Flower Bouquet

by MaiaMizuhara

Summary

The flowers sprout from night to morning like moles, although they looked more like faint tattoos. Each flower, as well as their color, tells us about the personality of their bearer. Their location identifies the type of person—chest, upper back and shoulders for an alpha (strength, fierceness and protection); hands, legs and face for a beta (hard work, safety and confidence); and finally, abdomen, stomach and lower back for the omega (motherhood, sweetness and sensuality). Every year, the tattoos are enhanced, they bloom and spread throughout the body of their bearer.

With sixteen years, Izuku does not have a flower, but in his memories flashes the red of the gladiolus flower against the skin of Katsuki. It is the memory he has and with it his desire to return home is revived; but things are never easy.

(AU. Three kingdoms, and a war about to explode.)

Notes
This lovely tale belongs to none other than Roquel, who's story has captivated and enamored me so much that I felt the need to share it with everybody else.

From now on, I'd be translating Roquel's story, "Bouquet de Flores" to English. You can expect another chapter every Saturday until I'm caught up with her.

I hope you'll enjoy this as much as I did!

See the end of the work for more notes.

- A translation of Bouquet de Flores by Roquel
Red Gladioli

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sending you forget me nots

To help me to remember

Baby please forget me not

I want you to remember

Forget me nots - Patrice Rushen

There are wounds that mark us, that leave visible and terrible scars. There are others that just exist deep within us, wounds that we keep in the depth of our hearts, wounds easy to hide that always come back to us unconsciously.

Some call them memories.

For Izuku, the memory comes in the spring, when the buds open and the fields are painted with yellow, red, blue, green and lilac colors… The view is beautiful, filled with color, life and an everlasting hope. However, it takes just one look at them for him to feel the weight of the memory come back at full strength.

Every spring, when the flowers rise once again, Izuku sits down to gaze at them—he closes his eyes and inhales the aroma, trying to recognize every piece separately. At the beginning he cried, the sight of the flowers was enough for Izuku to run in the opposite direction until he collapsed on the ground and broke into uncontrollable sobs. With the pass of time, he taught himself how to suppress that first reaction and managed to gather sufficient strength to sit in the fields, surrounded by flowers and memories.

He just needed to breath in the scent of the forest to remember his parents.
The white heliotropes were born on his mother’s left ankle and climbed upwards until they hid beneath her dress. When Izuku was a child he used to sit at her feet to count the flowers, to slide his baby fingers down the impossible stretch of green stems and tiny petals. They were illustrated in a bright white color, the symbol of purity and care.

And it was absolutely wonderful that his father also possessed a white flower in his right hand. It was a beautiful magnolia, with raindrop shaped petals and a tiny yellow center that highlighted the flower’s soft whiteness. From there, the row of green branches filled with small white magnolias were spread through his forearm and ended on his elbow, none as splendorous and magnificent as the one that shone on the back of his hand.

They were the village’s healers. They had a room next to their house where they treated colds, falls, wounds, bites, births and all the ailments every inhabitant of their town could possibly have.

Izuku could sit for hours in a corner of the room while his father diagnosed flus and treated wounds. He could spend whole afternoons with his mother grinding plants and seeds to replenish their shelves. He learned to identify the plants by their leaves, by the color of their flowers. For him, it was like a game to sit at the end of his parent’s feet, blindfolded while trying to recognize the concoctions only by the aroma.

He will always remember the day he wished he could be like them, the day he wished to save the world—he was four years old and his best friend Katsuki fell from a tree, breaking his arm in the process. Izuku remembers that it was him who cried all the way back while the blond, pale as a magnolia, clenched his teeth and grumbled lowly.

His parents did not utter a single scream, nor did they panic; his mother hurried to bring bandages, water and medicine and his father lifted Katsuki from the ground muttering words of encouragement and calmness. Izuku approached the work table, and although he did not dare to take hold of his friend’s hand, he approached as much as possible hoping to offer comfort.

That day, Izuku dreamt of receiving a white flower. That day, Izuku dreamt of being capable enough to heal everyone, to save everyone.

Izuku does not need to try too hard to evoke the scent of lily and honeysuckle. He just needs to inhale deeply so that all the aromas of the forest would infiltrate through his nostrils and flood his body with freshness, bringing back the delicate scent of his old home.

He stays there for a long time, thinking and remembering that time is diluted between his fingers. By the time he comes back to his senses the sun had already begun its descent. The wind blows softly, preserving the warmth of the day, but it will not take long before it starts gusting with cold violence, so Izuku sighs and gets up.
When he returns home Tokoyami had already finished lighting the fire and was amusing himself by cleaning the rabbits that will become their dinner. Izuku is about to apologize for his lateness when he sees them—a bouquet of red shafts protruding from a bunch of other flowers.

Something inside Izuku cracks.

“I brought more,” Tokoyami says, pointing to the pile of flowers. “You’re running out of lotion.”

Izuku smiles, although from the way Tokoyami’s eyebrows frown he thinks his face gesture might be closer to tears than anything else.

“Is something wrong—?”

“No!” Izuku shouts without letting him finish. “No,” he repeats more calmly, approaching with uncertain steps. “Thanks.”

*Mitsuki Bakugou wore a red sarashi that allowed her to exhibit the flowers, of a cherry red color, that extended by all her back and nape.*

*She had won the title as the best fighter for five years in a row. She knew how to fight, she sailed, and she had an amazing ability with knives. She was blonde and fierce, tall and noisy; Izuku loved to sit and watch her while teaching defense classes for the young alpha.*

“Stop drooling over my mother, Deku.” Katsuki used to say when he saw his face of adoration.

“Kacchan, your mother is amazing.”

*His friend’s answer was a pinch. “I’d be even more.” He grunted between his teeth as he turned to leave.*

*Izuku followed him trying to apologize. He knew Katsuki did not stand comparisons. He did not like to be a diminutive version of anyone, not even his own mother.*

Izuku turns away from the flowers and ends up helping with dinner. They sat down to eat in an unusual silence, because after all, the boy does not have the strength to talk about his day, nor does he feel like asking questions.
“Midoriya,” Tokoyami’s voice wakes him up from his trance and Izuku redirects his gaze to him.

“Yes?”

The bird-faced boy looks at him for a long moment. Izuku smells the questions that are hidden under the silence, yet he is careful not to say anything and limits himself to studying the soft surface of the black feathers and the way the firelight dances on his beak. Finally, the boy sighs and murmurs:

“It’s getting late, I’d better go. Do you need anything else?”

Izuku smiles without making any movement to get up.

“I’m fine, thanks.” He says softly, “Will you come tomorrow?”

“I’ll try.”

“Thanks for everything, Tokoyami.”

“See you later, Midoriya.”

Tokoyami gets up and Izuku turns his attention back to his bowl. He pretends to eat while listening to the other boy picking up his stuff; he hears him walking away, his sturdy footsteps fade until the only sound he catches are the crackles of the fire. Only then, Izuku looks back at the flowers.

A gentle breeze shakes the red petals. If you squint your eyes, the flowers lose definition and become a blur of scarlet. A long, slender blur—like a sword.

Nobody was surprised when the noisy son of the village’s best warrior proudly showed the flower of a red gladioli that had bloomed just above the bone that joins the arm to the chest.

The small flower was just about the size of his mother’s thumb, yet it possessed a crimson hue that was inevitably associated with strength, passion and perseverance. The gladiolus was also one of the most beautiful flowers—it represented vanity, strength of character, honor and fidelity. They were the absolute symbol of victory, because once they started to grow they would soon acquire the shape of a sword, long and red.

The complete set undoubtedly made Katsuki Bakugou an alpha.

Izuku remembers with perfect clarity the day he saw the red flower on his friend’s chest. He remembers the bright color and the small dark lines that sprouted just from the center. They were red like the eyes of his owner, red as the sky at dawn. The scarlet color it possessed was extremely radiant.

Izuku remembers the touch, soft and firm, he recalls the delicate smoothness of the skin in contrast to the firm bone that was underneath. He remembers that he spent days dreaming of red petals on a background of alabaster skin.
The sound of an owl wakes Izuku from his trance, only then is when he notices his half-empty bowl with the remains of rabbit cooked in the bottom.

Izuku sighs.

He picks up the remains of his food and buries them, then he cleans the bowls. Instead of going to his bed, the boy goes to his bag where he keeps the last notebook of his collection. He sits by the fire and tries to sketch the shape of the flowers.

He is not surprised when his first drawing turns out to be a gladiolus flower and not a baladre flower, but it bothers him that his sketch lacks life. He spends hours drawing, trying to capture the faint and almost hypnotic movement of the leaves. Dissatisfied, he takes the paintings from his bag and tries to make his drawing possess the ferocity of that red, the strength, the brilliance that he remembers.

It’s useless.

Frustrated, Izuku tears the page, wrinkles it and throws it away. As far as he can. He feels anger and frustration intensely on his pulse. To fight them, he sits next to the flower bouquet and begins to defoliate each of them, separating the petals in different bowls, but his anger fades when he sees the handful of flowers he has in his hands. It just takes to look at them to feel he can see them all again: heliotropes, magnolias, gardenias, roses, daisies, blood red gladioli… all of them and more dancing around him, showing the strength and beauty of their owners.

Izuku takes a breath, his hands full of broken flowers; he would laugh at the irony but the idea is too painful.

“You’ve done this before,” he tells himself, trying to resume the task.

But it is useless. He cannot stop thinking about heliotropes, magnolias and gladioli. He cannot stop seeing them broken and destroyed. All the flowers are gone, and he does not even have a flower on his body to console himself with.

All the children of his age received their flowers almost at the same time. All with the exception of Izuku.

Izuku spent weeks studying his body with attention, waiting for the flower that would define his life,
but when it came, it was not what he had been waiting for. It passed while he was bathing. There was another group of children with him and it was one of them who shouted “Omega” loudly.

Izuku turned around looking for the source of the noise and when he saw the finger pointing in his direction he turned around expecting to find someone behind him. There was no one and it was then that he understood. He covered his belly with his hands and ran to his house.

He did not even care that he left his clothes behind.

He arrived breathless. With his body still wet, he dove inside the consulting room where his father attended to his patients. Both were stunned to see him naked, but his mother immediately recognized his scent and ran towards him with a blanket in her arms. Izuku clung to her with his heart pounding in his throat.

That night, his mother held a mirror in front of him so that he could appreciate his mark. To the right of his hip were three thin and elongated leaves—there were no flowers and only those leaves of intense green color. The two at the ends were extremely thin, like fine needles, and the one in the center was a little thicker with a circle; no bigger than a fingernail, dark green at the tip.

“And the flower?” Izuku asked slightly disenchanted with the lack of color on his skin.

“They will appear soon.” His mother said, moving away the mirror and preparing the bandages for him. “Sometimes they take time to bloom.”

“But what flower is it?”

“Fennel.”

Izuku looked at his mother with a frown.

“That is not a flower. It’s a medical plant,” murmurs the six-year-old boy, trying to contain the panic. He does not even protest when his mother starts wrapping his hips with the bandages.

“The fennel is a plant that is used in medicine and it is also used in the kitchen as a flavoring. It grows in countless places and is resistant to many climates. It is a good plant for an omega.”

“The fennel isn’t a flower.” Izuku stubbornly repeats, feeling small and useless.

“The fennel has a yellow flower. It is small and adorable, but it takes time to appear. It will eventually come, it’s not something you should worry about. Now pay attention, have you seen how I just put on you the bandages? Because now you will have to do it on your own.”

Izuku muttered a protest.

“Why do I have to use bandages if I don’t have a flower?”

It was well known that although alphas and betas could display their flowers with pride, omegas used to cover their bellies and stomachs, to prevent anyone other than their partner from seeing them.

“The flower will come, Izuku, stop worrying about it. Now I’m going to take off the bandages and it will be your turn to try, okay?”

While his mother was dealing with the jumble of bandages, Izuku took the mirror and stared at his brand again. He was six years old and could not stand the bright green vision without flowers of any
kind, so he took the bandages that his mother tended and wrapped his hips and stomach. The first
time they were loose, the second one he squeezed them too much, on the third the knot broke while
walking, but Izuku continued again and again until the bandages stayed in place. He was not willing
to let anyone see his leaves without flowers.

Who would love a flowerless?

“Everything will be fine, Izuku.” His mother murmured as she smelled his anguish.

Izuku embraced her and let himself be cooed by her sweet and warm words. He tried not to think
that he would have preferred to be a beta, like his father, or an alpha, like his best friend. Someone
who could have a gorgeous and dazzling flower to brag about.

Izuku leaves the flowers, unable to continue touching them, and gets up to pick up the piece of paper
with a grunt of anger. He lights his oil lamp and makes sure to put out the fire before entering the
cave. He takes off the bandages that cover his stomach and tries not to look at the web of green
leaves that spread across his belly while he turns off the light. In the dark, he wraps himself in the
blanket with his eyes open—in his mind he does not stop seeing the image of flowers shattered
between his fingers.

Izuku does not cry, he has long since run out of tears, but the lament that grows inside him threatens
to explode all the walls he has built carefully over time. He concentrates on his breathing, gropes for
the ball of paper he dropped near his pillow, and as soon as he grabs it he clings to it and closes his
eyes trying to sleep.

At some point he dreams; or rather, recalls.

Izuku shook the water from his face and moved away from the river, into the forest. As soon as the
rest of the children’s voices become a distant buzz, Izuku lowers his bag and began to unwrap his
wet bandages.

“Why don’t you bathe with the other omegas?”

Izuku jumped and turned around with his heart pounding in his throat.

“Kacchan!” He screamed when he saw the blond standing behind him, as he struggled to redo the
knot in his hip. “What are you doing?”

“Why don’t you bathe with the other omegas?”

Izuku clenched his mouth tight. There was a private pond that the omegas used to bathe without worrying about other people’s looks. Children and adults would bathe in the river, in the lake, or on the beach, always wearing their bandages; but on the pond they could undress completely and enjoy a bath in relative peace. Izuku has already had his mark for a year and a half, yet he had never gone to the pond with the other omegas.

“So?”

“It’s none of your business!” Izuku shouted, feeling miserable. “Now go away!”

“What is your problem?!” Katsuki approached and extended his hand to the knot at his waist, “Do you perhaps have a flower so ugly that you don’t want anyone to see it?”

Izuku reacted with anger. He slapped the hand away from the knot vigorously and backed away, he felt the tears burning in his eyes.

“You cannot see it!”

“Haah? Why not?!”

“You—you can’t!”

“Your alpha is going to see it.”

“But you are not them!”

Izuku spun around and ran; behind him he heard Katsuki scream.

“Hey, Deku! Come back here!”

But Izuku kept running, he could not bear to think what his friend would say if he discovered that there was no flower on his body.

All the spring festivals were held at the capital, five days away. That, together with the fall feast, were the two most significant events that brought together all the inhabitants of the island. The villages sent their best warriors to participate in the tournaments, the artisans sold the works done during the winter, the different couples of newlyweds could request the blessing of the priestess… The activities were as varied as they were extravagant.

Izuku was eight years old when his mother agreed to let him attend the festival.

“Don’t stay away from your group,” his mother repeated for the umpteenth time while Izuku
finished putting sandwiches in his travel bag.

“Remember to take a change of bandages,” his father advised, as he handed him a wineskin filled with water along with another set of bandages.

The adults embraced and kissed their son until it was he who moved away from them to stand next to Katsuki.

“He will be fine,” said Mitsuki Bakugou, smiling confidently. “Masaru will come with us and he will take care of the children.”

Izuku said his goodbyes to them and joined the travel caravan. That day, he refused to get on one of the carts and preferred to walk with Mitsuki, asking all kinds of questions. The woman answered each of them with a smile, and at no time seemed to get fed up with him.

At night, Izuku tried to put his blanket next to Katsuki’s, but his friend got up and began to fold his blanket.

“Kacchan?”

“My mother is there,” the blond muttered as he pointed to his parents’ little tent. “You can sleep next to her bed.”

Izuku gaped at him while he carried his things to the other side of the campfire, he saw him settle while turning his back on him. Feeling abandoned, Izuku bit his lip and looked around. Most couples, such as Mitsuki and Masaru, had retreated to their tents. Young people and children slept by the fire, all of them under the care of the sentinels stationed around the perimeter. With nowhere else to go, Izuku curled up and tried to sleep.

He woke up at some point of the night because of the howl of an animal. He stood still, expecting to hear movement or voices, but there was no noise and the absence of it aroused his uneasiness. He knew that the sentinels were taking care of the camp and he also knew he was safe, but he could not stifle the feeling of fear that was beginning to grow in him. Not wanting to attract anyone’s attention, Izuku circled the campfire and approached Katsuki.

“Kacchan.” He shook him slowly, murmuring his name next to his ear. “Kacchan, wake up.”

The blond boy shook himself and turned to him, alert and on guard; as soon as his senses caught the aroma of Izuku, his body relaxed.

“What do you want, Deku?”

“Can I sleep with you?”

“What? No, if you are afraid go with my mother. Haven’t you spent all day jumping and smiling for her?”

“Kacchan, please.”

He tried to imprint on his voice all the urgency and fear that he felt at that moment, and it seemed to have worked, because Katsuki wrinkled his nose and took his blanket to place it next to him.

“Stop crying—and control that scent or you will wake everyone up.”

Izuku settled down next to him, wrapped himself in his blanket and arranged his head so that his
forehead was as close as possible to Katsuki’s shoulder. He then inhaled the scent of peace and safety emanating from him, and was rocked with the sound of his breathing; he was almost asleep when he heard the soft whisper of his voice.

“...Deku.”

“Hm?”

“You aren’t going to marry my mother.”

Izuku smiled with his eyes closed, “I don’t want to marry your mother.”

“Then why are you always drooling for her?”

“Because she’s wonderful.”

Silence spread through his body and Izuku let himself be carried away by the warmth and calm of the moment. The dream was there, so close he would have been able to touch it if he stretched his hands, and just before crossing the threshold into unconsciousness, he was able to hear Katsuki clearly.

“More than me?”

With his last flash of consciousness, Izuku muttered. “No one is better than Kacchan.”

“What are you doing?”

Izuku looked up from his sketchbook and watched as Katsuki sat next to him.

“Have you finished training, Kacchan?”

“Why else would I be here then? …You didn’t come to see the training today; my mother asked about you.”

“Really? Oh, I should apologize to her tomorrow.”

“Don’t do it!” Katsuki leans towards him and looks at the object that Izuku held in his lap. “What’s that?”

Izuku smiles and shows it to him.

“My father has gifted me a notebook.”

“Why?”

“He told me that I can start registering the plants I already know. I can draw them and write down their properties and qualities, the uses they have and their benefits.”
“But he already has books on that.”

“Those are his, this one will be mine. I have just started it. It has no color because the paintings are only sold in the capital, but it does not matter. I will fill it with all the plants I know and then, if I can, I will paint them.”

“What are you going to need them for?”

“I want to be a healer.”

“The omegas are not healers.”

Izuku shrugged and continued to sketch the plant in front of him.

“Anume is an omega and has a boat to fish.”

“Anume lost his alpha in a storm, he uses the boat to feed his pups.”

“Even doesn’t have an alpha and in spring she won the archery tournament.”

“Even is a rarity… Is that what you want, to not have an alpha?”

“No alpha is ever going to love me.” Izuku murmured, thinking of his green leaves without flowers. He preferred to stay alone and avoid the humiliation of someone else seeing his brand.

“And if someone asks you?” Asked the blond after a moment of hesitation.

“Well, they’ll have to accept that I’m going to be a healer.” He did not say it with presumption or bravado. It was a simple statement, like when someone says that the sky is blue.

He wasn’t able to hear what Katsuki said, he watched him move his lips, but the words did not reach his ears. He remembers they have been squatting next to each other, he remembers the pressure of his shoulder against his, he remembers the scent of his body, he remembers having gazed at the red gladioli flowers on his shoulder.

He remembers the surprise when the man appeared in front of them. He emerged from the bushes and stopped short at the sight of them.

Izuku had never seen before a man with purple skin, there was no one like him in his village. He was big and stocky, he wore loose clothing in light colors and his hair was the color of snow.

The man smiled and immediately fear spread through Izuku’s body. His fear floated like a dense and bitter incense, to which Katsuki responded by standing in the way of the stranger. The growl he made was not a sound that Izuku remembered hearing before, but it awoke in him a sense of urgency.
Izuku stood up just as two other strangers appeared next to the first. One had the head of a lynx and the body of a man, and the second of them had giant eyes and horns the size of his arm.

“Run!” Katsuki reacted first, turned around and pushed him to move. Izuku obeyed, managed to take three steps when something got tangled with his leg and made him fall.

He fell to the ground with his hands in front of him and spun around in time to see Katsuki jump over the man with the whip. The blond was nimble and fierce, but he could do nothing against the combined strength of three grown men. Izuku shouted when the boy fell to the ground.

Izuku remembers to have moved in impulse, remembers to have crawled to him just to see the blood flowing from his head.

“Kacchan, Kacchan!” He had called desperately, extending his hand to him, but was never able to touch him; the blackness falling over his body like a giant mallet.

Still unconscious, he kept shouting his name, again and again, in the middle of the endless darkness.

Izuku woke up filled with fear and anguish. He stirred in his bed, breathing quickly and without rhythm. He stood still, sniffing the world, expecting to feel the gentle movement of the waves and the scent of salt, but instead he breathed in the fragrance of the earth, and felt the scent of the cold morning. He felt the dry tears on his cheeks, and wiped them away without stopping to think.

He straightened on his bed and hugged himself with the blanket. He struggled to control his breathing while counting to a hundred and then up to a thousand. Little by little, his eyes adapted to the darkness and he managed to visualize the outline of the lamp and the shadow of the clothes near his bed.

