? So Izuku painted one on his face and deliberately raised arms above his head, trying to work out kinks both physically and emotionally. He got halfway through the stretch before a spasm in his back released all that breath in a painful whoosh.

Mom was immediately there, eyes focused and a peeler in hand. Izuku was struck with the sudden reminder that she could be *scary* and that sent him laughing in a way nothing else probably could right now. His mom against all the villains of Japan.

Izuku knew who he’d bet on.

“You okay?” she asked, knowing the answer, asking it anyway. Izuku paired that reassurance with a nod. He couldn’t tell her about what his daily training was really like. That he was no longer quirkless. The protege of *All Might*. There was suddenly so much missing between them… which meant that Izuku had to give her everything else he possibly could.


She hummed deep in the back of her throat and marched forward. With a quick flick of her wrist she had summoned a pillow from a nearby chair, determinedly fitting it between the now unsatisfactory cushions and her boy. As her hand pressed into his shoulder and Izuku caught a whiff of her
shampoo he couldn’t help but think, *Would you still be as proud? If you knew how much I was lying to you?*

The care with which she arranged the pillow? It said, *Yes.*

**Works inspired by this one:** [Roasting an Open Fire](#) by [Sapphiria](#)

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