He dressed up in silence, placing his bandages almost automatically. He sheathed on his gray pants and put his blanket over his chemise. When he came out of the cave the world was a dirty grey, and when he inhaled deeply, the warmth of his body rose up in white spirals.

Izuku took a moment to recover. The memory still felt too close and if he was not careful he was going to sink into it. No self-pity, he told himself harshly, shook his head decisively and went to work. He did it with determination, without hesitating.

He did not allow himself to ponder.

Fire, he told himself and moved the stacked wood inside the cave to the remains of his nocturnal fire. Water, he took his two largest pots and walked the long stretch to the nearest stream to fill them. Lotion, he took a big breath of air and ended up defoliating the flowers, moved a handful of each in containers with lids, then proceeded to work each of them with different methods. Breakfast, he used some of the water he had left to prepare tea and wrapped himself by the fire while nibbling on his wheat cracker.
The sky was beginning to clear and Izuku just looked at the heavens full of amazing colors. The red protruding from the rest.

He closed his eyes.

Each festival was the same and different at the same time. Although it was not the first festival he attended, Izuku could not help himself when he stopped at each post to appreciate the beauty of the necklaces, bracelets, knives and an infinity of other products. So much was the variety and perfection of each piece that he had not been able to decide on any specific one to buy.

“What’s wrong with you?” Katsuki asked him that night when he saw him sulking by the fire. Izuku told him about his predicament and the boy laughed. “Only someone like you would spend the night worrying about not having bought anything.”

Izuku grimaced.

“Take it,” Katsuki dropped a small and long package unceremoniously on his lap. It was about the size of his hand.

“What is it?”

“You will not know if you don’t open it.”

When he opened it, he found a box with six little jars of blue, red, green, yellow, white and black paint.

“Oh!” Izuku murmured with surprise and delight. He turned to Katsuki. “For what—?”

“What’s the use of paint for, eh? To paint! …Do you want your plant books to be boring?”

Izuku blinked and recalled their conversation of months ago. He smiled and laughed in pure happiness.

“Kacchan, thank you!” He hugged him with the pain box still in hand and breathed in the familiar aroma of wood and smoke. For the first time since he was six years old he did not mind at all his lack of flowers.
“I’m going to get out of here,” Izuku told himself for the umpteenth time, opening his eyes. He repeated it every day, sometimes five or six times to gather strength. “I’m going to find you, Kacchan.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter on January 27th.

"Black Incense"
Black Incense

Chapter Summary

Katsuki dreams and remembers, the memories are the fuel that keeps the flame of his anger alive.

Chapter Notes

Me and Roquel thank you all so much for all the kudos and reviews everyone left last time! We thank you from the depth of our hearts for joining us in this amazing journey and we both hope you all get to enjoy it from start to end. Really, thank you so much! (ノ^_^)ノ*:・゚✧

And so, let's start Katsuki's side of the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was usual for one of Izuku's parents to be absent for a few days to attend patients who lived far from the village. Usually it was his father, who disappeared for a few weeks, either to go to the capital to buy material or while making routine visits to the nearest villages. There was a time, however, that the two had to be absent at the same time.

The fault was on the storm that caused a collapse at the East. The closest village to the disaster had been partially covered with trees and debris. All of the adults of his village had left to take care of the wounded and help calming down the little ones, behind were left all the children under twelve with a small group of betas and omegas to tend over them.

That night, while it was raining once again, Katsuki woke up with the need to go to the bathroom. He rubbed his eyes and it took him a moment to understand that the ball of heat that was next to him was Izuku, with wet strands stuck to his forehead. His usually calm expression was absent, instead he was frowning and moving his lips as if he were talking to himself. When a thunder rumbled outside, Izuku involuntarily contracted and his frown got even more pronounced.

Katsuki reacted automatically. He reached out and gently stroked the dark green strands. While brushing his hair away, he rubbed his forehead delicately until the lines of tension faded away.

Once satisfied, Katsuki got up and went to the bathroom. They had been gathered in the assembly hall, the benches were removed so that the children could lie down on the floor while the adults slept near the entrance. The bathroom was no more than ten steps away from the building, yet Katsuki still returned soaked up.

The beta that had been watching him gave him a blanket when he returned. Katsuki used it conscientiously and parted without saying a single word. When he returned to his mat, he found Izuku awake.

“Kacchan?” The boy asked loudly.
“Shh, Deku, you’re going to wake everyone up.” He settled down next to him and wrapped himself in his blankets.

“I’m sorry,” the boy murmured, moving closer until their foreheads touched. “I just woke up and you weren’t here.”

“I went to the bathroom.”

“You got wet.”

“It’s raining again.”

“I know, the thunder woke me up before and that’s why I came, was it wrong?”

“Go to sleep now.”

And Izuku obeyed him. He closed his eyes and it did not take him more than five minutes to be swept away by the dream. Katsuki stood still, absorbing the warmth and the scent. It was like having a small bonfire for himself, although it was a different type of warmth, this one was radiant but it did not burn. Katsuki let himself be enveloped by the sensation. He closed his eyes and inhaled slowly—he got drunk and fell asleep.

When he woke up it took him a moment to separate the dream from the reality. The feeling had been so real that he was sure that if he just stretched out his arm he would find Izuku sleeping next to him. He laughed at his naivety, and the sound was not pleasant at all. Katsuki turned around and looked at the grey ceiling, feeling that his usual anger invaded him once again. He had woken up in a bad mood, like he always did when he dreamed about him. Which was basically every day.

He rubbed his face and forced himself to get up.

His partner, in the cell on the other side of the aisle, was already doing his morning warm-ups. Katsuki ignored him and started with his. Some stretches, push ups and sit-ups. He finished with the body soaked in sweat, his muscles tense and the feeling that his mood was not going to improve anytime soon.

The bell rang.

Water began to flow through the two channels that passed by the inside of the bars. Katsuki and the rest of the cage dwellers leaned by the water. Some drank directly from the canal, and others, like Katsuki, used their water buckets and began to fill them until the bell rang again and the supply was cut off.

Katsuki drank and washed himself as best as he could with a cloth and fresh water; he kept a little for later as the heat inside their cells was usually unbearable during the afternoons. Then he just waited.
Breakfast arrived half an hour later. Two guards came downstairs escorting two omegas. Two omegas for two rows of cells, although not all were occupied.

Unconsciously, Katsuki’s eyes roamed on both of the omegas’ bodies. The two girls wore a white sarashi around their chests, white wristbands with metal rings and a fur collar around their necks with a ring that left no doubt of their use, yet the worst of all was that they were not allowed to bandage their stomachs. All of the omegas that he had seen over the years on that cage wore a fundoshi that covered the front, but left the back and most of the belly exposed. They were held by loops around the hips and its goal was to highlight the intricate design of flowers that were supposed to be a shared secret between an omega and their alpha.

From afar, Katsuki glimpsed the white petal on the skin of the girl and averted his eyes, clenching his teeth.

The change had been sudden. One day there were no bandages, and on the next one they appeared.

Katsuki was not around when Izuku’s flower had sprouted; none of the presents had seen the flower but they had managed to distinguish the outline of the leaves and stems before the boy ran home.

When Katsuki saw the bandages he did not question or mention them at any time. In his village the alphas were taught that it was disrespectful to ask about the flower of an omega. When he was old enough to understand, his mother told him clearly that the omegan pond was forbidden under any circumstances and that there was a severe punishment for any foolish person who would try to disturb the privacy of his companions.

Katsuki understood and obeyed, but he was still curious.

He was not the only one, though. The older alphas used to gather around together to talk about the possible flowers of the omegas, they would laugh and fantasize, but sooner or later they would inevitably end up matching with one and never come back to participate in such conversations. It was considered of poor taste after all, to ask another alpha about their omega’s flower. So Katsuki’s curiosity was natural and he could not do anything about it.

The problem was… that Izuku always bathed with them, swam with them, made sandcastles on the beach with them. He was at any time of the day with them, with his bandages and all. Izuku did not want to go to the omegan pond and Katsuki had to find out why, even though he knew he should not ask. He knew it was incredibly rude to even try to touch the bandages without permission, but he could not help it.

And his imprudence had made Izuku cry.

“I’m sorry,” he said that night when he steeled himself enough to offer an olive branch. “What I did was wrong.”
Izuku’s unhappy expression softened and he had accepted the olive twig with a smile.

“Thank you, Kacchan.” The boy had approached him and had given him a hug he did not feel worthy for. “I’m sorry for hitting you.”

“I deserved it,” said Katsuki and returned the hug with care. He felt his body vibrate with Izuku’s laughter and he knew that his friend had forgiven him.

Katsuki kept the questions for himself, but his curiosity remained there, as it was natural.

“....blanket,” the voice returned him to reality and Katsuki turned to the girl with brown hair, her round face had a friendly expression. “I’m going to change your blanket and clothes. It’s time to wash the ones you have there.”

Katsuki got up, folded his blanket and came over to give it to her. At that distance, the scent of the girl enveloped him—chestnuts and berries—, and for a fraction of a second Katsuki was tempted to inhale forcefully; instead he backed up to the farthest wall and threw the blanket towards her, which hit the bars and fell to the ground. Then he undressed and kicked his pants near the bundle of fabric.

The girl said nothing, picked up the blanket and clothes, and passed a clean set through the bars. She placed the breakfast above it: cinnamon rolls, fruit, bread and dried meat wrapped in paper. Although the task was relatively simple, the girl took her time to complete her task before moving to the next cell.

After so much time being locked in, Katsuki was familiar with the routine. He knew that the mission of the omegas was to calm them, flood them with pheromones so that the transfer was as calm as possible, but that day the blond could not approach her without thinking of mint and spices. He still had the memory fresh in his mind and he did not want any other aroma to overshadow it.

The omegas finished their work and left with the two guards. He noticed that only two of his companions had also pulled apart from the omegas and ate with the same expression of distrust that he surely had, the rest of them seemed calm and relaxed, no doubt drunk with the sweet aroma of omegas. Katsuki ate quietly away from the blanket and clothes that smelled of chestnuts.
“Nejire smells like strawberries.” Katsuki heard one of the older alphas say. They had finished their training and were sitting at a side, drinking water and stretching their muscles.

“I know,” answered another alpha that had joined the conversation. “I sat next to her in…”

Katsuki moved away from the group while helping his mother pick up the wooden swords with which he had been training, but one of his friends had listened to the conversation and had continued the topic with the children his age. For Katsuki, the inquiry had lacked interest until one of them had brought Izuku’s name up.

“Midoriya smells like medicine,” said one of them, wrinkling their nose.

“Yes,” answered another one quickly. “Smells like mint, or ginger.”

“I think he smells like flowers,” said a third. “I like it.”

Katsuki stopped what he was doing and turned towards them.

“If you have nothing better to do, you can leave. I don’t feel like listening to stupid things.”

“Do you think he smells like medicine?” The first of his friends asked and Katsuki roared.

“I said, get out!” He pushed them until they all run out. “Leave!”

Katsuki finished collecting the stuff and paused for a moment to think. Yes, Izuku always smelled of medicinal plants, smelled like infused flowers, smelled like those pastes Inko always made and that Izuku tried to imitate, but he did not smell like that all the time. After bathing and before he returned home to be impregnated with the aroma of plants, Izuku’s scent was unmistakable.

He smelled of spices and mint. He smelled like home.

After breakfast and before the effect of the omegas became opaque, another group of guards came down to move them. First, they opened the cages on the left and the occupants came out in a straight line. Katsuki took the pants, and while holding his breath, rubbed it against the ground, then against his body until he was sure that his own scent was opaquing anybody else’s; additionally, he had dry leaves next to the wall, so he took them with discretion and put them in his pocket.

When it was his row’s turn to leave, Katsuki counted the number of guards and their weapons. It was useless of course, several before him had tried to escape, what the heck, he himself had also tried—he bore the marks of his failure on the back. The damn cells were underground, and they were a labyrinth. The only exit he knew of was from the training camp but that place was infested with guards patrolling the battlements. The exit was made of iron and the door could only be opened from
But instead of going up, they went down. First by stairs and then using an elevator. They went into the mountains, to a zone dimly lit by torches, and next to each torch there was a tall base that had incense on the top. Katsuki cursed to himself when he spotted the unmistakable scent of milk and honey. He heard several deep inhalations and felt, rather than saw, that the environment relaxed. It was inevitable. It was within their nature and it was difficult to combat a custom rooted deep down their system.

It smelled like a pregnant omega. A happy and peaceful omega. It conveyed warmth and calm, and when it was breathed in the natural reaction was to relax, even to purr. The scent made them docile, made them manageable. Katsuki felt his body soften despite his reluctance.

To fight it, he put his hands in his pants and rubbed the dry leaves, then he brought his fingers to his nose and covered it with the mint aroma. It was tenuous, but he concentrated on it. One by one, the alphas divided into groups. Some took their picks and began to dig, others picked up the rocks and transported them to the cargo elevator, the last group was responsible for uploading the material. Katsuki swung the pick in his hands and for a second he thought about nailing it to the closest guard, but the impulse gave away when he remembered that even if he managed to knock down all of the guards, it would have only taken one of them to sound the alarm; all the elevators would be paralyzed and there would be no way out of there.

And Katsuki had to leave. He had to go out. There were pending accounts and he wanted to collect them. So he took his pick and started using it. He lifted it over his head and buried it in the rock, imagining a particular face.

He woke up tied, his head was throbbing, and he was unable to remember the last moments before he became unconscious. He looked up to the sky, smelled the salt of the sea and when he turned around he felt the sand on his neck.

“Oh, look. This one woke up.”

Katsuki turned to the voice and found an unfamiliar and frightening face. His hair was light blue, almost white, and his red eyes were surrounded by wrinkles. He smiled, but his gestures were not kind—his aura emanated pure hostility. The memory of what happened in the forest came back to him, he remembered the men, he remembered Izuku on the ground. ‘I hope he’s gone.’ He thought desperately as he struggled against his bonds.

“Maybe I should put you back to sleep,” the man muttered and Katsuki felt nauseous when his hand made the gesture of reaching out to him.

“We don’t have time, Shigaraki.” Someone else mumbled. Katsuki could not see them because they were outside his periphery, but he would never forget their voice. “The adult alphas are on their
Katsuki thought of his mother and immediately got on his knees. His hands and legs were tied but he had to make time; he had to get his mother—

Every thought possible floated on his mind when his worst nightmare came true. Izuku was on the sand, unconscious; the vision of his body tied paralyzed his heart. Seeing one of the men pick him up to put him in a small boat blew something inside him.

“Let him go!” Katsuki roared and stumbled when he forgot that his hands and feet were tied as he tried to get up.

Somebody else picked him up and he writhed like a worm, but he was only a twelve-year-old kid tied up, there was not much he could do. They put him in a different boat, along with other alpha from his village, all of them unconscious and none older than fifteen. Shigaraki’s boot kept him stuck on the ground, so the only thing Katsuki could do was scream, writhe and gaze at the sky.

He saw the profile of a ship and when they managed to get him inside Katsuki glanced around. There was another ship nearby, both were completely different to the small goondole that his town used to fish. These were gigantic ships, with huge white sails, and on the inside there were giant rooms full of cages.

When Shigaraki threw him into one, Katsuki lost his breath and took a moment to recover. By the time he was able to turn around, the door had closed, and the blue-haired man was smiling.

“Where is he?!” Katsuki howled, ignoring the pain in his head.

“Your friend?” Asked the other with a creepy laugh. “They travel on the other ship, but maybe, someday, if you behave well, you could convince me to let you see him.”

Katsuki had screamed and cursed at him. His nightmare had barely just began.

The pick got stuck, taking Katsuki out of his reveries. He took a moment to breathe and realized he had worked on autopilot. His forehead was beaded with sweat and his shoulders were numb; his back creaked when he straightened, but none of that mattered. He felt good, relaxed and at peace, he inhaled the delicate aroma of honey and his battered body breathed a sigh of relief.

He did not think the work was monotonous, boring and strenuous, he did not think about the time, he did not think the food was bad and tasteless. He worked reveling in the aroma of milk.
“Kacchan?”

His voice; it is hard to hear his voice.

“How?”

It was like a distant echo. A distorted echo.

“Kacchan!”

He woke up from his trance and immediately scanned his surroundings. He was back in his cell, and the work day was over. He felt his head light and filled with smoke, so he shook his head; despite the discomfort, he could certainly say that the incense has lost its effect.

Katsuki approached his water bucket and wetted his face and body, vaguely aware that the cell has been cleaned, that his shit bucket has been emptied and that there is a slight omegan scent in the air. He drinks until he feels full and gradually regains control over his body. He stretches his back carefully and massages the tendons of his arms the way he has done it at nighttime for the past few years. He was so concentrated on his task that it took him a moment to process the words that came from the adjacent cell. He turns to the voice and is greatly surprised when he discovers a new face.

“What?” He growls, studying the stranger’s features.

“Bad day?” Asks the other with a smile.

And Katsuki does not know what is more extraordinary, the carefree smile or the feeling that this boy has no idea where he is.

“What’s your name?” The stranger asks him, leaning against the bars that separate both cages. “I’m Kirishima, or Eijirou if you find it more comfortable.”

Katsuki growls and ignores him, he does not feel like chatting.

“I had asked you before,“ the guy continues as if nothing. “But you didn’t answer, nobody did. It was pretty weird. You all had the same expression, between reality and dreamland. What happened?”
“Does it matter?” Katsuki grunts, disentangling his neck. “Tomorrow you’ll know.”

“Oh…” He keeps quiet for a second, just one. “Would you mind giving me more details?”

“Yes.”

“...yes what. If you would mind or if you’re giving me more details?”

Katsuki feels that his bad mood returns with full strength.

“Shut up!”

“I see you’re upset, do you think—?”

“Shh!”

Surprisingly the strangers holds his tongue, maybe because he had also heard the steps. The ritual is repeated and two guards escort two omegas that carry their dinner; these are not the same as the ones from breakfast, and one of them is a boy.

Katsuki hears his cell neighbor take a quick breath. He can feel the surprise, the shock, the agitation, and the never-ending flow of different emotions sprouting from him. All newly arrived alphas have the same reaction when they see an omega for the first time in public without bandages.

Katsuki looks at him and is not surprised to see the blush on his face, nor the way he suddenly tries to look everywhere except at the omegas. All his confidence vanished when the blond omega kneels next to his cell to pass dinner between the bars, he stays still while staring directly at his face and when the blond gets up to leave, the stranger directs his eyes to the ground.

While the omega places his dinner inside his cage, Katsuki approaches him. This time he does not mind sucking the aroma of oranges.

“I need more mint,” he murmurs, picking up his dinner while trying to hide his face from the guards. The other does not respond, but Katsuki knows he has heard it. After all, it is not the first time he asks for it.

The omegas leave and Katsuki eats his dinner in peace, or at least he does until the steps of the guards disappear in the distance and his neighbor decides to resume their talk.

“Why are they—?”

Katsuki cuts the question that he has heard a hundreds of times. “Do you think they have a choice?”

He listens the alpha take a deep breath and Katsuki supposes the conversation is over, but he is wrong.

“What did you tell him?” He asks in a low voice, turning his back to him.

“It’s none of your business.” Katsuki mutters while biting on his food lazily.

“Wow, you’re so charming.”

Katsuki’s bad mood bursts out at last, his head hurts, he feels useless and the desperation that roars inside him seems to have no end. He gets up and in two strides he covers the distance to the adjacent cage. He stretches his arm and buries his finger in the chest of the newcomer.
“Listen, you moron. Nobody here has any humor for your jokes or questions. It’s obvious that this is your first day. Do you want to know what’s going to happen? You’ll find out tomorrow. Do you want some advice? Shut up! Let the rest enjoy their dinner in peace.”

The stranger studies him with absolute attention. Katsuki looks back at him and tries to make up an idea of the man in his head while examining his body. He has vast angular features and his complexion is robust and firm. At the center of his chest scarlet lys flowers bloom and gleam. When Katsuki is just about ready to turn around and go back to his dinner, the stranger says:

“How do you like to live here?”

Katsuki growls, a sound of threat and fury.

“How are you an idiot?”

“How do you want to go back home?”

He listens to the question but his brain is not able to process it. The pain on his back is dull and it spreads through his body, crushing any other sensation. He opens his eyes and blinks until he can focus on the face in front of him. When he recognizes the body, he is filled with a thick and liquid hate.

“I’ve heard you say you wanted to go back home, although maybe it’s the incense’s fault, I don’t know.”

Katsuki grunts and tries to throw himself at him, but his arms are chained to the wall.

“Oh, we have a wild cat here.” The blue-haired man laughs and Katsuki feels his insides contract in disgust. “Several actually.”

It is only then when Katsuki realizes that he is not alone. There are more boys chained in the same room as him. All of them are around his age, some even younger than him.

“You know,” Shigaraki continues without looking at him. “You’ve been muttering a name while you were sleeping… Deku? Do you find it familiar?”

Katsuki roars and the sound alerts the others who begin to shake in their chains.

“Shigaraki! Stop provoking them.”

“Shut up and bring more incense.”
One of his lackeys rushed to please him and Katsuki struggled with more force. He hates that incense. He hates it with all his strength. It smells like an omega, a happy pregnant omega, but there was something wrong with it, because it does not only reassure them, it also leaves them weak and makes them lose track of time.

But there was no way to escape, soon the room began to get flooded with an irresistible aroma. Ignoring them all, their captors continue with their talk.

“How long will the conditioning take?” Shigaraki asks.

“In a couple of weeks we’ll send them to the general.”

“And the omegas?”

Katsuki tenses, it is the first time he hears them mentioning them.

“We will not have time to go and look for more. We cannot risk being intercepted by Yuuei’s ships. We have to deliver this group to the city.”

“The general will not be pleased.”

“The general will understand that it wasn’t anyone’s fault that the damn ship was wrecked. We were lucky that ours didn’t run with the same destiny.”

“Hey? Did you hear me?”

Katsuki blinks and looks at him. He takes a second to rewind the conversation. Back home? No, there’s nothing there for him. His mother, maybe, if she’s still alive. But what he really wants, what he wants above everything else: It is the head of the man called Shigaraki.

“I want revenge,” he says, and his voice resounds low and severe, like the growl of a wild animal.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter on February 3rd.

"The Fourth Attempt"
The Fourth Attempt

Chapter Summary

Izuku starts the trip back home, but the farewells are bitter and the memories even more.

Chapter Notes

Thanks everyone for the kudos, reviews and the overall support! We are heading forward slowly, but we hope you enjoy the adventure!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

He woke up with a headache and it took him a moment to understand that yup—for sure—the lamp above his head was moving and that it was not a result of his imagination; nor was he imagining the bars that were next to his face.

“Hue,” he murmured and felt his mouth dry. He tried to get up but only managed to turn around, feeling that his head was beating like a giant heart.

“Are you okay?” Asked another boy sitting next to him, an omega from his village two years older than him.

“Where?”

“On a ship,” someone else muttered.

Izuku closed his eyes and concentrated on easing the pain in his head. He touched the bump and massaged the outline despite the chills that ran through his body when he touched it. When he managed to calm the dizziness he stood up slowly. In his cage there were another eight omegas cohabiting with him, and all of them from his village; there were also four other cages in the room, each of them filled with omegas from all ages. Izuku counted no less than fifteen unknown faces.

None of them was Katsuki.

At first he felt relief, because if the blond was not there it meant without a doubt that he they had left him behind. ‘Stay at home,’ he thought, and it was almost absurd to feel that his consolation managed to reassure him; but the calm did not last long. The room smelled of stress. The fear of the omegas had spread throughout the compartment filling it with a bitter scent. It was impossible to remain calm in those circumstances. Izuku tried, he had tried not to think about the body of his unconscious friend.

‘There was too much blood,’ he told himself and immediately shook his head. ‘No. Kacchan is fine. It was just a blow, someone must have found him already. My parents would have tended him. He’s going to get better, it’s not the first time he has cracked his head open. When he wakes up he’ll tell everyone what happened, Mistuki and the rest will know.’
Izuku came out of his trance when Toru pressed next to him, only then did the boy realize that he had been muttering loudly.

“Will they come looking for us?” The girl asked, resting her head on Izuku’s shoulder.

The answer was immediate. “They’ll come.”

‘Kacchan will come,’ Izuku told himself, full of blind confidence. And when the time comes, Izuku would be waiting for him.

The omegas piled up in small groups trying to give themselves comfort. The vicious environment lightened, but it still reeked of fear, uncertainty and anxiety. Izuku breathed and every inhalation was shaking his assurance that Katsuki would look for him. He fell into an restless sleep; he dreamt of Katsuki covered in blood, dreamt of his white skin falling apart between his fingers. His fear joined with the others and when they started to cry, he did not have the strength to stop his tears.

They were not allowed to leave to go to the bathroom, so soon the room got filled with the smell of urine, shit and vomit. Izuku and the rest used one corner of the cage as a bathroom and piled up in the other. They received food once a day and because their rations were tiny and limited to bread and water, the bath began to be used less frequently. Everyone had started to show signs of exhaustion—they slept more and moved less. It only took one to start crying for the rest to follow.

In spite of everything, it was a consolation to be surrounded by the scent of his companions. Izuku woke up in a pile of arms and legs, trying to rescue the aroma of his home.

Izuku woke up with nausea. The ship was rocking with such violence that one of the lamps that hung
on the wall shot out and crashed to the ground. The oil spilled on the wood and the fire spread uncontrollably.

All of the omegas began to scream.

It did not take long before one of the guards came down to investigate the uproar. When he saw the fire he left running and returned carrying two buckets with water. It was almost funny to see him wobble because of the ship, but in the end he managed to put out the fire. When the guard finished he turned to leave, but just at that moment the whole ship shook violently and all the cages moved.

One of them crashed into the guard and the man bounced to the wall where his head emitted a strong ‘Plop’.

“The keys!” Izuku shouted when he saw him on the floor.

Immediately one of the adult omegas that was in a nearby cage took out her arms from the bars and after a brief hesitation began to search the pockets of the unconscious man. As soon as the keys were found the omega tried each one until she found the one that opened her cage.

The omegas came out. Another violent shake sent them to the ground and made them roll to the wall. The adult, who had some quick reflexes to hold on to the cage, staggered but was able to keep her vertical position. With great care she moved from cage to cage, opening the doors. All the omegas began to move slowly, some crawling, others holding on to the cages, but the trembling was growing in intensity. And not only that, with each violent shake the water that was entering the stairs kept accumulating even more until it reached the depth of two fingers, then it covered their ankles, and it kept growing.

The omegas stumbled and fell, their bodies slid from left to right. Izuku, who was holding on to one of the cages, waited until the movement of the ship tilted to the right and then released his hold. He crashed into another omega but managed to get to the corner closest to the door.

Another violent shake, the worst of all, moved the cages, and they all ended up colliding into the opposite wall. The surge of water that entered the stairs got even more pronounced.

And it did not stop.

Clinging to the ring embedded in the wooden wall, Izuku noticed that the water began to reach his waist, then his chest and by the time it reached his head he let go. He floated and waited until his forehead touched the ceiling. On the corner of his eyes he saw several omegas following his example, then he inhaled deeply and submerged.

He swam to the door, he swam with all his strength and although he felt weak and exhausted, he did not give up. He swam down down the stairs hoping to leave the waters, but when he did he found no air or sky. They were under the sea.

Izuku swam. He kicked until he felt cramps on his legs. He braced until his shoulders turned into fire. His head pierced the surface and his immediate reaction was to open his mouth and breathe, and then when a wave hit his face he sank once again. He emerged coughing and with the lacerating sensation of having swallowed water against his will.

He struggled to stay afloat, but wave after wave sank him beyond despair. Suddenly something hard crashed into his face, the blow shook him and he reached out to grab it. It escaped between his fingers, and Izuku used the rest of his strength to go after the piece of wood that was moving away from him. As soon as he had it within reach, he clung to it and used it as a float.
More exhausted than ever, Izuku took a moment to breathe. The raging sea did not stop rising until it fell with force, cold and implacable. The wind emitted roars like those of a furious beast, and the sky flashed lights, one after another, accompanied by a deafening bellow. When Izuku looked around, expecting to see other omegas emerging from the sea, all he found was water, white waves swaying against him. There was no sign of the ship, its crew, or the merchandise they carried in the vault.

Izuku was alone.

He closed his eyes and rested his cheek against the board. He thought of his home and let the sweet nostalgia invade him. He cried silently, saying his goodbyes to his parents, to his friends, to Katsuki.

“Don’t be a wimp.”

The phrase sounded clear and fresh in his mind. He could remember the nuances of that voice without effort. He could see the confident smile and the expression brimming with presumption.

Katsuki had always been brilliant, had been the first to get his flower, had started his training before anyone else, had skillful hands to grasp knives and make knots, was fast and agile and had become the star that guided his life. Izuku wanted to be like him, he wanted to be what Katsuki was for him.

Izuku’s hands clung to the plank without hesitation, he opened his eyes and fought the sleep, hunger and fatigue. While the rain raged on him, Izuku vowed not to surrender.

“Wormwood is bitter,” he murmured to himself as the wind continued to blow. “It has long, dark leaves and it serves to calm the pains and the stomach. The basil...”

With the storm whipping above his head, Izuku continued to list the plants he knew. He recited one by one, their characteristics, their utilities, and their shape. He imagined them and tried to remember the aroma of each one.

When he finished reciting all of the plants he knew by heart he started again. He knew he would never see Katsuki again if he surrendered.

When he came back to his senses the storm was over and he was no t able to remember ever fainting. He woke up in front of a blue sky, bright and clear. He woke up with his body numb and his head full of noise. He woke up under the scrutiny of big black eyes. When he saw her with another person with the head of a bird next to her, Izuku started screaming.
Izuku opened his eyes and the first thing he saw were the familiar black eyes, the thin square face and small nose. This time, he smiles.

“Hello, Tsuyu-chan.” He smiles and tries to identify the time of the day by the sun’s position. “I didn’t know you were coming today.”

“I came to collect mollusks. I didn’t think I would find you here, it’s a bit past the afternoon.”

“Really?” He straightened up slowly, disentangling his back. “I was working on the sails, but I fell asleep.”

“You know you can’t stay on the beach Zuchan. It’s dangerous if someone else finds you.”

“I closed my eyes for just a moment, I didn’t even realize that so much time had passed. I will start packing my things.”

“I’ll help you, but I have to hurry. My sister will come looking for me if I don’t return soon.”

“It’s okay, if you want to I’ll help you so you don’t get late.” Izuku takes the bucket that the girl had and they spend the next half hour with their feet stuck in the sea. “Is the curfew still enforced?”

“It will last until the king’s troops arrive.”

“How much time is left? One week?”

“The recruiting letter arrived two weeks ago, so another two need to pass before the first group arrives. Fumikage told me you’re thinking of leaving by then. Are you sure it’s a good idea? You could do the same thing you do every year.”

“I’ll go into the woods when my heat arrives. I have everything ready—food, water, blankets; but I don’t want to risk any of the soldiers finding the ship. If they find it they’ll ask questions, or worse, they’ll take it away.”

“Fumikage says—”

“I know. He has offered to take responsibility for it in case they find it, but it’s a risk I don’t want to take. I can’t spend another year building a new one.”

“You’ve done it before.”

“Yes, I did, but this is the first one that has never sunk during any of the test trips. It’s the best I’ve done so far.”

“Are you sure it will resist the trip?”

“I hope so.”

“Have you made any alterations in the route?”

“According to the maps that Tokoyami got me, we are at the southeast of the Inner Sea, and on the other side of the sea is the Yuuei Kingdom. If I can get there and border its coasts, I’ll be able to reach the southern tip of the continent. From there, I must continue to the southwest until I reach the group of Kohei Islands. One of those islands is my home.”
“Crossing the Inner Sea isn’t easy. Storms abound and there are water snakes. Those who traverse it use huge ships to make the sailing successful. I think it would be better if you didn’t separate yourself from the coast. If you manage to follow it, you’ll go around the sea and you’ll reach the other end anyway.”

“It’s an option that I still haven’t dismissed. I could get away from the coast enough to avoid being seen by land and if I ran into a storm I could go to the coast and wait for it to pass. It is, without a doubt, a viable option; but, if I do follow through it, I would have to cross near Overhaul Castle, and we know very well how your king isn’t able to put up with my race. If they catch me, they’ll kill me. Even if I suppose that I pass without being seen, immediately afterwards there are the lands of the General and we know that its port is always open. I’ll not be able to cross it by ship, I could leave the boat before arriving to the port and try my luck by land, but even if I manage to cross the territory without being caught, I’ll have to cross the war zone…” Izuku stops and turns around to her. “I’m sorry, I’ve started muttering once again.”

“Don’t worry, I’m glad to see you’ve considered all the possible scenarios, but even so, I think that crossing the sea on that ship is risky.”

“Thanks for your concern, Tsuyu-chan, but it’s something I have to do.”

Once they finished collecting the mollusks, Tsuyu helped him collect his things and hide the small boat under leaves and branches. They begin to walk back home and before separating, Tsuyu sighs.

“Has Fumikage told you?”

“That his name’s on the recruiting list? Yeah, he did. He also told me that you plan to get ready instead of your brother to avoid him being the one taken away.”

“Samidare is too young, my mother would die of pain if she had to see him go.”

“It will also hurt her to lose you.”

“I’m the oldest one of my siblings, it’s my duty. Maybe the war would be over when next year arrives.”

“Those are the news that arrive?”

The girl sighs.

“It’s said that the General and our king have started the process of an alliance.”

“Is that why this year’s recruitment is more exhaustive?”

“It’s said that our king will send support troops for the General. I suppose that with both forces they plan to oppose to the king of Yuuei.”

Izuku absently rubs his nose.

“If the two kingdoms of the western zone come together, nobody will be safe.”

“You must be careful, Zuchan. The General has convinced our king to deliver him anyone who wears flowers on their body. They have also decided to help in the construction of ships, if any of their ships finds you, there’ll be no escape.”

Izuku shakes his head.
“It’s a risk that I’ll take. I can’t stay all my life here, hidden in the forest, waiting for no one to find me. I appreciate the concern that Tokoyami and you feel, but when you guys leave there’ll be no one left who knows that I’m here. I can’t stand thinking that I’ll never see my home again. I have to go, I have to take this chance.”

The girl nods and Izuku moves away from her, offering another sad smile.

Izuku’s heat comes and goes. It leaves him exhausted, dissatisfied and with a mind full of memories—the aroma of wood and smoke, the ghostly sensation of alabaster skin, the condescending smile, and the bright red of the gladioli.

The memory of Katsuki is radiant and hot. Izuku touches himself while thinking about him, murmurs his name until it loses meaning and grinds until his body melts again and again. And even then, it is never enough.

The sky is colored in a light grey when Fumikage and Tsuyu arrive at the beach to say goodbye. Between the three they transport the food, clothes, blankets, the bottles with pastes and water.

“Zuchan,” said the girl when she stops to observe her friend. “What’s that?”

Seeing that she pointed at his ankle, Izuku raised his pants to show his artwork.

“I made it.”

A beautiful white orchid flashed just above the bone of his ankle, from it green lines were born and wrapped around his leg.

“It’s not perfect, but I think it’ll work out.”

“Won’t the paint fade?” asked Fumikage.

“If I wet it and rub it away it will and if it stays wet for a long time the ink will run, so I intend to wrap my leg with bandages, this way I’ll avoid getting it wet and it’ll serve as a distraction.”

“Have you loaded enough lotion for the odyssey?”
“All that I could, but you can’t recognize us by our scent anyway.”

“But we can track you.”

“I know. Well, I have everything I need, and I’m also carrying some plants in case I get dizzy, sick or hurt. I think I’m ready.”

They embrace once again, offering advice, consolation and good luck. When the sun finally raises completely from the horizon, Izuku hugs them for the last time.

“Thank you for rescuing me,” he says, squeezing them hard. “Thank you for helping me when I had nothing. Thank you for the food, the company. Thank you for not delivering me.”

Tsuyu cries quietly as she mumbles, “Take care Zuchan. I sincerely hope that you will be able to return to your home.”

“Thanks, Tsuyu-chan. If I can, someday, I hope to return.”

Fumikage does not cry, but his expression shows a deep sadness.

“Hopefully, Zuchan, you’ll never see any of our people ever again.”

The two friends push the small boat while Izuku gets ready with the oars. He shakes his hands until the silhouettes on the beach are dwarfed, then, he turns towards the sea.

“Here we go.”

The first day the wind is favorable. Izuku releases the sails and guides his ship, taking as a reference the sun. It advances at a good pace, and when there is no more wind he tries to fish to maintain his food reservations, although he knows that eating raw fish constantly can be dangerous.

The sun is unbearable, so Izuku wraps his head in one of his shirts and undresses. He sleeps at intervals, always taking care that the boat does not move away from the imaginary line he drew. When it rains, he collects water inside one of the pots that he carries and every day he counts his food, the days he has been traveling and tries to adjust the rations as needed.

According to his calculations, he’s not even halfway through the trip when he encounters his first storm. It’s not terrible, but it rattles the sea with fury and the cold waves collide against his boat with such force that Izuku is left with no other choice than to tie himself to the mast in order to avoid falling. The nausea shakes him and the experience overall is terrible.

When the storm finally calms down, Izuku is exhausted. His first thought is to make sure that his things remain safe and it takes him an eternity to check everything in his inventory. When he’s finally over and starts to resume his course, he notices a black shadow that flashes on the horizon. There’s not only one though, because behind it he begins to distinguish another one.
Izuku’s stomach contracts with panic.

The first thing he does is get dressed. His hands tremble so much that he cannot get his bandages done on the first try. Fear beats within him forcefully, but Izuku bites his mouth, uses his breathing exercises to calm down and restarts his work. He puts his pants on, his chemise, his vest and tries to fold his pants to leave the bandages ankle in sight. After that he hoists the sails, and unfortunately for him, there is no wind.

Izuku curses.

The black shadow advances at an astonishing speed and its contours do not take long to distinguish themselves. Behind them come other three ships, one after the other.

Izuku uses the oars to initiate the retreat, but the lookout of the first ship must have an excellent view because the ship has slightly modified its route and now heads directly towards him. Wanting to avoid a collision at all cost, which would undoubtedly end with his boat split in two, Izuku moves in parallel line to the ship. He waits for the speed of the ship to not allow them to stop so he would have the opportunity and be able to get away before the others react, but the desire is in vain because he realizes that the ship began its deceleration from the moment he corrected his route.

As soon as Izuku’s boat is close to the ship, long ropes fall from the railing. Izuku tries to use the oars to get away but before his boat starts to move, one of the men on board jumps using the ropes and falls on his boat.

The blow shakes the boat and Izuku bends over the edge because of the movement. He loosens the oar unintentionally, and when he tries to grasp the other to defend himself, the intruder grabs him by the hair. Another intruder falls from the ship, and while the first one of them uses the ropes to ascend while carrying Izuku like a sack of potatoes, the other is entertained by putting all of his belongings in several sacks.

The attack does not even take more than ten minutes, and despite the situation, Izuku is quite surprised by the efficiency.

The attacker drops Izuku with force and the boy growls when his arm receives all the weight of his body. Before he can say anything, strange hands turn him around and try to tear his vest. Izuku fights and kicks, but the copper-skinned man is much stronger. Then, a voice near him says:

“Just leave him. He’s a workman.” A hand grips Izuku’s leg and the boy prats that his deception works. Apparently it does because the hand releases him and the attacker takes him up as if he was a mere child.

Izuku looks around, studying the faces. Many of them have animal characteristics, but there are others, like the man who’s carrying him, whose only difference is the color of his skin.

“Put him in a cell,” the voice belongs to a small man with eyes of a man but the beak of a bird. “And
the rest to work. Turn on the boilers again. Maximum speed.”

Just at that moment a dreadful rumble resounded in the distance. Izuku turned around to look towards the horizon. In the distance, the second and third ships seem to have crashed, but after a thorough observation, Izuku realizes that the second ship is in flames while the third seemed completely fine. Moreover, Izuku distinguishes that they are not even the same type of boat: the one burns has only one mast, while the other had three, and the flag that flutters over them is different.

He listens to someone of the crew yell a curse and the little man starts screaming.

“Come one, move! I want this thing to move! Unless you want to enjoy the damn hospitality of the savages.”

The last thing Izuku sees before they put him inside the cellar is the fourth ship, the one that comes behind everyone, passes the other two and heads directly towards them. Like the third ship, the last one has three masts and on the top of one of them a grey and red flag flies.

Izuku knows to expect the cages, but unlike the ones he knew when he was ripped from his home, these cells were individual. The cellar is full of small cages, most of them full. Izuku needs just an inhalation to know that all the people present are alphas. There was not a single beta on board.

Inside his cage, Izuku arranges his clothes and tries not to writhe with anxiety. It is difficult to not do it when the whole compartment is full of anger. The alpha, although young, exude warnings and fury, Izuku smells them and understands why they, unlike the omega, go in separate spaces. They smell confinement, violence. Izuku feels the urge to become a little ball, to beg for forgiveness. He is tempted to release pheromones in order to calm them, but he bites his hand and buries his nose in his clothes.

His clothes smell like flowers. Flowers and plants. He concentrates on the aroma and tries not to look at anyone. The alpha that is in the cell next to his speaks to him:

“Where did you come from?” His tone is steely, his face looks no older than fifteen years old, but his teeth look frightening and his eyes sparkle danger.

“I was traveling on my boat,” he explains, trying to keep his voice steady. “I got away from the coast and they captured me.”

The alpha sucks air several times in a row.

“You are not an alpha,” he growls.

“I—I’m a beta.”

“You don’t smell like one either.”

“I’m a healer, I make pastes and medicine with plants. Surely I smell like that.”
The alpha inhales once again, “Yeah… I can smell the flowers.”

“What was the rumble that we heard?” Asks another alpha, the boy who’s cage is right in front of Izuku’s.

“A ship… there was a ship burning.”

“Which one?”

“I don’t know… aren’t they all the same?”

“No! Those demons attacked our villa, but the king’s fleet is chasing them. We’ve been listening to their warning horns since two days ago! It’s a matter of time before they reach us.”

“They are close,” Izuku tells them before explaining with great detail the scene that unfolded on the deck.

“The omegan boat was on fire?” Someone asks and Izuku turns to the voice but doesn’t know where it comes from.

“The omegan boat?”

“Where do you come from that you don’t know?”

Izuchokes. “From the Kohei Islands,” he said with a dry voice. “They attacked my village a few years ago, but I never knew that—”

One of the alphas cut him with a gesture. “Those demons always use two ships: one for the alphas and one for the omegas. If the king’s fleet has manages to board that ship, then the omegas will be safe.”

There are countless murmurs of excitement among the boys. Izuku notices that the anger subsides, no doubt many of them are grateful to know that their friends, siblings or future fiancés are now safe; but there is something that shakes Izuku from head to toe.

“How many ships of the king’s fleet were there?” Asked someone and Izuku reacts slowly.

“I saw two,” he mutters without strength. “One stayed with the ship on fire, the other one comes right behind.”

There are cries of elation, the compartment is flooded with energy, rapture, but Izuku does not pay attention. He cannot stop thinking. A ship for omegas. A ship for alphas. His heart writhes. ‘No,’ he thinks with despair. ‘Kacchan is at home, he’s at home.’ But even while he repeats it, he does not stop seeing the body of an unconscious Katsuki. He does not stop remembering the water filling the cellar, he does not stop thinking about the raging sea.

‘Two ships,’ he repeats. He did not see another ship.

‘Two ships.’ There was no other ship.

The two ships… Did they sink?

Izucover his mouth, goes back to the corner of his cage, he tenses his body to control himself and lets the tears overflow. Silent, bitter and salty.
Some extra characteristics for this a/b/o for those with curious hearts:

At the age of six, children are classified as alpha, beta or omega; although they don't reach maturity until they are twelve of thirteen years old. The classification occurs when the petal of a flower appears on the skin of the person. They sprout from night to morning as if they were moles, although they look more like faint tattoos. Each flower, as well as their color, tell us about the personality of their bearer. Their location identifies the type of person—chest, upper back and shoulders for an alpha (strength, fierceness and protection); hands, legs and face for a beta (hard work, safety and confidence); and finally, abdomen, stomach and lower back for the omega (motherhood, sweetness and sensuality).

At the age of six, the first flower appears and every year the tattoos are enhanced, they bloom and spread throughout the body of their bearer.

Besides them, there is another race of human beings. They don't have secondary gender, but they have animal characteristics, colorful skin, and other details that vary from village to village. That's the basic idea of this world, so here we go, thanks for reading this!

Next chapter on February 10th.

"The Boiling Anger"
The Boiling Anger

Chapter Summary

Never ask an omega for their name, it is the last piece of privacy that they have left.

Chapter Notes

I just have to tell you guys that my stomach grumbled and my mouth salivated from all
the food mentioned in this chapter, so it was double the suffering (’;_;’)

And ohh boy this is getting so intense! Thank you everyone for all the kudos and the
reviews, Roquel and I appreciate it with our whole heart!

Glossary:
Ouji - Prince
Ou - King

See the end of the chapter for more notes

From his boat trip Katsuki remembers the scent: a room full of young alpha, furious and violent,
locked for days. It is not something that is easily forgotten.

The grunts, cries and curses lasted a long time, they lasted day and night until hunger prevailed.
Despite the fatigue and discomfort, Katsuki remained attentive. His fury was red and bright, it was
paralyzing. He could sit for hours, tense as a steel bar. He watched, he listened, he paid attention…
waiting for an opportunity to jump and flee; but there never was one.

After the ship they traveled in wagons for days until they reached the fortress. Katsuki saw the tall,
grey towers with a small flag waving on the tip of one of them, before they pushed his cage on a
platform. Katsuki stood on guard waiting for the door to open. Despite the fatigue, he was ready to
bite and kill; he did not expect the floor to move.

He fell through a tilted tunnel. Which’s surface was completely smooth. Katsuki used his hands and
nails to avoid moving but he had no luck, he reached the bottom of the passage and his body hit the
ground with a dry sound. Even so, he quickly got up, ready to face anything, but there were only
other guys like him. All tense, distrustful, dirty and hungry.

Behind him came more prisoners, all of them children. When the tunnel door closed without
warning, everyone looked at each other. They waited in silence, getting ready to fight, but their
enemy had been invisible. It had arrived in silence, sliding between their legs, ethereal and without
form.

Over time, Katsuki would give it the name of the black incense.
The memories of his stay in that dungeon were vague, fragments and pieces of events that seemed unreal, although if he tried hard he could evoke complete scenes. He remembered that the food came through the tunnel albeit no one seemed interested in approaching, he remembered that many contracted and shrunk in the corners with a lost expression, and he remembers that there were others who shook violently until they suddenly became rigid with the gaze dull.

Several of his acquaintances died like this. Katsuki survived. He survived the storm that had taken Izuku. He survived the incense and conditioning. He survived the dungeons that came later. He survived the chains, blows and hunger.

He survived everything.

And within him burned a single desire.

“I want revenge.”

He tasted the word, each syllable, each intonation. He feeds himself with it and the word becomes fuel for his boiling anger. Revenge. It is the only thing he has left, the only thing he lives for.

His answer causes the newcomer to smile. A gesture full of satisfaction, a gesture of companionship, a gesture of understanding… for Katsuki it is a useless gesture. He does not want his friendship. He does not want approval and nor does he want his attention.

“Then we’ll have to get you out of here.”

Katsuki freezes. ‘Yes!’ The scream resonates within him with the force of a storm. ‘YES. YES. Yesyesyes…’ He wants to be free. He needs to be free. ‘I would be free…’ But before he can say anything, the guards return. Katsuki backs away, tense and on guard.

“It seems that your welcome party is ready.” The murmur that he emits was not intended for him to hear, but the boy in the adjacent cell turns to him and frowns. Katsuki looks at him and tries to use the same tone of voice again. “We’ll see if you’re one of those who returns.”
“What?”

“They have no choice.”

Katsuki walks away. He does not need to look to know how the situation develops, he has seen it too many times—Alphas ready to fight with boldness and determination, only to be reduced by damned tranquilizing darts.

The bastards had learned that if they dare to get into a cage with us, nothing guarantees that they will come out in one piece.

Katsuki hears the curses of the alpha, he hears his body hit against the bars, he hears him scream and fight and when it gets silent, he hears the grid that opens, the body that is dragged, and the silence that follows. When he looks around, he sees the same anger that beats inside him. Everyone knows what awaits the newcomer.

He woke up chained to the wall in the middle of the darkness. Unlike previous occasions, the chains was fixed to a metal collar on his neck, which left his hands and legs free. When he tried to stand up he realized that he was trembling. He could not say when was the last time he had eaten something.

Slowly, examining his newly recovered will, Katsuki moved through the cell, measuring the length of his chain and trying to disperse the fog that covered his mind. He stretched out his arms in front of him and moved slowly, hoping he would not crash or fall, but before he could touch anything the chain tensed. He began to move laterally until he found one of the walls on the sides, then he leaned against it and let himself fall. He closed his eyes and tried to look back at everything that has happened to him, but there were only incongruous pieces and flashes. He thought of Izuku, and it was a relief that his memory was still there, waiting to be called. He struggled a bit, but he was managed to evoke his dazzling face with round cheeks. The Izuku of his memories was happy and possessed a blinding smile; his voice had a characteristic high-pitched tone and his laughter was carefree. Katsuki inhaled strongly but instead of the scent of basil and mint he smelt the confinement and the rottenness of his cell.

He left his trance when the door opened.

Katsuki opened his eyes and stood up instantly, but the sudden movement and adrenaline hit made him dizzy. It took him a moment to recover before focusing his attention on the visitor, and when he did he felt his eyes resent the faint light of the lamp. He rubbed them hard, hoping the weakness would go away. When he focused on the newcomer, he saw a girl, no older than fifteen, skinny and tall. Her orange hair had been cut short and she was almost half naked.

Katsuki’s eyes slid from the white sarashi to her belly. When he spotted the intricate design of the daisies that stood out on her hip, the boy choked. Surprised, altered and confused, Katsuki looked away from her and turned around, giving her room to cover herself.

He heard her approach but even so he did not turn around.
“I brought you food,” she said.

Katsuki looked at her, trying to keep eyesight above her head. Along with the scent of fruits he distinguished the indisputable smell of fear and anxiety.

“Who are you?”

“Itsuka.”

She sat down in a way that her knees covered her stomach. Katsuki sighted and imitated her. He looked at her necklace and the wristbands with rings. They were similar to his, and he did not need to ask to know that her dress was something she had not chosen by her own free will.

“Eat.”

She handed him a bag and Katsuki looked at her suspiciously. He became alert and the room was filled with his scent.

“Didn’t the tell you?”

“Tell me what?”

There was a sharp inhalation and the girl’s anxiety thickened around her.

“First, eat.” She said.

“Why…?”

“Shh,” she murmured as she rested her head on her knees. Her voice faded until it became an urgent whisper. “Don’t shout and don’t move. They are watching us.”

Katsuki tensed and held back the urge to look around. With his heart eating at full speed, Katsuki took out the fruits, the bread and the water. He hesitated a moment before touching the items, even though his mouth had begun to salivate in anticipation.

“It’s clean,” she murmured when she saw his uncertainty. “They want you to trust me.”

Katsuki ate slowly, making sure his stomach was not rebelling against him.

“What do they want?” Katsuki asked, making sure the murmur did not extend beyond them.

She hesitated, her fear shot up and flooded the room. Katsuki wrinkled his nose.

“I’m sorry,” Itsuka said, trying to control herself.

“Just spit it out. Why are you here?”

“We have… they want… we’re supposed to mate.”

Katsuki choked. Although his intention was to remain calm, he could not help but get up and back away.

“What?!”

“Don’t scream, calm down.” When she got up, the other stuck to the wall. “If you scream, they’ll come.”
“Stay away!”

She froze at the indisputable tone of an alpha. They stayed like that for a moment before the door opened and one of the guards entered.

“Come here.”

The omega hesitated before obeying, and as soon as she was near the guard, he held her by the hair and dragged her through the door. It was then that Katsuki realized that the worst had yet to come.

They tried it again and again.

They tried to nurture his trust and Katsuki made sure to keep his distance. Day by day he was building the walls between them. He was not fooled by her aroma not by her sweetness. They ate in silence, separated, without exchanging a word.

They tried to threaten him and Katsuki laughed at them. He fought and they skinned his back, he received blows and lashes without yielding. There were long periods in blank where he laid unconscious and limp. In one of those times he almost made the mistake of letting himself go. He had woken up confused and disoriented, and when he managed to focus his sight the first thing he registered were two green eyes. Two light green eyes, like the grass in spring. Had he been fully conscious, he would have realized the difference, but his head weighted a lot and the memory of Izuku was still fresh. For a moment he thought he was still dreaming and let himself be carried away. He had kissed that “Izuku” with a silent and anguished despair. He would have done much more if he had not sucked the air hard, longing for the scent of spices, but then he recognized the fruity aroma, sweet and soft, completely opposite to what he expected. He had released her, pushed her away and used the strength he had left to force her back.

They tried to use her nature and Katsuki had preferred to bleed. That day, when she entered, Katsuki knew immediately that something was wrong. The girl’s scent had intensified exponentially and her eyes, usually calm, seemed to tremble with agitation. As soon as he understood it, Katsuki roared, bit his arms until they bled, he screamed in fury until the girl retired to a corner to wail, wrapped in need and desire. Her scent was so intense, so exquisite, that Katsuki saw black. That day, he cracked his head open while throwing it against a wall, the intoxicating aroma of fruit flooding his senses, and luckily for him, he had managed to faint.

They tried to blackmail him and Katsuki had to harden his heart. It was closing all sympathy and all empathy when he saw the bruises on the delicate skin were becoming more and more visible. Sometimes he could hear the beatings of the omega on the other side of the door and Katsuki tried to withdraw into a corner, knowing that if he showed the slightest sign of consternation, everything would start all over again. Eventually, the healthy girl withered before his eyes and it was heartbreaking to see her sink into silence as she sat away from him. There were days when she cried in silence, disconsolately and broken.

Seeing her like that, Katsuki did something he swore not to do: he spoke to her.
“Eat,” he held out the two guavas that were in the bag and waited patiently until she recovered from the surprise to get closer.

Itsuka bit the fruit and chewed silently.

“I’m not going to mate with you,” said Katsuki eating slowly. His voice was a faint whisper and she answered him in the same way.

“Would you prefer someone else?”

He thought of Izuku. ‘If it was him…’ The thought crystallized and it was terrible, because it will never be him, because he will never be there. For the first time, Katsuki appreciated that Izuku was free and wasn’t forced to do what Itsuka did.

“I’m not gonna mate with anyone,” he answered in a tense voice and pulled away.

And he fulfilled it. He resisted Itsuka and those who followed. He fought against everyone at every moment, until finally they got fed up with him and left him alone. There were others like him and he knew of omegas that resisted in their own way. They all watched. They all learned. Everyone was waiting for an opportunity.

If the knucklehead returned, there would be one more to the group, and if not, it would be a memory that Katsuki would hurry to forget like all the previous ones. He had not time to bond, he did not have time to make friends, Katsuki had sworn he would live to kill Shigaraki, and he waited for that moment. He would leave that cage and once he was out, once there were no more bars, the fucking world would burn with him.

[...]

Eijirou woke up hungry, which was nothing new when someone is locked in a damn cell for what, three days? Five? There was water and that at least guaranteed he would not die immediately. Perhaps the intention of his jailers was to let him rot in this damned dungeon, which endangered all his plans.

He knew the risks, he told himself that while trying to distract himself from his stomach’s roars, but it is one thing to know that there is a possibility of dying while fighting and another is to face the possibility of starvation.
He imagined the buns filled with meat that his father made. The memory made him salivate and sent him back home. He could see him by the table, using both hands to prepare his other father’s lunch. In face, the memory was so real that for a moment he thought he could smell it. Meat, tomatoes and…

*Oranges?*

He opened his eyes and noticed that instead of the usual darkness there was a small flash coming from the entrance. There was an omega there, the same omega from before. Just like last time his clothes were…

Eijirou blushed and looked away, feeling cornered. He coughed to control his embarrassment and when he recovered he asked:

“What are you doing here?”

“I brought you soup.”

He turned slowly, trying to keep his eyes glued to the ceiling. With great care he slid his gaze until he met the blond sitting in front of him. His knees were pressed to his chest and there was a lamp and a tray of food on the floor in front of him. Eijirou’s stomach roared loudly as the aroma of the soup flooded his nostrils. It was not one, not two, there were several consecutive grunts, embarrassing sounds and to some extent… entertaining.

“Well, it seems that my stomach welcomes you.” The comment was spontaneous as Eijirou himself and to his surprise he hear the omega laugh.

He was speechless with shock at hearing it. The boy had a high-pitched and contagious laugh. He was about to make a comment about it when the omega transformed. That brief flash of humor vanished in a blink, his shoulders tightened, his hands gripped his elbows and his entire body emitted bewilderment and guilt. There was a warning in his eyes, a sign that Eijirou could not read.

“Eat,” said the omega and when the other did not make any gestures to obey, it was him who took the spoon and tasted the soup. “It’s pretty good, don’t let it cool.”

He looked at him again and this time the signal was clearer. *Follow me*. Eijirou breathed calmly and leaned over to take the bowl of soup.

“Slow down or you’ll burn yourself.” *Make time.*

“I’m so hungry that it would not be a problem at all.” *Why?*

“It will be if you get sick.” *Do it.*

“Did you come just to make sure I don’t get sick?” *Why?*

“I came to eat with you, when you finish, I’ll go.”

“I would prefer,” Eijirou said while extending his hand towards the omega but the warning in his amber eyes was loud and clear. *Do not touch me.* So the alpha recalibrated his movement and made it appear that he was leaning over to take the loaf of bread on the tray.

“I didn’t hear you, what did you say?” *Continue talking.*

“Eh?” He turned his head and the chain attached to him tinkled. Eijirou looked at the blond and
smiled. “I just wanted to say that I’d prefer to try stuffed buns.” Why?

“I’m sorry, we don’t made those here.” Patience.

“It’s a shame.” Why?

“Well, if you say it out loud maybe someone will fulfill your wish.” They are hearing us.

“For real?”

The blond shrugged but his eyes did not lose their severity. “You don’t lose anything with trying.” Yes.

“I suppose I could.” And now what?

“I suppose so.” We talk.

They discussed about food and there were no more warnings but Eijirou remained in alert. At the end the soup was finished and as soon as the boy returned the bowl to the tray the door opened.

When the omega prepared to get up with the tray, Eijirou looked away and did not dare to move until he heard the door close. Only then did he realize that he had not asked him his name.

It became a routine, a very nice one. The food was never first class, but Eijirou did not care about that. He saw the omega only once a day, chatted about the fruits of the season, about the types of meat and about bread. The omega smiled and was friendly, but Eijirou noticed the tense posture and the way his eyes seemed to shout warnings every time he laughed too much and began to tell personal anecdotes. The blond tried to keep the conversation in a neutral tone, but Eijirou could not stay serious for too long. It was in his nature to laugh and joke. His greatest achievement was making the other laugh. His laughter was charming, though sparse, barely gleaming in the semidarkness. They lasted only a moment, barely a glimpse of a playful and uninhibited nature, until he seemed to realize what was happening and then his eyes acquired that unusual severity and channeled the conversation back to the food. At no time did he ever say his name and Eijirou kept forgetting to ask whenever he saw him enter.

Everything stayed the same until one day the omega sat next to him, closer than he had ever been, and extended his hand to touch his forehead.

“What’s this scar?”

Eijirou was startled when he noticed the finger that slid down the scar on his eyebrow. He was suddenly distracted by the smell of oranges and took a moment to process the question.

“A fall,” he said with a dry throat. His eyes slid down the pale shoulders, over which the light of the lamp spilled, and his eyes wandered down the thin neck and they ascended to the eyes of the omega. He was surprised by the hardness withheld in them.

“A fall?” Repeated the omega and Eijirou understood loud and clear. Keep talking.

“Yeah, it happened when I was about five years old.” He paused when he heard a whisper. Do not move.

And he obeyed. He tensed in his place and tried to focus his attention on the blond’s mouth. The other gesticulation, without making a single sound, keep going. Eijirou returned to his story almost immediately, it was a shameful anecdote, but he filled it with details while paying attention to what the omega muttered next to him. His voice was tenuous, barely a pitch higher than his own, so it was
perfectly camouflaged. It was difficult to talk and listen, but Eijirou tried hard.

“They want us to mate, but when that happens they move us and things get worse. Everyone here knows it, so we must avoid it at all costs; but if we don’t do it, they will try to force us. First, they’ll attack you and then they’ll come at me. It can get pretty ugly if we don’t obeys, but we can trick them. Tomorrow I’ll come and I’ll sleep here with you, and under no circumstances you should mark me.”

Eijirou got confused in the middle of his story and he realized he did not remember the nonsense he had been saying, he just looked at the omega with an expression of utter stupefaction, but the blond smiled as if the story had been absolutely adorable and he turned away. At that moment the door opened and the omega came out with the empty tray.

Only at that moment did Eijirou remember what the other alpha told him, they have no choice.

He wasn’t able to sleep that night, so he sat down, in the middle of the darkness, as he rewound over and over again what he had heard. The whole thing still had no meaning. Mate? It was not possible. Although if he thought carefully he could see the trap hidden between the lines: They lock you away from everything, abandoned in the dark, and then they bring an omega, an omega that becomes a constant. His presence means that there will be food, light, conversations, fresh air…

Yes, Eijirou could see the deception clearly, but he could still not understand the reason for it.

When the door opened, Eijirou tensed instead of relaxed. He kept his eyes fixed on the wall to the left to give time to the omega to come sit next to him. He kept going over the previous day’s conversation and had a myriad of questions, but was not sure how he was going to formulate them or cover them up as they were not technically supposed to talk about them out loud.

When he felt the presence of the omega in front of him, Eijirou turned his attention to the blond. He tried to put on his best expression of “I have questions” but an inhalation was enough for his mind to pause. They boy smelled clean, no doubt he had just bathed, and his scent was clearer than ever. It smelled of fresh juice, of vitality, of citrus, and the aroma caused him hunger. He did salivate and felt his hands tingle. For a fraction of a second he thought about approaching and drinking. He wanted to lick him from head to toe.
‘Shit,’ he thought when a brief flash of sanity made its way across his mind. He covered his nose with his fingers and counted to ten. When he opened his eyes he saw the blond was extending an orange. Eijirou took it and held it against his nose, concentrating on the aroma. It was not the same, it could not be the same, but it had to be enough. Eijirou bit the orange despite the shell. He noticed the bitter taste for a second, then the juice came. It filled his mouth and the acidity tickled the insides of his cheeks.

It was shameful that the sensation alone gave him an immediate erection.

He finished the orange and spitting the shell in between each bite. Then he started with another and another until he licked his fingers and felt like he could control himself. The need had subsided, or so he thought until the blond approached and knelt between his legs. The only thing that kept Eijirou in his place was the expression of fear in the eyes of the omega, a fear that he could now smell. And once he did he had to concentrate on it.

“‘It’s fine,’” he said. He wanted to emit pheromones to calm the other but held back because if the fear went away, only the scent of orange would remain and Eijirou was not sure what would happen then.

The blond took his hand and at the same time bent down to kiss him on the cheek. From there he whispered:

“This is a gag,” he pressed the piece against his hand without moving away. “It’s for… well, you know.”

“This… has worked before?” The alpha whispered back as the blond continued to place chaste kisses on his cheek, barely any friction that undoubtedly had the intention to distract those who were watching.

“…most of the times.”

“And in the others?”

“They take them away.”

“Because it doesn’t work?”

The blond moved slowly away, but before Eijirou said anything else, the boy climbed into his lap, letting his legs wrap around him. He rested his head next to his’ as his arms wrapped around his shoulders.

Eijirou’s hands gripped his knees tightly and counted to a thousand to fight the need in him to wrap him in his arms, bury his nose into the blond’s neck and suck. He concentrated on the fear, on that bitter scent that dwarfed the sweetness of the orange.

“Sometimes it can’t be avoided,” the blond murmured next to his face. “Sometimes they let themselves be carried away. The only thing we know is that if we refuse, they’ll make us suffer.”

“What do they do with those who refuse?”

“Do you want to do what your friend did?”

“Friend?”

“The one on the cell next to yours, the blond with the bitter face.”
“What did he do?”

“He yelled, bit and bled. There are stories of the time he cracked his head open when he kept bumping it against the wall to resist the heat of an omega. He has been left in peace, but there is no doubt that they will try again sooner or later.”

“Maybe I could…”

The blond parted from his face and looked at him.

“You could.”

His expression was a combination of fear and anxiety. Eijirou held back the urge to reach out and touch his cheek.

“What would happen to you?”

“I’ll survive.”

He smiled and the gesture was pure resignation. He remembered what the other had told him before, “First, they’ll attack you and then they’ll come at me” and the idea was unbearable.”

“I don’t want them to hurt you.”

There was a pause and he felt the blond relax. “Then let’s do this.”

Eijirou swallowed the, are you sure? That he was about to murmur almost reflexively. Instead, he said:

“Would you at least tell me your name?”

Instead of answering, the blond made him put the gag in his mouth.

The truth is that this was not his first time.

He still remembers with emotion how he had covered with kisses the intricate tracing of flowers that ascended from his best friend’s neck to her right cheek. That meeting had been fun and stimulating, but just like any other alpha he had fantasized about sleeping with an omega. He had dreamed of removing the bandages, he had imagined the sensation of touching, admiring and smelling the intricate tracing of flowers. He imagined sliding his hands down the warm belly, kissing the hips full of flowers, or even biting the stems that covered the soft skin of the buttocks. It was stimulating to imagine what kind of petals grew in each one or in what portion of skin there were more flower buds.

He had none of that. It was not the act of mutual trust, adherence and devotion he had expected. It was uncomfortable and overwhelming. He held him close but he did not caress or kiss his skin. He
inhaled the aroma of oranges, intoxicating and delicious, but he did not lick or bite the skin that was within reach. He did not adore his body nor did he touch him until he felt fulfilled, he just kept holding him while he slid inside the other. And when he felt the need to bite, he gritted his teeth despite the leather restriction in his mouth.

At some point the oil in the lamp ran out and the room went dark. At that moment the omega instantly broke away from him and Eijirou gave a frightening grunt. The silence became absolute, he couldn’t even hear the omega breathing, as if afraid to move.

“I’m sorry,” murmured Eijirou as soon as he managed to control himself by removing the gag from his mouth.

The omega came up and whispered next to his ear, “They can still hear us.”

Eijirou understood the implications and cursed himself. He leaned back against the floor as he felt the omega’s hands move up his legs. He moaned when he felt them over his erection and had to bite his knuckles so he would not commit any stupidity.

At least on that occasion he managed to finish.

The omega stayed with him for what seemed like days. Every so often they brought food and oil for the lamp, but the omega controlled the exact amount that was placed in it and in that way they managed to get some privacy. When it went dark, the omega helped him finish with his hands or his mouth.

If the lamp was on, they chatted. If not, they tried to sleep separately. It was a draining situation and Eijirou’s frustration grew day by day; and he was not the only one because he could smell that the omega was beginning to emit signs of dissatisfaction. Until one day, a day when Eijirou’s body refused to cooperate, the omega stopped suddenly, completely exhausted, and made a low sound, like an anguished sob. It was almost inaudible, but Eijirou felt it in his body like a physical blow. He immediately stood up and extended his hands to where the omega was. He pulled him to him and tried to comfort him as best as he could. He felt him tremble, but this time there was no smell of fear in him, only need. From close he smelled even more delicious. It would have been so easy to just drink him whole and get carried away.

Eijirou’s instincts fought against his self-control. It was even worse when the omega buried his face in the curve of his neck and after he inhaled he gave a sigh full of desire. Eijirou wanted to Kiss him and touch him. He wanted to sink inside of him and offer him everything he was. Instead, he hugged him, rubbed his face against his and touched him. It was wonderful to feel him writhing when he tried to relieve his erection but the omega whimpered and he knew that the contact was not enough, so he slid his fingers inside.

The humidity, the aroma, the weight of the other body against his… the combination of everything was enough for his body to recover from the frustration. When the omega returned the gesture and placed a hand on his member, the feeling was completely different. Eijirou pressed him against his as
his fingers sank into that slippery passage.

For the first time, their scents became intertwined, and they spread through the cell to cover every corner. Orange and saffron. The omega moaned against him and when he moved, his neck was exposed. More than seeing it, Eijirou felt it; he rested his mouth against him, the aroma in that particular space was absolutely exquisite. The alpha salivated, and when he swallowed he realized that his fangs were ready to sink and mark the omega.

‘Not the neck,’ he thought with the last vestige of self-control he had. He sank his teeth into the curve of his shoulder, far off from the glands in his neck. He bit until it bled, and later he came when he felt the other do it.

After that everything was calm.

“Thanks,” the omega whined as Eijirou licked the blood from his shoulder.

The alpha limited himself to just hold him close and offered comfort. He stroked his back and rubbed his face against the other until he felt him purr. There were no words or kisses, only silent compassion. They stayed like that, offering comfort.

“What’s your name?” Eijirou asked at some point.

There was a long pause, until he heard a whisper almost inaudible.

“Denki…”

Eijirou savored the name, cuddled the blond and fell asleep next to him.

They took the omega way not long after that day and left him alone. They brought him food, water and brought a lamp that they made sure to keep burning constantly. Finally, they drugged him again and moved him back with the rest. When he woke up, the first thing he saw was the blond in the cell next to him.

“So you’re back.”

Eijirou got up and went to sit on the far wall, near the bars that separated both cages. His head hurt and he felt miserable.

“How long was I there?” Was his question while he massaged his forehead.

“A month,” replied the other, shrugging absently. He had imitated his example and sat with his knees raised. He entertained himself by rubbing some dry leaves between his fingers and then smelled the fragrance, at that distance Eijirou was not sure what kind of plant it was. “Though it could have been much longer. In this place the notion of time is crap.”
Eijirou took a slow breath and tried to shake off the drowsiness.

“Well?” Asked the blond without looking at him.

“Well what?”

“Did they break you?”

It was difficult for Eijirou to get angry, so the whiplash of bad humor that ran through his body was completely unexpected. It was so incredible that he was not able to utter a word. He took a moment to study his mood; in addition to the fact that the light was hurting his eyes and that his body was resenting the confinement, the discomfort he had felt was not physical. He felt frustrated, angry and dissatisfied. It took him a moment to understand that the reason for his annoyance was that he could not distinguish the smell of oranges. After getting used to it, it was difficult to live without him.

“In a couple of days the memory will fade away,” he heard someone say, although was not able to recognize who.

“Why?” was the drowned question that he managed to formulate with clenched teeth. “Why… make us do that?”

“Was it not obvious?” The blond murmured without looking at him, but his smile seemed to indicate that he considered him an idiot. “Control.”

“But the drug us.”

“With the darts and with the damned incense.” Eijirou refrained from asking questions about the last one because he did not want to draw attention to himself. “But both methods are imperfect.”

“What do you mean?”

“You don’t get it? What they seek is the empathetic link, the bond that is created between an alpha and an omega. The bond that connects them intimately. They encourage the creation of the link, that way they do not need cages to contain us because they keep the omegas under their power. Any alpha would gladly lose one of their limbs to make sure their mate is safe.”

Eijirou cursed aloud, “And then what? What do the want with those that get mated?”

“They take them. No one knows where or why, but I can assure you that it’s not to let them live in freedom.”

“I thought the main objective of the kidnappings was slave labor.”

“We work in the mines and on the piers. The omegas wash our clothes and prepare our food… but that is a way to keep us busy. The main objective is another.”

“Our pups?”

“No, if that were the case, they would not take so much trouble in all this. Think about it. They stimulate contact, familiarity, avoid stress. They aren’t trying to impregnate the omegas, they want to mate us. They want the link. I don’t know why, but I’m not going to give them that satisfaction.”

Eijirou studied him carefully. “I heard that you refused to participate.”

“And now they leave me alone.”
“I’ve been told it will not be for long.”

He saw the blond tense, his body radiating a mute warning. Without saying anything, he rubbed the dry leaves with force until they pulverized between his fingers. He inhaled the scent slowly and then looked at him. His eyes gleamed with an overwhelming anger.

“They can try as many times as they want, I don’t intend to participate in their games.”

“I don’t understand how you can say that. You are condemning the omegas to a suffering that you could easily avoid.”

“They will suffer no matter what we do.”

“Maybe if you just bothered to talk to them, to call them by their name, you would see that there is a way to deal with this situation.”

The blond laughed at him. His laughter was brutal and full of contempt.

“We have two rules here, redy. One is that we never ask for their names. Never ask an omega for their name, it is the last piece of privacy they have. They can’t have anything else, they can’t keep their flowers, they can’t choose, so they keep their names as the last treasure they have left. And we respect their wish.”

Eijirou’s heart was squeezed by an iron fist and he felt the blood roaring in his ears.

“And the second one is that you don’t dare to pity them. Don’t you dare to feel sorry for them, because they already have to suffer with enough shit to make them ashamed of what they do. Don’t get confused by believing that you are doing them a favor, they do it to you. If they don’t sleep with you, you both will be beaten, but they risk a lot more when they sleep with a complete stranger. If you lack self-control or lose your head, then you condemn both of you, yourself and them, to an even worse fate. But they take a risk, they allow you to choose and they don’t reproach you for the choice you made. In the end, if you slept with them and managed to contain yourself, the thing is over for you. Congratulations. They’ll send you back to your cell, they’ll put you back to work, but it’s not like that for them.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Oh, please, I don’t feel like explaining the obvious to an dimwit.”

“No, wait, please… what are you talking about?”

“About the obvious stuff. They can’t see the marks on the necks of the omegas, they can’t smell them like we do, so the only have one way to find out if there’s a link or not.”

“Pain,” murmured Eijirou, noticing his dry mouth.

“So you’re not stupid, well, congratulations. Yes, they’ll take your omega and submit them to a stress test. It doesn’t leave scars, I know, but I don’t think it’s anything close to nice.”

“So they…”

“They look at you. They study you, and if you don’t react to the stress of the omega, they grit their teeth and try again. So enjoy your free time, redy, because I assure you they will return. Luckily for you they will try with another one, and then you will have to ask yourself if you’ll be able to fulfill the deal…”
The blond turned around to sleep. Eijirou covered his eyes and tried to compose himself. He remembered the dreadful experience when they took the omega, but that was all. It could not be the link, he had avoided it at all costs. He tried to rewind everything, he tried to concentrate, but there was no way. He could not help but evoke the sweet scent of juice, the feel of his teeth sinking into his skin and the vivid memory of his fingers caressing his inside.

He fell into a restless sleep, he dreamed that he was back in the cell, in the darkness, but this time it was not his fingers that slid in that moist passage with the smell of oranges. He woke up and cursed at the hardness between his legs. He inhaled again and again, thinking of terrible things to lower the fever. When he managed it, he studied the cell. There were a couple of lanterns by the stairs, which provided little light, and it was undoubtedly nighttime because the rest of the alphas slept in their corners.

Eijirou sucked air and filled his lungs with the aroma of confinement. That night he did not sleep, he was determined to overcome the smell of oranges. Curiously, his wish was fulfilled the next day when they made him go down to the mines and he inhaled the incense that smelled of honey for the first time.

Eijirou came back to his senses hours later. He noticed the fatigue, his sore muscles and the hunger. He approached his tray with food and devoured what was there, then struggled to clear the last corner of his head.

“What was that?” Was the question he asked in a low voice, although the silence of the dungeon caused the sound to reverberate strongly. It was night, his first one after his encounter with the smell of honey and milk. “How can they?... How...?”

The blond in the adjacent cell turned, he was the only one who gave any signs of waking up, the rest remained silent. For a second the blond stood still, looking at him, then approached the bars that separated both cells. Even in the semi darkness, Eijirou could see the tension in his shoulders, the stiffness in his neck, and detected the unmistakable scent of mistrust and threat.

“Who are you?” The blond asked in a low voice, his voice full of ferocity.

“What are you talking about?”

“The first thing they do when they get you off the ship is to put you in a dungeon with incense. Not everyone survives it.”

“What?... Why not?”

“Isn’t it obvious? That thing is not natural. And as such, not everyone reacts in the same way. There are some who go crazy, those are taken away and others simply don’t survive. The rest falls into a simulation of an automatic pilot, which leaves you exhausted, with headache and nausea—”

“But—”
“No. I answered your question and now you’ll answer mine. **Who the fuck are you?** They didn’t capture you, if that were the case you would have known the incense since you came here. And you can’t be a new acquisition because you’re too old. They always choose young people, none older than fifteen. The only option I have left is that you’re a spy, *their* spy.”

“What?! No! Of course I’m not!”

“If you are a damn spy—”

“No! I’ve already told you I’m not! It’s not what you’re thinking!”

“Really? … well, then tell me, who are you?”

Eijirou growled but resigned himself, after all, it was time for things to start moving.

“You’re right,” he murmured, sitting next to the fence. “They didn’t catch me, I asked to be sent here.”

“I knew it! You’re—!”

“Not for them. Todoroki-ouji sent me.”

The blond grumbled. “Who?”

“Todoroki-ouji, you don’t know him?... How long have you been here?”

“That’s none of your business. And no, I don’t know your prince.”

“He’s the Yuuei’s king youngest son.”

“For me he can be the son of the sun for all I care. I come from the Kohei Islands, we don’t have princes.”

Eijirou blinked, only then did he pay attention to the splendid red gladiolus flower that grew from the middle of his chest to the alpha’s arm. He had heard that in the southern islands the exotic flowers were common among their people.

“Well, whatever. Todoroki-ouji sent me and three others to study the conditions and the situation in the two prisons that are the closest to the border. It has been tried before, without much success, but this time we had help from the inside; so we traveled along the shores of the Nomu desert and abandoned the ship at the border to find our contact. He told us that to enter we would have to pretend to be prisoners from another camp that had been transferred; apparently it was the only option.”

“Are you telling me you got into this cage by your own free will?” The blond’s voice oozed with sarcasm and mockery. “Do you really expect me to believe it?”

“It was the only way.”

“Why?”

“Because six months ago Todoroki-oo gave the order to recruit every alpha and beta in fighting age. He’s ready to start a war.”

“Well, he’s late. These bastards have kidnapped our people for years.”
“And every year we fight to recover them. We set up patrols to intercept them, but they have learned to plant decoys. We try to fence their coasts but it’s useless because we can’t establish a permanent blockade. We need an outpost, but there is no way we can cross the desert, not with the beasts that live there, it has to be done by sea and we have tried. We lost ships and men, again and again. Now the king is determined to send a whole fleet with the intention to abolish the ports, but Todoroki-ouji wants to prevent him from doing so.

“Why? It sounds very reasonable to me.”

“And it is, if you don’t care about the losses. A few years ago, there was an attempt to rescue one of the fortresses near the coast. The aim was to establish an outpost and defend it until the reinforcements arrived, but the troops lost many men and in the end they had to retreat; worst of all was that the prisoners had been massacred before the fortress fell. Nobody understood at that moment why our people didn’t fight, but now I know. It was the incense. The king believes that it was an isolated event, which will not happen again, but Todoroki-ouji does not think so. That’s why he sent us with the objective to find out the truth.”

“And what do you plan to do now that you know?”

“Send a message. The king’s troops will attack the ports and the shipyards first, but when they try to besiege the fortresses, it will cause them to kill us all. We have to avoid it.”

“Your logic is absurd.”

“But—”

“But nothing. This is our opportunity. When your king arrives, we will be ready.”

“It’s dangerous, we can’t risk the lives of everyone who’s here.”

“Our lives are already at risk. This is what we have been waiting for. Let them attack from the outside, we will hit them from the inside.”

“Who—?”

The question died in his mouth because he realized that he had the attention of every alpha in the dungeon. He could smell in all of them the thirst for blood, although none of them as intense as the one the blond emanated. Eijirou could not help but smell it and get excited.

Chapter End Notes

So many things are happening at the same time and it's all very complex, but please tell me I'm not the only one creating an scenario in my head about "What if Izuku had also been successfully captured and he and Katsuki were forced to mate like Denki and Eijirou?"

All the 'what if's' in my head are making me crazy gosh...

I'm also in love with Denki and Eijirou's double meaning conversation! It's soo good hahaha
Next chapter on February 17th.

"Plans and Promises"
Plans and Promises

Chapter Summary

Izuku had planned his trip, taking care of even the tiniest of details. Maybe that will get him back on the right track.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! Thank you so much for the wonderful reviews and the kudos. It makes us both happy and brightens our day!

I've caught the influenza and been hospitalized the past week sadly. I was worried so much that I wouldn't be able to upload this week's chapter because of it, but thankfully I remembered I had already translated this chapter ahead of time and it was saved between my drafts! I felt I could die in relief hahaha (ragments)

So, there we go! The first few chapters were mostly just told from one point of view, but from now one that will change~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He swallowed down the sobs despite feeling like they kept accumulating inside his chest like grains of sand and buried his face between his knees to hide his tears. He could not conceive the idea of Katsuki lost in the storm. It was an absurd idea—an impossible idea. Izuku hugged his knees and his knuckles turned white as they clutched to his ankles. His entire body was a tense knot that held back the sobs that bubble in his throat.

“Don’t be a wimp.”

He heard Katsuki say for the first time when they were four years old while the blond looked at him from one of the low branches of a tree. Izuku protested, but at the same time he was looking out for a route to ascend. He had taken two steps towards the tree when a creak was heard and Katsuki ended up on the floor with a broken arm. Despite the accident, the phrase became Katsuki’s personal motto. It was accompanied by a smile, a daring tone. It presented a challenge and fueled Izuku’s stubborn nature.

“Don’t be a wimp.”

He heard it when he was afraid to learn to swim. He was not good at floating, but Katsuki wanted to show him the duck nest on one of the small islands in the center. Katsuki who swam like he was half-fish, Katsuki who did not stop swimming back and forth while he waited for him. So Izuku swallowed the fear and followed him. His heart throbbed wildly all the way there, but he forgot about it when they reached the island and found several nests of ducks, full of eggs and little ducklings. Izuku managed to caress several of them before a furious mother duck pounced on them. When Izuku sank and panicked, it was Katsuki who grabbed his arm and kept him afloat. He had told him: “You are such a wimp,” but he never let him go and accompanied him all the way back.
“Don’t be a wimp.”

He heard it when he felt afraid to jump into the sea. His mother had warned him about the possibilities of being dragged away unable to return to the shore, but Katsuki wanted to show him the line of corals and the goldfishes. Katsuki who could dive and keep diving for entire minutes, Katsuki who did not let fear stop him. So Izuku turned a deaf ear to his mother’s warnings and tried to sink with his eyes open. It had taken him a while to get used to it, but in the end he was able to sink to a decent height and with time Izuku could hold the air for several minutes.

“Don’t be a wimp.”

He heard that phrase over and over again during his childhood. When they were trapped in the forest in the middle of a storm, when Katsuki decided to imitate the elders and jumped from the ravine to the sea, when Katsuki defended him from a wild boar. That phrase got Izuku to face fear and allowed him to build the memories that would keep him alive.

“Izuku woke up when he felt the ship shake. His heart froze when he noticed the bars and had a vision of the raging sea, he was assaulted by the terror of being drowned, but then he noticed the scent of alpha and remembered all the events from the previous day. He rubbed his face, full of dry tears, and stretched his legs. He heard screams on the deck, but he paid no attention to it, instead closing his eyes and evoking Katsuki’s face. He remembered the smile. The eyes with the color of fire. The aroma.

Wood and black smoke."
'No, not like that.' Izuku opened his eyes just as a frightful sound reverberated inside the cellar. Everything around him creaked like a seed when crushed. This time the shouts that were heard outside were decidedly clear. The alpha guys who were sleeping woke up and started asking questions while the others tried to distinguish what the voices on the deck said.

“Fire,” said a voice in the cellar, and Izuku could smell the burn wood.

The unmistakable sounds of struggle filled the air and activated the impatience of the alpha boys. The cellar was filled with restless voices, quick questions, assumptions and Izuku tried to follow the conversation, but the scent distracted him. He could smell the fire and could not help but remember what had happened many years ago in a similar situation. He could not stop imagining the water flooding the cellar, covering the rest of his companions.

He left his trance when a man came down to the warehouse, or rather when a man fell down the stairs, his head hit the ground producing an atrocious echo and remained face down, unconscious. There were knocks, grunts and suddenly another man fell, only that he managed to stand up in time, just to intercept the attack of the beta that was coming after him. The boys roared with excitement when the black-haired man attacked. He had two short-swords that he was spinning at an impressive speed, he moved gracefully and was definitely lethal. He managed to slash his enemy three times before cutting his neck.

Immediately he turned his attention to the fallen man and when he turned him around the man left a trail of blood on the dark wood. The beta cursed under his breath.

“Press the wound,” Izuku said almost reflexively and was startled when the man looked at him. He had deep black eyes framed by purple azalea flowers that bloomed on his left cheek and grew on his temple and forehead. They undoubtedly reinforced the natural authority of his gaze.

Izuku remained still under inspection, although for a moment he felt naked. Before he could wriggle with anxiety, the beta got up, took his swords and hit the lock of the cage four times before the padlock gave away.

“Can you help him?” His voice was deep and warm, there was not a single note of anxiety in it.

Izuku swallowed the fear and moved, legs weak with the scent of alpha combined with the authoritative presence of beta. He remained silent as he checked the wound, a deep cut at the level of his ribs, and a giant bump on his forehead. As soon as he set eyes on him, Izuku forgot about the fear, the anxiety of knowing he was being observed and the pain, his mind simply making a quick analysis. He took the pulse, evaluated the depth of the wound and made sure to exert pressure without aggravating the situation.

“It’s a deep wound but the knife was diverted to the outside,” he said out loud and turned towards the beta that stared at him. “I’ll need to sew him, I have the materials in between my stuff. I also have plaster that would help to avoid infections, and another that will reduce the swelling of the blow.”

“Your things?”

“They’re in some burlap bags. They put them in two large bags when they assaulted my boat. I think they were left on the deck.”

The beta nodded, took out two of the eldest alphas, gave to each of them a sword with instructions to release the rest and remain on guard in case there were problems and then climbed the stairs with the grace of a feline.
With his hands wet with warm blood, Izuku fought against panic.

*Don’t be a wimp.*

He swallowed the tears. Katsuki was right. It was not time to break down.... He took a deep breath and turned to the closest alpha around him.

“I need water and bandages or something that looks like it.”

[...]

It had taken time, days of incessant persecution, and a lot of teamwork for the Fleet to catch up with its prey. Despite the captain’s warnings, Shouto enlisted himself with the rest of the crew to fight, the only warning from his teaches was: Avoid losing your head or I will lose mine. Far from considering it obvious, Shouto noted his concern; and at least he managed to nuance it.

“Todoroki-ouj—”

“For the last time, Tenya, we are traveling incognito, I’m Shouto.”

The beta next to him twisted with anxiety.

“Sir! I could not fall at such—”

“Stop screaming or you’ll attract attention. And if my name is too much for you, at least avoid the titles.”

“Very well, sir.” Shouto squirmed at the formal tone. “I just wanted to tell you that I consider it extremely dangerous for you to participate in this raid. The captain has recommended that you should stay safe in the cabin, next to the helmsman.”

“The captain has undoubtedly the best of intentions, but as I see it they will need all the possible hands to ensure victory.”

“To risk your life…”

“We’re not going to start with the same thing, right Tenya?”

“No sir. Sorry sir.”

Shouto remained silent and waited for the captain’s order.

As soon as the enemy ship was within range, the archers threw arrows on the mainsail and almost at the same time others lit cannons. The captain waited for the counter-attack and responded in the same way. One of its bullets was lucky to collide with the main mast and it fell on the deck causing a frightful noise.

When the two ships were almost at the same height the ropes were laid and the boarding began.
Shout jumped behind his teacher and immediately took position next to Tenya. His job was to prevent the enemy from having access to his ship, so they both stood side by side and defended their terrain by cutting, stabbing and dodging. The battle on the front was bloody, but they had no problems. Shouto felt no remorse for the fallen bodies. He fought with agility and dexterity, he did not take two steps if one was enough and made sure his cuts were deadly.

When the fight was over, he had his body covered in a thin layer of sweat, his face was stained with blood and his arms felt heavy. Only then did he notice the cuts on his clothes and neck, all insignificant.

“Sir!” Exclaimed Tenya as soon as he saw his appearance.

“Help the captain with the fire, Tenya, I’ll look for Aizawa.”

He left without giving him time to protest. He moved away from the bodies and found his master kneeling beside a pile of sacks tied to the railing.

“You survived.”

“You don’t sound surprised.”

“If I were I would not have allowed you to come.”

At that moment the captain materialized besides them.

“And the alphas?”

“Safe,” was a dry answer.

“Good, we have little time before the fire goes out of control. My hands are full, the victuals, fire and weapons… where is Hizashi? I need him to inspect the cabins.”

“He’s wounded. They stabbed him and he remains unconscious.”

“Damn it! ...well, can you take care of getting all the prisoners out?”

“I’ll do it.”

He got up dragging two sacks with him and Shouto followed him. They hurried down, turned left and immediately ran into another staircase.

The first thing Shouto noticed when he came down was the smell: Blood, impatience, threat, shit and anguish. He wrinkled his nose reflexively and tried to ignore it. The next thing he noticed was that all the captured boys were forming a circle with their backs to them. Shouto crossed the circle and stood while his teacher knelt.

In the center there was a boy, older than the rest. His hands were soaked with blood as he placed a tourniquet on Hizashi’s torso. Two alpha boys helped him lift the body as he wrapped it in what looked like a piece of sheets.

“The ship will sink,” his teacher said as he extended the sacks to the boy. “Are these your things?”

“Eh? ...ah,” they boy finished adjusting the bandage, bent to look at the contents of the bag and nodded again. “Yes, they are.”

“Good, now we have to get out of here.”
“Oh…” the boy curled a bit in front of his teacher’s stare and when he did a delicate smell of lavender flooded the cabin. Shouto was not the only one who was delighted with the aroma.

“Can I move him?” Asked his teacher, breaking the sudden silence.

“I still… I still need to patch him.”

“I’ll take him to our ship and you can do it there, okay?”

“Y-yeah… just be careful… be careful with the wound.”

The boy seemed ashamed of his advice because he averted his eyes and rubbed his nose. A delicate nose covered in freckles.

“Shouto, help him with his things. The rest with me.”

His teacher came out and the little alphas followed him. When the boy made a gesture to take one of the sacks, Shouto intercepted it. The movement startled the boy who withdrew his hand in a nervous gesture. The lavender scent sprang with unusual strength.

“You smell like flowers,” Shouto said without thinking. It was not the scent of an alpha, there was enough of that scent in the entire cabin… but it did not have the characteristics of any of the other either.

“I-I’m… I work with plants. I make infusions and poultices.”

The boy bent down, took the other sack and left before Shouto could say anything else.

All the adults concentrated on the tasks of cleaning and transporting. Shouto left the boy’s things and returned to finish transporting the supplies and weapons. A couple of hours later everyone howled with joy when the enemy ship sank with the corpses of the slavers.

Shouto looked overboard until there were no more bubbles on the surface, he felt no pity for any of them, nor remorse. He vaguely wondered if his mother would approve of his attitude and the thought hurt him. To fight against the feeling of failure he went in search of his teacher.

He found him in the makeshift infirmary. There were several injured, most with relatively innocuous cuts. Shouto took a seat next to Hizashi, and from there he watched as the boy who smelled of flowers cleaned a treated all wounds with surprising effectiveness. He was methodical and quick, but he got embarrassed every time one of the sailors gave him a compliment. The change happened so fast that it was entertaining to see: He applied the paste that smelled of aloe with a concentrate and tenacious expression, bandages with agile hands and when the man in question gave him a word the boy would wrung his hands and blush self-consciously.

Shouto did not get tired of watching the same sequence over and over again. There was something extremely amusing in the way his tanned face dyed a delicate pink hue while he smiled nervously.
Eventually all of the injured were treated and the only ones left in the cabin were the three seriously injured. Hizashi was the only one still unconscious.

“He’ll recover,” Shouto said quietly as he watched Tenya approaching with food for them.

His teacher did not answer, instead he signaled to the boy.

“Food,” he said, and Shouto saw the other hesitate before approaching.

“Thanks, but they,” he signaled to the two wounded, “need to eat first.”

Before anyone could say anything, another sailor came in carrying food for his two companions. Without further excuse the boy rubbed his fingers and faltered in his place before taking a seat.

“Thank you.” He accepted the dried meat, the bread and the water. He ate without looking at anyone and Shouto was about to ask a question when his teacher spoke first.

“What’s your name?”

“Midoriya. Izuku Midoriya.”

“I am Aizawa. These two are my disciples, Tenya and Shouto.”

“Pleasure.”

“What were you doing on the ship?”

“Eh?”

“What were you doing on the ship? They don’t usually abduct any alpha over fifteen.”

“I’m not an alpha.”

Shouto’s eyes remained fixed on the dirty bandage that covered the ankle. When the boy pressed it against him, Shouto looked up to find two eyes of an extraordinary green. In just a second of inspection, Shouto took note of the delicate profile, of the freckles that covered the nose and faded around the eyes, he noticed that the lashes were a dark green, almost black, and that his mouth was a delicacy like the bud of a flower.

“A beta?” Asked Tenya, bringing Shouto back to reality.

“I’m a healer,” said the boy as he brushed back the strands of his green hair, green as the leaves that grow in the shadows.

“You’re too young,” Aizawa said, printing the tone of authority Shouto knew well in his voice. It was a tone that did not work with him, but it was excellent for teaching beta under his tutelage. However, the boy tensed as if he had been shouted and the scent of lavender returned. Strong and dense, combined with the scent of aloe and chamomile.

“I didn’t finish my training.”

“Why?”

Shouto looked at his teacher through his peripheral vision, wondering the reason for the sudden severity in his tone, but he put the question aside when he put his eyes back on the boy and noticed his discomfort—his shoulders were tense and his hands were writhing nervously, he bit on his lower
lip while he laid his eyes on his teacher and immediately looking away, as if he could not face the hardness.

‘Certainly not an alpha,’ Shouto thought absentmindedly, but it was rare that a teenage beta would lose their composure in front of that tone. It was as if…

No.

The boy surrendered to the authority of his teacher, perhaps Aizawa was not an alpha but he certainly had trained several and knew how to prevail. The boy looked away from him and lifted his shirt to the height of his stomach.

As soon as he saw the bandages, Shouto’s heart fluttered inside his chest like a frightened bird inside a cage.

[...]

The silence lengthened to what seemed like an eternity. Izuku noticed the fear dancing inside him and tried to control it, but it was damn hard to bear the adult beta’s gaze. His expression was severe and his scent was so imposing that it is physically impossible to lie to him.

He heard on ef the boys say something. The taller one of the two said “You’re…,” but the rest of the sentence was cut off when the adult beta turned his attention to him and Izuku took advantage of his distraction to redo his posture. He took air slowly and kept his hands still.

“How did you get there?” Was the next question, less severe than the previous one, but equally firm. Izuku did not waste time with lies, lowered his voice and looked at the ground.

“A few years ago they attacked my village,” distracted, Izuku rubbed his nose and brushed his hair away from his face as he told them about the kidnapping and the shipwreck. He made a short summary of his life in the enemy land and ended by saying, “I had planned to cross the sea until I reached the shores of Yuuei. From there I would have sailed to the south, towards the Kohei Islands.”

“An impossible trip,” said the younger beta.

Izuku shrugged without looking at anyone, “I had to try.”

“Why the bandages?”

Izuku rubbed absentmindedly the knee from the bandaged leg and looked at Aizawa.

“Because I wanted to avoid being sent with the rest of the omegas if they captured me. I thought the flower would deceive them, and that it would give me time to escape.”

“It was an absurd plan. They don’t capture betas, only alphas and omegas.”
Izuku frowned, “No, that’s not true. They also kidnap betas.”

“Who told you that?”

“Those are the rumors that arrive.”

“Well, they’re wrong. Every year since the kidnappings began they have sent just two ships. Always. They started with a handful here, a handful there and suddenly they started with large groups. Twice a year they’d attack the coasts and kidnap alphas and omega alike. They had never taken a beta.”

“That’s because they attack them at sea. Many beta men are merchants and sailors. For all I know is that they look for boats that are easy to board and then take them away. It’s almost certain that many believe that their disappearance is due to storms and sea snakes.”

There was a long silence while Izuku’s words crashed unto the other three, the boy was surprised to see shock and surprise on Aizawa’s face.

“You didn’t know?”

“Adult betas?” The man murmured, looking at the omega with a surprised expression. “It doesn’t make sense.”

“Why?” Izuku asked in return.

The three looked at each other as if he was not there.

“What’s wrong?” The boy repeated, trying to get their attention.

“I must speak with the captain.”

Aizawa stood up and Izuku stepped aside to let him pass. As soon as the adult disappeared through the door, the boy turned to the other two.

“What is the problem with betas being also abducted?”

“Most people,” said Tenya, “believe that they use the alpha as labor. They are taken young to train them. The omegas are intended to serve as companions.”

“And isn’t it like that?” Izuku asked, looking at the boy with blue hair.

“The king believes so,” murmured the only alpha in the group. Izuku looked at him and tried not to writhe before his eyes. Not only was it amazing that his eyes were of different colors, but his bearing and expression shouted authority despite his age. “For him, that’s the only explanation.”

“What else can there be?”

“To work.”

“No, we know that there is no beta with the rest of the prisoners.”

Izuku cocked his head, unable to follow the alpha’s line of reasoning, but as the other leaned towards him, Izuku straightened, suddenly aware of the smell of pine and moss. It smelt like spring. It smelt like a wet forest, familiar, cool and serene.

“How do you know?” Asked Izuku instinctively backing out, trying to put space between the alpha
and himself.

“Since the kidnappings started spies were sent to the lands of the slavers. All of them disappeared, dead or captured doesn’t matter, none of the reports they sent mentioned beta slaves.”

“Are they killed?” Asked Tenya with evident discomfort.

“After taking the trouble to take them away?” The alpha replied before turning to Izuku, who tried not to stoop in front of him. “I still don’t understand, why beta and not alpha or omega?”

Izuku looked at him strangely. “What are you talking about?”

“Why disguise yourself as a beta? If you were afraid of what they would do to you if they discovered that you were an omega, why not pretend to be an alpha?”

“Because the alphas are drugged.”

[...]

Shouto took a deep breath trying to put his thoughts in order. He grabbed his temples and rested his elbows on his knees. Tenya tried to speak to him, but he gestured for him to shut up because he did not want to start an interrogation without his teacher, even though that was precisely what he wanted the most.

While they waited the beta—no, the omega—leaned over to check Hizashi’s pulse and then went to check the status of the other two patients. He returned, finished eating and stood still while absently rubbing the scar on his right hand.

“What happened to you?” Shouto asked impulsively.

The omega looked at him, It was surprising that the same person who moments ago was writhing with nervousness could look at him with an expression full of calm. His eyes were amazingly green, in the light of the lamps the color resembled that of moss dampened by the morning dew and were bordered by those long lashes that were green but looked black. Shouto stared at him with such intensity that the boy gave a nervous start and turned his eyes away from him.

“I fell,” he answered quietly, stroking his scar absently. “Slid down a cliff and landed on my hand. I ended up with three broken fingers, but managed to align them without complications.”

Shouto tried not to imagine the situation, but he could not. He was six years old when he dislocated his shoulder when he fell from his first horse and remembered his screams while the healer tried to put the bone back to its place, he remembered how the pain had filed every hole inside his brain, preventing him from processing any coherent thought. He could not imagine healing himself, alone.

“What about you?” The question surprised him and it took him a moment to understand that the omega was referring to the burn on the left side of his face.

His throat contracted at the memory, but before he could say anything, Tenya stepped forward.
“That is an impertinence.”

He made his voice so hard that the omega was startled and his face lost all sympathy, he tensed and pressed his hands against his body. Shouto felt guilty and was about to growl at Tenya when his teacher finally returned with them.

“What happened?” Asked the alpha immediately.

“We’ll talk later.”

“No, we’ll talk now.” He turned to the omega. “Tell him what you just told us.”

“Eh?”

“Tell him about the drug.”

He felt his teacher tense and all his attention was focused on the omega.

“What drug?”

Shouto stepped forward. “He says the slavers are drugging the alphas.”

“Is that true?” The omega nodded, looking at them reluctantly. “How do you know?”

“Tokoyami’s family—the person who helped me trace my route across the sea—lived near the General’s fortress. His father worked as a guard in one of the prisons, and they left after his death, but he still remembers everything his father would say. It was him who convinced me to disguise myself as a beta. He told me that the omegas are the most guarded and the alphas are drugged daily.”

Shouto exchanged a look with his teacher.

He asked. “What did you tell the captain?”

“Nothing,” the beta rubbed his face, trying to alleviate his tired eyes. “I asked him about missing boats or ships.”

“And?”

“Apparently there are a few, but not too many to attract attention.

Tenya shook his head, “What does that mean?”

“It means,” said Aizawa, “that we have another question at hand. Why adult betas? Through all these years young alphas had been taken, omegas were kidnapped indiscriminately, but they have never shown interest in betas. When did they modify their behavior? And why?”

“Does it matter?” Asked Tenya, squinting. “I mean, now we have the answer we were looking for. We know now that Todoroki-ouji was right in assuming that something prevented the alpha from fighting on that occasion. If the drug was able to neutralize them, it will not matter if we manage to besiege a prison. They’ll prefer to massacre the prisoners rather than let them go. We have to go back and tell the king. We have to devise a plan that allows us to take over the prisons without killing the alpha.”

“We’re not going back,” Shouto growled, shaking his head. “Eiji-rou and his group are waiting for us to pick them up.”
“If they manage to get out,” murmured Aizawa, crossing his arms. “You knew very well that there was no guarantee.”

“Your contact—”

“My contact was clear. He could help them get in, but leaving was another matter. The main objective was to avoid the same disaster from years ago.”

“Eijirou is your disciple.”

“And he knows his responsibilities.”

“And he also trust us. We agreed that we would go to pick him up.”

“We agreed that I would let you come with the condition that you would stay on this ship while I went to look for the contact, at no time did I allow you to come with me.”

“I don’t care if you let me. Eijirou and the others are part of my guard, I will not abandon them.”

“Eijirou knew that if he could not escape he would have to wait until the king’s fleet arrived and even then there was no assurance that the king’s army would get the prison back. He knew that his main mission was to gather information and send it to us. He made the decision knowing the risk he was running.”

“I can’t believe you’re just going to leave him there.”

“There are priorities. We have to warn the king of this situation. He will have to change his plans and will have to gather more details about the drug if we want to overcome it.”

“Then go back to my father. I’ll keep my word.”

“Don’t do this.”

“What is the importance of my return? The old man will not care, you know that just as much as I do. You have a higher chance to convince him to change his mind. If I arrive telling him that he should not attack, the first thing he’ll do is tell me to stop acting like a coward and to set an example to everyone. I will not do any good there.”

“You’ll not do any good while being dead either.”

“I won’t be dead. I will find your contact and maybe we can devise a way out to get Eijirou and the rest of the prisoners out.”

“Are you even listening to yourself?” Aizawa shook his head in disbelief. “You’re only going to get yourself killed, or worse, captured.”

“If that’s the case, then maybe then my father would want to make a real effort to recover the prisoners.”

“Shouto—”

“You know I’m right. You know that my father intends to concentrate on destroying the ports and attacking the General’s strength. His priority is not the prisoners. You don’t need to say it out loud, it’s more than obvious. I know it and you know it. If he manages to free a few, it will be good for him, if not he can always say he tried.”
Aizawa spread his arms, obfuscated.

“No, no and no… This is crazy, how are you going to face a drug you don’t know nor have you ever seen?”

“Eijirou will know about it.”

“And he will be in the exact same situation with you.”

Shouto shook his head, took a deep breath and stared at his teacher.

“Don’t ask me to leave them.”

“This isn’t your fault.”

“They did it for me.”

“You didn’t force anyone.”

“Have you ever said no to my father?”

“... you’re not him.”

“And that’s why we are here.”

Aizawa closed his eyes, scratched his cheek and began to curse the day he became attached to that group of noisy children.

“Be sensible, Shouto, what are you going to do? You want to enter an unknown area, that none of us knows, to look for the prison that holds Eijirou, and then what? How are you going to enter? How are you going to leave?”

“You’ve always said that we should innovate.”

“Don’t use my words against me.”

“Maybe I don’t know the place, but I’ll find the way there.”

“Excuse me,” both were startled at the intervening voice, they had forgotten about the omega they still had around them. “I know where all the fortress in the area are.”

Silence. Shouto rewinds the phrase until it makes sense.

“How?” Aizawa asks sternly.

“Tokoyami got me a detailed map of the army. If I saw myself in the need to get closer to the coast I would at least know which areas to avoid.”

“Do you have the maps with you?”

“No, they stayed on my boat, but I learned them all by heart. I’ve memorized the locations of all the villages and the guard posts.”

Shouto smiles and looks at his teacher, who grunts.

“The problem with the drug is still there.”
“Well…” The omega intervenes before Shouto does and when both turn to him, the boy blushes. Shouto is surprised when the omega moves the hair from his ear, it is a mania that he has repeated at least five times through all the time they have been chatting.

“Do you also know how to neutralize it?” Aizawa murmurs impatiently.

“Uh… no… I don’t know what it is, but Tokoyami told me that it was delivered by air, so before leaving I had to prepare a complete set of lotions. We had the idea that in case they tried to use it against me, maybe I could counteract it by using a cloth covered in perfume. Like when you use a wet handkerchief to avoid getting intoxicated with the smoke.”

Both Shouto and Aizawa spoke at the same time. “Brilliant.”—“Absurd.”

“In any case,” the omega muttered, trying to ignore the tension between them, “it’s not a long-term solution, but even if it does work it will give us a margin of advantage.”

“Yeah, it will.” Shouto smiled proudly and his gesture caused the omega to blush. Still smiling, the boy turned towards his teacher. “I suppose there are no more excuses.”

Aizawa run a hand through his hair, clearly frustrated.

“Are you willing to drag him into this nonsense?” He pointed to the omega and for the first time, Shouto had doubts.

He looked at the omega, undecided, but the boy did something extraordinary. He smiled for the first time since he met him. The gesture was brilliant, shy and charming.

“Actually, it’s me who’s offering help,” the boy said without hesitation.

The silence spread as the three looked at him in surprise, finally it was Aizawa who asked the question everyone had in mind, “Why?”

The beautiful smile was suddenly erased, his gesture extinguished like the flame of a candle. A small wrinkle formed between the eyebrows and his cheekbones went pale. Eyes roamed the room, as if searching for something, but it was obvious the boy was not here, he saw something beyond them all. A memory. A wish. Whatever it was, it had the strength to turn a beautiful flower into a withered leaf.

Finally, the boy put his hands to his face and brushed his hair, slowly coming back to reality. When he looked back at them his face was the spitting image of sadness.

“If I knew that my friend is a prisoner, I would also do everything possible to rescue them.”

Chapter End Notes

And Todoroki made his appearance! Soon we'll know how succesful they are...

(Ahh... school is starting on the 20th so I hope I can still be consistent and post)
Next chapter on February 24th.

"Wistfulness"
Wistfulness

Chapter Summary

To miss is not to be empty, but it is to be full of someone who is present despite their absence.

Chapter Notes

It's been a long week, and I'm glad I was able to get this chapter on Saturday just like promised! Thank you everyone for all the support~ This chapter is one of my favorites because, reasons ☺️

More info of Roquel's wonderful world down below and soon I'll upload her Flowers Archive which you would all be able to check up and learn more about the different types of flowers she uses to make her story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku rested his forehead on the railing and held the groan that threatened to turn into tears within him. He had recently taken the habit of walking to the deck and gaze at the ocean. He prefers it before sleeping, because when he does he dreams of a cage under the sea and with the body of Katsuki falling apart between his fingers. He cannot stop recalling that day, he cannot stop envisioning the cellar full of water.

‘What if they didn’t take him away? What if they left him behind?’ But the thought is foolish and he knows it. It is a childish dream, so he closes his eyes and tries to cling to the only thing he has left.

Izuku decided to organize his first trip to collect ingredients without telling his parents because his mother used to suffer from anxiety if he ever got too far away. He had everything planned and had prepared his travel bag in advance, he had the route he was going to follow and he had made sure to make a list of all the plants he was going to collect.

That day he got up early, left a note to notify his parents that he would return for dinner and left with a quickstep in direction to the forest. He did not expect to find Katsuki yawning and walking around near the edge of the village.
“Kacchan!” He ran towards the blond and smiled as soon as he stood in front of him, “What are you doing here?”

“Freezing, obviously. What took you so long?”

“I’m sorry! ...I did not know that you were waiting for me.”

“Hm.”

“Why are you here, Kacchan?”

“You’ve been talking about this trip nonstop for days, Deku.” He yawned again, picked up his bag and turned his back to him. “Better be worth it.”

Izuku smiled and followed him.

The truth was that it ended up not being the perfect trip by far. It dawned, but there was no sun, only grey clouds covering up the sky. They were not able to find even half of the plants on the list, they almost fell into a swamp and had to flee from a wasp nest; but instead they ran into a field full of dandelions, splashed in a pond while trying to catch water lilies, saw a herd of wild boars with their younglings from afar and ate under a grey sky while competing to see who could identify more birds by just hearing their singing voice.

To Izuku, that memory was bright and timeless. He remembers that when it started to rain they had to take shelter under some dry trunks. He remembers that Katsuki put some leaves on the floor, sat down and made space in between his legs. Izuku had leaned against him, wrapped in the warmth of his body and the scent of wood. They stayed there, chatting in low voices, while the rain poured on them.

There was a moment when Izuku noticed the scar on Katsuki’s thumb. It was new because he did not remember seeing it before, so he reached out and touched it. He slid the tip of his index finger through the small mark to the middle of the thumb.

“When did you get it?” He asked, admiring the skin’s delicate texture, sliding his finger along the thumb, back and forth until it reached the wrist.

“About a week ago when we were practicing with short knives.”

Izuku nodded and made a gesture of withdrawing his hand, but Katsuki took his and used the tip of his fingers to caress his knuckles. The gesture made him smile and he unconsciously curled up,fitting his forehead unto his friend’s shoulder. Katsuki’s response was to tighten his embrace and rest his cheek against his head.

At that moment Izuku knew it, and no questions were needed whatsoever for him to know that Katsuki knew it too.
That memory is the one that hurts him the most. The promise of what could have been, of what can no longer be.

*Don’t be a wimp.*

The memory of his voice and his perpetual titled smile. That’s all he has now.

[...]

“Who’s the boy?”

Shouto looks up from the map he has spread out on the ground and stares at the captain, who—with his hands on his hips—has his eyes fixed on his teacher.

“Which boy?”

“Don’t try to play smart with me, Aizawa. Why was there an omega on that ship?”

“If you had bothered to question him, you would have known that they abducted him from the sea. I don’t think they knew he was an omega.”

“I didn’t bother to cross-examine him because I didn’t think it was necessary. I assumed that if there was a problem, you would have told me immediately.”

“Is there a problem with him?”

“I believe I don’t have to spell it out to you, right? The boy’s mourning scent is spread all over the ship. Maybe you think we have out noses covered, or that maybe we are some birdbrained fools, but there’s no way you haven’t noticed. The alpha pups don’t stop haunting him like bees to honey, and by the beard of neptune! Even my crew has began to notice it.”

“To everyone’s eyes he’s a beta.”

“I’ll admit that his scent is not immediately distinguishable, but you can’t cover the sun with a finger. If you took a moment to go out you’d see a group of those guys watching him like he was some kicked puppy. You would see them bringing him food, you would laugh at their attempts to chat, it’s in their nature to want that aroma to disappear. The worst part is that my men has started asking questions, and they know better than anyone else that a beta can’t smell like that.”

“Very well, I’ll fix this matter.”

“And it has to be now, we don’t need a handful of alpha pups fighting for him.”

The captain left and Shouto watched as his teacher took a calming breath. He saw him massaging his head, so he kept silent and waited until he speaks.

“Has the boy told you anything?”
“He doesn’t need to tell me anything.”

Aizawa frowns and Shouto tries to explain.

He saw the notebook by chance, as he got up one night for the bathroom. He found it lying next to the head of the sleeping omega and his first reaction was to pick it up so as to not step on it. His intention was to put it back together with the boy’s things, but he thought of the lost maps and wanted to make sure there were no hidden copies.

It was not a sketchbook in itself, but rather a pack of loose papers linked by a ribbon. When he took it off, the sheets inflated, as if they had a life of their own. In several he found clumsy sketches and brief descriptions of plants that Shouto did not know of their existence, but the rest of the notebook was filled up with images of the same flower. There were dozens of doodles pressed into a single sheet, and in others there was a single flower in the center, red and bright. There were flowers from all sizes. Some were painted with so much color that the papers had been wrinkled by the water, and others were not colored at all, but the strokes of the sketches were thick, firm and almost obsessive. There were some with paint running and others seemingly unfinished.

And all of them were alike. They all had the same shape, small flowers piled up along a stem. An elongated stem, broad at the base and thin at the tip, as if it were a sword. And regardless of the size or the color, they all overflowed with the same impetus drive. Shouto did not need to ask who was the flower’s bearer, he did not need to know their name or their history to understand who they were. All that he needed was to look at the expression the omega had when he looked at them.

“You cannot deny him from his mourning,” Shouto murmured with a tired sigh.

“I’ll not be so cruel, but we’ll have to keep him away from the rest.”

“Let him come with me.”

His teacher growled. “Tell me the truth, are you willing to take an omega to the battlefield?”

Shouto writhes in his place. His first reaction, the natural reaction, was to say no. Of course not, the omega were not allowed to participate in combat. If the boy smelled like one everything would have been easier, there would have been no argument and things would have been clear; but the truth is that every day he smells like something different. It smells like lavender and jasmine, aloe and vervain. Whenever he was near he’d find it hard to remember why he wasn’t supposed to be able to take him to land with him.

“I will not take him to fight,” Shouto repeats the argument that has been said dozens of times since the boy offered his help. “But you can’t belittle the fact that he knows our enemies. He has thought of a way to deal with that drug, and whether it works or not is a completely different matter, but it’s the best we have now. I’m not aiming to assault the prison, I’ll just concentrate on Eijirou and the rest, but we need to test whether his idea can be put into practice.”

“I don’t think you understand what you’re asking me. You want me to leave my king’s son in the enemy’s land, with the company of an omega who does not know how to fight.”

“If it’s easier for you, I can order you.”

“You spoiled brat,” muttered Aizawa.

“What other options do we have? ...Hm? ...Of all my father’s court, you are the only one that has shown an interest in recovering the prisoners. You do it for your nephew, but there are also other families waiting for their children to come back home. That’s why we are here. My father does not
have enough information to perform a successful rescue, and he does not even care. If the omega can help us, maybe we should try.”

Aizawa shook his head, “I’ll regret this.”

“If it bothers you that much, I promise you that I’d send the omega back as soon as we test his theory. No participation in combat.”

“...Uh ...you are giving me a headache. Well, all right, go for it and take him to Hizashi. I’ll search for Iida.”

Shouto did not argue, he stood up and left.

He found the omega on the deck, sitting with his feet dangling overboard. There were a handful of alpha pups loitering nearby, no doubt looking for excuses to get close. He also saw a couple of the crew members snooping not too far away, and all of them tensed when Shouto approached the boy.

“Aizawa wants to see you,” he murmured softly, keeping a respectful distance for three steps.

The boy straightened his head and stared at him. Shouto tensed.

He had heard that a mourning omega was a devastating spectacle, as much or even more that seeing an alpha in feral state, but hearing about it was completely different from watching it happen. His posture shouted abandonment and the scent of aloe - despite being artificial - carried the smell of mourning and sadness, and there was no doubt that upon inhaling it the reaction of an alpha was unconscious: comfort and protect. Only now did he understand the captain’s urgency. If the situation continued there would be a lot of pups wanting to erase that scent despite being ignorant of it, which would undoubtedly lead to territorial disputes.

“I’ve told him everything I know,” said the boy, rubbing his face against the cold metal of the railing. “I’ve drawn the maps he asked for, I’ve told him a thousand times everything that Tokoyami told me and everything I saw in the time I was living there. What else does he want?”

The frustration emanated from him in grey waves. Shouto is able to endure it, but the pups that are watching shift in their place, distrustful and impatient. There is no doubt that if he does not get him inside, he will have to put up with the boys’ territorial instinct.

“It’s Hizashi. He had a relapse.”

The lie gets Shouto what he wants, the boy straightens, alert and on guard. He stares as the other gets up without saying anything and lets him lead the way. When they arrive at the cabin the omega stops when he sees Hizashi is awake and smiling. He immediately turns to him with an expression of uncertainty.

“I had to make you get down here,” he says with a hint of remorse, “but I could not force you or we would have had problems.”

The look he receives confirms that the omega was not aware of the eyes that watch his every move. Shouto refrains from making a comment and simply points to the back of the cabin. There were only five of them, since the other two wounded had recovered enough to return to their jobs.

“Now that we’re all here,” Aizawa says as they both take a seat beside Hizashi’s bed. “Tomorrow we’ll get to Hosu. The plan was to disembark and look for our contact. If our men managed to get there they will be with him, if not, the idea is to go back to the ship and return to the king. That was the plan, but things have changed. If what Midoriya told us is true, we are at a disadvantage. We
don’t know if the drugs used at the prisons can be used in combat, and if so our troops run the risk of falling into a trap.”

“And that is why it’s vitally important that the king knows about the situation as soon as possible,” murmured Tenya with a stern expression.

“I know, we have to go back, but if we do it is very unlikely that we’ll be able to free the prisoners. I think we all know that they are not the king’s priority.”

Tenya started to protest but it was enough for his teacher to raise a hand and silence him.

“Do you really want to do this?” Asked Aizawa, looking towards the omega.

“If I can help, I will. I lost my friends when the ship sank, but I can’t turn around and pretend that everything is the same as before.”

“Are you willing to take this risk because you think you can help or because you are in mourning and you don’t care what happens to you?”

They boy tensed, swallowed hard and took a moment to compose himself. When he did, he straightened up completely and clenches his fists.

“I can help, I know I can.” Honesty, firmness and determination.

Aizawa massaged the bridge of his nose, “If it were in my hands I would take you back. In any other situation I would absolutely refuse to allow an omega to stay here, but in war there are exceptions.” He took a deep breath and stared down at each of them, one by one. “Things have changed and we have to act accordingly. Yuuei’s troops are not enough to face the alliance between two kingdoms, so this is the plan: I will go back with the king and expose the situation and I’ll try to coordinate with our forces. Shouto and Midoriya will disembark tomorrow when we approach the land, they will look for the contact and find out what they can about the drug and how to neutralize it. Shouto,” his teacher laid his eyes on him. “I know you want to free Eijirou and the rest, but the main goal right now is to find a way to counteract their weapon. Watch, listen, and be patient.”

“Only them?” Tenya asked without being able to contain himself, “I cannot let that—!”

“You can’t go with them, Tenya, because I have another mission for you. You’ll travel with us to the peaks and disembark and will head to the north. I need you to visit the barbarian tribes of the mountains. You must talk with their leader and explain the situation as best as you can and you must convince them to fight in this war.”

“The king would never accept it,” murmured Tenya, shaking his head. “He considers Toshinori Yagi as his enemy.”

“Yagi is no longer the head, not it’s the young Togata.”

“Even then the enmity still lies there.”

“You will not ask for help in the king’s name, you will ask for it in Shouto’s name… They will be his reinforcements.”

“But they don’t have ships to get there.”

“They don’t need it. They know the desert like the palm of their hand, they know how to survive and to avoid the beasts that live there. When the king’s fleet moves we will need land support and the
only ones who can cross the desert are them, do you understand why this is important?” Tenya was
left silent, tense and on guard, “Your mission is to get Shouto help for recovering the prisoners and
start an offensive from the land.”

Tenya nodded.

“I can go,” said Hizashi while showing a wide smile, “Let the boy accompany our—“

“No,” Aizawa cut him off, turning to him. “I have work for you too.”

“Really? ...so you’ve left me at the end of purpose.”

“We need the warriors of the southern islands, they are the best fighters among our people. We must
gather them if we want to prevent the armies of Hosu and Overhaul from taking us by surprise.”

“If I’m not mistaken, the king tried to recruit them. He sent emissaries to the council and they
refused.”

“Our king has not cultivated the best relationship with our brothers from the south.”

“You’re talking about the disaster from a couple of years ago, right?”

“What disaster?” Asked Tenya when he saw his teacher nodding.


“We were supposed to provide ships and reinforcements, and they were to besiege one of the
fortresses. The rescue had been their idea and they were willing to offer their life in that battle. They
manages to win but the price was too big and our king offered withdrawal. They didn’t want to
leave, they wanted to defend it until the reinforcements arrived, but the king threatened to leave them
there. So everyone left. After that the diplomatic relationships grew cold, but I think that if you
explain to them that our mission is to release the strongholds, they’ll agree to fight. After all, their
greatest wish has always been to recover their children.”

“All right, I’ll do it.”

“Very well then, hands on.”

Aizawa signaled his students to speak in private and as they walked away, Hizashi turned to the
omega.

“Do you want me to take a message home?”

Shouto was not able to hear the answer, but he saw him get up to look through his sketchbook.

[...]

It’s sun day, or so Katsuki calls it. It’s the day when they are allowed to rise to the surface to stretch
their muscles and to bathe in the warm light of the morning.

The groups are always small, five up to eight, no more than ten. They go up to the training grounds, from where the guards watch with bows ready, stiff and on guard in the area of the battlements. It has become a habit for Katsuki to look around when he arrives. He has perfected his observing technique without attracting attention. In silence, he counts the numbers of soldiers—to establish patterns—, he takes notes of their faces—in case they looked familiar—, and of their weapons—which they always held with apparent indifference.

He has tried once to climb and ended up with an arrow stuck in his back. The wound had not been fatal, but he was punished with months without leaving. Since then, Katsuki watches and waits. He knows that the only way out is to jump the wall, reach the battlements, and run. He has done countless of simulations in his mind, over and over again. The problem is that he does not know what is out there, he does not know if the wall has the same height on the other side, he does not know if there would be a cliff on the other side or if there would be an open field of a forest that offers protection. He has considered all the options, what was missing was the opportunity. So Katsuki enjoys being outdoors.

He takes off his pants and stretches like a cat in the sun.

He ignores the guards who stand like marble statues, he ignores the omegas who sunbathe on the other corner of the camp. He ignores his cellmates who take advantage to feel the earth under their bare feet. Katsuki assumes the lotus position, straight back, arms to the sides. He lets the light warm his skin, breath clean and fresh air. The warmth of the day makes him sleepy. He dreams.

Katsuki followed the vague mint trail into the forest. He stopped every moment to make sure he was going in the right direction and cursed when the aroma was driving him to the swamp area, a region that adults strictly prohibited. Katsuki grunted between his teeth, “What the hell are you doing, Deku?”

He continued to advance with all his senses in alert. He found the omega with his sketchbook of plants, kneeling next to a berry bush. The relief he felt was paralyzing, he smiled and took a moment to catch his breath and meanwhile took advantage of it to appreciate the narrow shoulders, the stooped back and the line of columns that was drawn on the smooth skin; but his eyes inevitable fixed on the line of bandages that protruded from the brown trousers.

At his age he had begun to dream about them.

His distraction lasted a moment, because at the next his periphery caught the shadow to his right and before he knew it he was moving at full speed. His legs propelled him forward and he took Izuku out of the way of the manticore. They rolled over each other until Katsuki managed to straighten up. He took Izuku’s arm and tried to drag him way, but the boy turned around and pulled him into the opposite direction.

“What are you doing?!” Katsuki shouted as the animal rearmed its posture and looked at them.
“My books!” Izuku answered pointing to the bag lying in front of the bush.

Katsuki cursed, but moved anyway, dodged a huge claw with sharp nails and rolled until he reached the tossed backpack. He grabbed it by the handle, spun it around and threw it in the direction of the omega.

“Run!” He shouted as he dodged another claw and tried to put space between himself and the animal.

Katsuki analyzed the situation. The beast was much bigger than him and there was no way he could deal with it with his hands alone, so the most sensible option was to retreat. He knew the animal would stop pursuing them if they managed to get out of their territory.

The animal attacked and Katsuki dodged, feinted to the right and issued a menacing growl while emitting warning pheromones. The animal roared in turn, but Katsuki did not let himself be intimidated, instead he took two lateral steps trying to get his position as close as possible to the escape route. The beats read his intentions because before he finished moving it shortened the distance, interposing between himself and the way back. A soon as he saw him lower his head, readying its hindquarters, Katsuki knew that he would not get out completely unharmed.

“Bah, it doesn’t matter,” he told himself apathetically, it would be another scar he planned to wear with pride. Katsuki prepared for the attack and at the same time took into account the possible outcomes.

Several things happened at the same time.

The animal jumped and Katsuki shrank and shot to the left noticing that one of the claws grazed his arm. He felt the burning of the wound and gritted his teeth. When the animal landed it used the rebound force to turn around towards him. Katsuki prepared for the second attack, which did not arrive because suddenly a blurry spot smashed into the face of the manticore, effectively hitting one of his eyes.

The animal roared and Katsuki blinked at seeing Izuku standing a few steps away from him. His face pale and his large eyes trembling with fear. The beast shook its head and the bag that had stuck in its face spilled all its contents on the ground.

Katsuki lost no time, barely recovered from the surprise, he straightened up, took Izuku by the hand and ran to the opposite direction. He did not let go even when they reached the safe area, he did not let go while he was bending over himself panting for air.

He let got when he started to yell at him.

“What the hell were you doing!” There were no words to describe the emotion that was stirring inside him. Fury, fear, anxiety. They all squeezed together when he thought of all the things that could have gone wrong. “I had everything under control!”

“It hurt you…” Said Izuku with a murmur that sounded more like sob.

Only then did Katsuki notice the blood running down his arm, grimacing at the wound, it burned too much, meaning that it was just superficial.

“What is nothing!” He shouted, refusing to let himself be overcome by the smell of fear and stress that came from Izuku. “I was ready to face it!”

Izuku shrank, but that did not calm Katsuki. He screamed until he felt tired, he shouted hoping that it
would lighten the fright inside him. He could not stop thinking about how close Izuku had been to the disaster.

“You almost made it kill you!”

The screams drew the remaining air inside him and for a moment he struggled to recover, but before he could continue his speech Izuku wrapped his arms around his waist and rested his head against his shoulder. The feeling of his cold body against the other’s gave him the stability he needed. Izuku grabbed him tightly and when he felt him tremble Katsuki reacted unconsciously: He inhaled his aroma — fear and mint —, wrapped him in his arms and rested his head against his forehead.

Only then did Katsuki finally find calm. His fright remitted because Izuku was there. He was there and he was safe. He could feel his heart beating against his at an unbridled and anxious pace. He could feel the tears on his shoulder.

“Don’t be a wimp,” he muttered, drowning in the aroma that the omega emitted and trying to offer comfort. “It’s just a cut.”

“I thought… I thought…”

“No, you didn’t think. What the hell were you doing there?”

It took a moment but Izuku was able to swallowing the rest of his tears to answer him.

“I got distracted while looking for a bush of blackberries.”

Katsuki separated and hit him in the nose with the tip of his index finger.

“That’s why I always accompany you, Deku.”

“You can’t always come with me.”

“I can and I will… and next time don’t even think about getting into my fight.”

“But Kacchan! …It was going to kill you.”

“Who are you calling a wimp, huh?”

He tickles him and Izuku laughs. The sound makes him feel better, so he continues until he has Izuku on the ground dying of laughter. Katsuki stops and gazes at the adorable face, round and charming. Eyelashes wet with tears, round cheeks and a soft mouth. Izuku’s eyes were colored in a very deep green, it was like moss, dark, velvety and fresh.

“… I saw you dead.” Izuku murmured, losing his smile.

“I’m going to get angry again,” he replied, without malice, stroking green hair. The cut on his arm has stopped bleeding and now it only burn him. “Besides, you made me go for your books and then you lose them again, what was that about?”

The pout Izuku made was lovely.

“I can make more books,” he murmured in a low voice, “…but there’s only one of you.”

Katsuki laughed. He did not need to hear the rest, it was enough to see the expression in the green eyes. The thought made him smile, inflated his heart with energy and safety.
“C’mon… I need to get this cleaned up. Then I’ll ask my mom for one of her knives and we’ll come back for your things.”

“No! What if that thing is still there?”

“That’s why I’m going for, Deku. I will not let it hurt you.”

He made him stand up and took him back to the village.

The memory is bitter. He had promised that he would take care of him and he had failed. He had been weak, he had been useless. He had allowed them to take Izuku away.

[...]

Eijirou could not help but become depressed.

It was already two months since his arrival and he has began to feel the weight of the confinement. The routine was monotonous, castrating, horrifying. And the incense was the worst of them all. Maybe it was because he was not used to it like the rest, but he did not stop having headaches, he could not sleep, and sometimes he woke with panic attacks. He was beginning to feel the walls pressing against him. It did not improve the fact that he could not stop thinking about Denki. Sometimes he saw him when he brought breakfast, but there were always rotations and there was no way to talk to him.

The day he had to go out like the rest to sunbathe it felt like opening a window in a stale room. The aroma of the field, the warmth of the morning, everything relaxed his body until he found a comfortable position on the ground and stayed there, allowing himself to be caressed by the sun’s rays.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the blond undress, he saw him exercise. He saw him doze in the sun and he took advantage of the moment of calm to study him carefully. The flower on his arm and chest was extraordinary, under natural light it shone with a scarlet hue, thin green lines extended by the arm highlighting the triceps. Despite his captivity the blond remained his shape. The whole set—the muscles of his shoulders and arms, the thin waist, the flat belly and his toned legs—attracted the attention of the omegas that lounged nearby.

He had seen the boy train in his small cell. Squats, push-ups, sit ups and a whole series of warm-ups exercises. What surprised him, besides the discipline, was the energy that overflowed. The obsession.
He had seen that depression was quite common, there were days when many tried to sleep until it was time to go to work, there were days when nobody wanted to talk. The blond did not seem depressed, and instead he trained. He did not befriend anyone, he just repeated sequence after sequence until his body was covered with sweat. After working, he spent an hour massaging the battered muscles, washing them and resting.

He kept an absolute control over his body, and Eijirou understood why. It was the only thing he could control. ‘Not always,’ said a little voice inside him evoking the smell of oranges. The memory depressed him again, because if he was honest with himself he had been one step away from disaster. It would have been so easy to get carried away… and sometimes he dreamed of doing it. Sometimes he dreams of going back to the dungeon and do what his instincts had told him to do.

Eijirou growled between his teeth and straightened. At the same time the blond shook off the drowsiness. He saw him stretch his neck and arms. There were moments when he saw him give up his usual irascible grimace and acquire a melancholic air. They were very few and far in between, almost all of them happened just after waking up, and they disappeared with an amazing speed.

While he pondered on the matter, the blond stood up and assumed a fighting stance. Bent knees, arms outstretched, legs open. The position was familiar to him and he studied it carefully. Seeing him move, the feeling of familiarity increased: One foot in front, slowly, bow bent, first support the fingers, raise the back leg, balance the weight, maintain the posture…

“By any chance, do you perhaps know Aizawa?” Eijirou asked quietly, looking at the position of his feet, the way they moved and inevitably remembering his teacher’s voice.

The feet stopped and Eijirou looked up at the red eyes.

“Who?”

“Shota Aizawa. He’s my teacher, do you know him?”

“No.”

Resuming his movement, with a deliberate slowness, shifting the weight from one leg to another, changing its center of gravity from the foot to the knee and waist.

“Wow… how strange. My teacher taught us that fighting style… well, although there are certain differences. There, what you just did, it’s different. You’re supposed to stretch your arm to punch while you’re turning around, and you shouldn’t—“

“Shut up!” The blond finished the routine and glared at him. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“That technique is taught to the king’s guard. My teacher, Aizawa-sensei, learned it from the warriors of the south, trained with them when he had… Oh! …you’re from the south! Did you train at the capital?”

“No.”

“Who was your teacher?”

“My mother.”

“Your mo—? Wow! Who’s your mother?”

“Why do you care?”
“Curiosity… Is she an alpha?”

“She is, she was…” The blond muttered, shrugging as he resumed his stance.

He repeated the sequence until it was finished and then started once again. Eijirou watched him carefully and although there were certain differences, the familiarity of the situation transported him back to the palace.

It filled him with wistfulness.

After twelve weeks of confinement and no response from the outside, Eijirou began to become aware of the enormity of his situation. His teacher had warned him of the danger, he had told him that it was possible they could not get him out before the king’s troops got on their way, and even then he could not shake off the impatience.

He counted the days, waiting for an answer from the outside.

Exactly in the third month of his arrival, the story was repeated, only this time Eijirou was a spectator. From his cell he saw the guards move two unconscious alphas and tried not to writhe with anxiety. He was so distracted that it took him a moment to notice the soldier who discreetly stopped by his cell. As soon as he looked up to him he instinctively raised his guard, but the other just looked around before throwing what looked like a small tube, no bigger than a finger.

Eijirou reacted immediately. He extended his leg and hid the cylinder beneath it. The soldier walked away without looking at him. With the hoods they wore it was impossible to distinguish one from the rest, but Eijirou tried to remember their height and the shape of their body.

With his heart beating at full speed, Eijirou had to stay still until the soldiers left with the two prisoners. As soon as the sound of footsteps disappeared, he had the blond next to the bars watching him with overwhelming intensity. Apparently he had noticed the exchange.

The tube was actually a piece of rolled paper. It had the thickness of his thumb and it was as long as half of his little finger. When unfolding it, Eijirou ran into his prince’s delicate calligraphy. It was written in code so he ignored the blond’s incendiary stare and took a moment to translate the text.

When he finished, he kept silent and tried to assimilate it.

“What does it say?” The blond growled impatiently.

Eijirou did not even hesitate, the words came out alone.

“Todoroki-ouji is here.”

The blond said something but Eijirou ignored him, he could not stop thinking about the message.

“Oh for the love of…! What else does it say?!”
Eijirou shook his head. “He says the king’s priority is not to get the prisoners back. He says they will not come. He says we are alone… he says they are going to get me out of here.”

“Only you.” The voice held no bitterness and no reproach, but when he looked at him he clearly saw contempt.

The blond laughed, but before he could get away Eijirou reacted, he held him by the arm.

“No,” he said firmly. “No,” he repeated.

He wanted to leave. He hated this place. He hated the incense and the work… but the mere thought of leaving without them… He looked at the sleeping alphas, he thought of Denki. No, he could not leave.

“You said that if the fleet arrived,” he murmured without ever looking away from his eyes, “you would attack from within. So all right. The fleet will not come, but with the help of my friends, maybe we can get out of here.”

The smile that spread across the blond’s face was carnivorous and cold.

Eijirou nodded. “Well, now tell me, how can I give him a message?”

Chapter End Notes

Facts and information that did not survive the original edition and that we don’t know if they will be mentioned at any time:

- In the beginning, the kidnappings were limited to Yuuei’s Kingdom. They happened once a year, sometimes up to two. When the king decreed to establish patrols around their coasts, the pirates expanded their hunting area. The first attack they made on the islands was the attack where Katsuki and Izuku were captured, but they did not expect the adults of the island to immediately make a counterattack. They were chased by sea, unfortunately, the boats of the villagers could not compete in speed and the storm ended with their pursuit.
- Everyone believes that the two ships sank. After that, the attacks have continued but the island has organized their own patrol, although they do not have the necessary boats to cover all the islands on the abduction continue.
- Mitsuki Bakugou, Katsuki’s mother, led the attack on the fortress that was meant to free the prisoners, the attack were all the alphas prisoners were sacrificed. Her team fought with a ferocity that earner her praise from the king, but when Todoroki-ou asked her to join his ranks, she refused because she preferred to take care of her home. (Badass Mitsuki!)
- When Aizawa was a kid he trained for five years with a teacher from the islands. He participated of several tournaments that took place there, and in fact he knows Mitsuki.
- When they lose a partner, the omega can spend days in a duel. They usually have friends and family members who help cope with depression. On the other hand, an alpha does not get depressed. Gets angry. Depending on the situation the
depression of an omega can lead to death and the wrath of an alpha can take it to feral (wild) state.

Next chapter on March 3rd

"Despite the Fear"
Laughter is part of his past, a distant memory that seems to have vanished from his mind. Sometimes it is hard for Denki to remember what his life was like before he met the black cells.

Denki wakes up wrapped in the aroma of wheat, egg and sugar. He stretched with laziness and curls up, burying his head under the blankets. He waits for his mother to show up and tell him *good morning*, but when it does not happen Denki rubs his face, puts away the blankets and gets up.

The first thing he does is take off his sleeping camisole and wraps his hips with his bandages without ever stopping yawning. The weather is pleasant, slightly cool due to the season. As soon as he finishes dressing, he crosses the separation curtain and finds his mother leaning over the kneading table.

Her apron is dirty and her arms, covered with white lilacs, are covered with dry flour up to her elbows.

Denki still remembers how happy her mother used to be. She used to sing and laugh, she used to tell her fantastic stories of travellers at sea. Until his father passed away and all the joy in his house withered away with him. Denki remembers his smiles, bright and immense, able to shake the sadness. His father smiled even when he was in bed, with blankets down to his chin and the emaciated, dirty look of someone dying.

So Denki smiles, squares his shoulders, inflates his chest and approaches his mother as he rolls up his sleeves.

"Good morning, Denki. I didn't want to wake you up."

"My stomach's the culprit, it's time to feed it."

When his mother tried to get up to help, Denki puts her back in her chair and places a bowl of water in front of her.

"Clean hands!" He demands in a bad imitation of the tone his mother used to use with him, then immediately returns his attention to the pot of soup he wants to reheat. "Don't forget your elbows!"

His mother laughs, a gentle, delicate gesture, a poor replica of the vibrant, uninhibited sound she used to share with his father, but it's a victory and Denki will not let it pass.

As she washes herself, he takes the dough away from the table, brings dishes closer, unwraps the homemade bread full of dried figs, and places two cups of tea.

He is so busy that he cannot keep his mother from getting up and limping to the pantry where the tea leaves are stored. At home she does not use a cane as the distance are relatively short, but Denki always keeps an eye on her for any unforeseen events.
On that day his mother's limp was much more pronounced.

"I didn't hear you move throughout the night," says Denki, helping her sit down.

"I didn't sleep much. I got up early to start another batch of bread."

"For what? Masao's order is ready and we'll finish Naoko's order before she comes to pick it up this afternoon. We don't have any more orders left."

"Michi came last night while you were sleeping; he asked me for three dozen blueberry bread."

"Blueberry? It's not blueberry season yet."

"He said his grandson saw a full bush last week. He's offering to pay double if we can get them done by today."

Denki sighs, he does not dare to contradict his mother, specially because he knows that extra money is never too much.

"Well," the boy murmurs while sitting down to eat, "I'll go get the blueberries while you finish Naoko's order."

[...]

It's beginning to feel like Autumn in the air. Most trees have begun to change leaves and many seasonal fruit shrubs begin to fill with color.

Denki knows he could buy blueberries at the market, it wouldn't take him long to go to the plaza to buy them, but he also knows that the price of a fruit is inflated too much at the first month of its season. He prefers to go into the forest rather than look for them himself.

It will take him longer, no doubt, but at a much cheaper price.

Denki leaves his mother at work and sets off. He crosses the square in time to see the merchants who start early. Many of them greet him, still remember his family's bakery, which they were forced to close after his father's death and his mother's depression.

Although they are now making commissioned bread, Denki dreams of reopening it. In his village it is not seen with good eyes that an omega owns a business, so his intention is to get himself a bread-loving husband and encourage him to reopen the bakery.

"Good morning, Denki," says Allana, a beautiful black-haired alpha who smiles at him every time she sees him. "Are you going to get fresh ingredients?"

Denki smiles back, immediately noticing the bubbling sensation that always appears when Allana shows herself interested in him. Despite the desire to sit down and chat with her, Denki answers without slowing down.
"I'm going to try!"

He's almost out of town when Ilh, a beta a year younger than him, greets him.

"Do you need help, Denki?"

"No!"

He waves his hand and goes on his way; for now the candidates are scarce, but Denki doesn't give up.

Finding blueberries is not an easy task, he finds many bushes full but most of them need time to mature, so Denki leaves them alone.

When he finally manages to find a bush full of mature pieces, Denki takes the time to cut them, not wanting to waste a single piece.

He's on his way back when he finally hears it. The alarm bell reverberates so loudly that Denki feels it vibrate inside him.

Or it may be the fear that shakes him inside.

Denki knows what he has to do, they have done simulations following the orders that came from the court.

*Move away from the coast, meet in the shelter with the rest of the village, wait for directions from the caregivers.*

His mother has forced him to memorize the instructions to the letter, but it is precisely thinking about his mother that paralyzes Denki.

She cannot run, not with her leg. His father used to carry her, he used to transport her in simulations, he was the one who made sure she was safe.

*But he's gone.*

Denki's dilemma is solved when he sees the smoke rising in spirals in the area where his village is, before processing what he sees, Denki releases the basket and moves by inertia. He runs at full speed back home. The village is empty and the smoke comes from the far side of the square. Denki knows that somewhere there must be some alpha that can help him move his mother, but at that moment fear covers him completely and the thought drowns there.

"Mom!" He starts screaming from three houses away and keeps screaming until he walks through the door. He stops at the threshold, covered in sweat and his lungs burning. When no one answers, he breathes a sigh of relief.
Until he hears it.

"Denki?" His mother is hiding in the cupboard next to the stove. "Denki! What are you doing here?"

"Come on, Mom!" He stoops towards her to get her out. "We have to go!"

"No! No! You have to go! Run! I'm fine! They're not looking for me!"

"No, they're setting the village on fire! You can't stay here! Come on! Come on! We've got to get out!"

Although his mother tries to push him Denki grabs her and forces her to stand up. As soon as they go out he is aware of the smell of smoke and ashes.

They both limp away from the square; on the way they find a small cart leaning against the house at the end of the street. Without wasting time Denki helps his mother to get on, then approaches the suspension rods and lifts them.

The weight is excessive and his arms protest the effort, but Denki clenches his teeth and pulls. Ignoring the blood that roars in his ears, Denki moves forward with his eyes on the front determined not to give up, until his mother starts screaming.

"Denki! Run! Run! They're coming!"

He makes the mistake of looking back, he turns his head and somehow the inclination makes him lose his balance. The cart leans over the left rim and combined with his mother's weight it causes Denki to fall sideways.

Next thing he knows, someone grabs him by the hair, Denki tries to escape, kicks and bites the hand that tries to hold his arms. In the distance he hears his mother screaming, until she suddenly falls silent.

He turns his face in search of her and sees her lying at the feet of a demon. Denki screams and fights with renewed vigour until suddenly pain explodes in his head and everything turns black.

The last thing he sees, before vanishing, are the white lilacs in his mother's arms covered in red.

[...]
When he starts crying it is Ochako who caresses his hair trying to console him.

[...]

The demons took everything from him. They took away his mother and destroyed his life. They took his bandages and forced him down into the dark cells.

Denki is sure that he will die there, in that prison, far from home. Bread is all he has left, the only pleasure he is allowed to have.

At first he used to think of his father: *Smile, Denki, no matter what. Smile for your mother. Smile for yourself. Life is too short not to smile.*

But the memory has vanished. There is no one left who can smile.

The red-haired alpha's smile is immense, frank and brilliant. Denki laughs with him and for the first time since he was torn out of his home, he feels the longing growing inside him.

*Please smile. Your smile is as bright as the sun.*
Despite the Fear

Chapter Summary

What is worse, to live with the fear to try to change something or to accept the imposed hollow existence?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Hey, sleepyhead, it’s time to get up.”

Denki growls, but the voice is insistent and kind; he notices the fingers that gently caress his hair with immeasurable amounts of affection. In the end he gives up. He opens his eyes and finds two hazel lakes staring back. He blinks and contracts when the muscles of his stomach tighten.

“Does it still hurt?”

He seats in silence. It’s been two weeks since the red-haired alpha was returned to the cells with the rest of his group, but only six days since they left him in peace.

“Come on, I’ll help you bathe.”

“Thanks, Ochako.”

The girl smiles at him and she helps him stand up. Out of the corner of his eyes he sees other omegas in the same situation; they moved slowly while someone else helped them get to the toilets. He also sees a few empty rugs and his face twists at what they represent.

“How many didn’t come back?” He asks in a low voice as they gradually move towards the door.

“Six,” Ochako mutters, looking at the floor. “Maybe they’ll come back today.”

Denki is not deluded, but he keeps the pessimism to himself. The lavatory is in the side room, there is an area for the toilets and at the other end there are several huge jars. They use hand pumps that raise the water from an underground stream, it makes bathing during the winter a nightmare and in those days they clean themselves with a damp sponge. On the other hand, in midst of the summer the bath is the only thing that manages to calm the incandescent heat, during the rest of the year the cold is vaguely bearable.

With Ochako’s help he sits on one of the stone benches and lets her wash him. The silence is absolute, he hears nothing aside from the falling water and the soap on his skin. Denki shudders with the cold water, trembles when he notices the soap glides over the bruises on his stomach. While Ochako moves away to fill her tray with more water, Denki looks at himself. The marks cover his stomach and belly, the black from the first days started to fade, only to leave yellow and green areas where it stood before. It still hurts him if he makes sudden movements, but at least he can walk.

Ochako returns and Denki closes his eyes, allowing himself to be pampered and he tries to clear his mind from all difficulties that surrounds him. That’s it, until the sobs break the silence in the bathroom. When he opens his eyes he sees Yui sitting on the same bench as him, her mouth tense as
she drowns her tears. Denki sees the wounds on her fingers and the cuts on her legs.

He does not need to ask to know that she has just been let out, he leans towards her and rubs his forehead against her thin shoulder. The person on the other side of her does the same thing and Ochako also joins the pile, the atmosphere becomes loaded with the aroma of support, affection and sweetness that characterizes the omegas when they are together. The air oozes love and compassion. Denki soaks himself in it, comforting one another in silence, offering the only affection they can.

When the cries remit the bath resumes. The wounded omegas are returned to their cots since they are usually given four days to recover. While Ochako bathes, he dresses, although the word has no actual meaning. His attire consists of simply just a fundoshi that leaves the his whole body exposed and for everyone to see. Denki remembers the shame and terror he felt when his bandages were taken from him and he was forced to use that thing.

Now he can use it without shaking.

Liar.

He still feels the shame but it has become a routine feeling. To this day his instincts makes him shrink when he sees an alpha nearby, and he never tries to look at them in the eyes. He does not want to see them looking at him.

Once he is dressed, he waits for Ochako, who returns naked, drying herself with a blanket. He helps her put on her sarashi and fundoshi, then all who are in a good enough condition to move stand close to the elevator, carrying in their warms the mats where they sleep with their blankets.

Denki yawns as the creak of the elevator resonates overhead. The omegas line up in two rows facing the only exit there is. A thud is heard and immediately after he hears the jingling of the keys and the sound of the padlock opening. The double doors open, revealing the elevator drawer with a guard making signs for the first group to climb.

As the first group moves towards the surface, Denki absently scratches his shoulder. He touches by mistake the bite that is still there and removes his fingers as if the brand burned him. He cannot stop himself for clenching his teeth. His discomfort causes some of his companions to turn towards him, asking questions in silence, but Denki simply smiles and shakes his head. At his side, Ochako pushes his arm in an attempt to distract him, he pushed back and the thing ends there.

They do not ask questions. They never talk about what happened in the dark cells, except to warn newcomers of what they should avoid and how to avoid it. In his previous life any contact with an alpha would have been cause for gossip, nervous whispers and happiness. But not here, because here they try to establish a clear barrier between themselves and the others. No names, no ties. He has broken the only rule they have. He told him his name and he does not know which one is worse—to have said it or to want to hear it from his mouth.

‘It will pass,’ Denki tells himself with resolution. It is not the first time that his body cries out for contact. It is not the first time that the need vibrates within him at a slow and inopportune frequency. He is not the only one. The dark room always leaves them unsatisfied, anxious and with longing. It is a natural reaction. It is an absolutely normal reaction.

What was not normal is that it has already been two weeks and Denki still has dreams filled with the aroma of saffron, but he is willing to overcome it.

When it is his turn to climb the elevator, Denki is forced to stop thinking about the red-headed alpha. ‘It’s over,’ he says resolutely as he leaves the mat and blankets piled up along with the others—the
last group is responsible for putting them in the sun—, then goes along with Ochako down the hall and they turn right to enter the kitchen.

The room is elongated with several stone tables, shelves along one wall, and a row of ovens in the background. They eat cold bread, cheese and jerky, accompanying them with mint tea while the ovens are heated. When everyone has finished the omegas are dispersed as a group of working ants. Denki and several of his companions begin to fill the carts with breakfast for the cells. When they are finished, several of them are escorted by the guards and Denki goes to the table where the bread is prepared.

He likes to make bread. It is the closest he will ever feel to his home. While filling the mass with nuts, raisins and figs, he remembers the redhead. He remembers their conversations. He remembers his laughter.

*It was bright and striking. Noisy and spontaneous.*

Maybe that was the problem. Maybe that was why he could not get it out of his head. He has not heard a laugh in such a long time. He has not laughed in such a long time.

*He laughed with him.*

It is what most disturbs him. To laugh. It seems impossible in a situation like his, but somehow the alpha managed to relax him enough to get a laugh from him. Laughter return him back to his home, with his mother and her sweetness.

Denki shakes his head and concentrates on the dough. He squeezes it with excessive force but nobody says anything to him. He vents with it, fills it with his anger and then puts it on the tray with the rest. He works and repeats the same pattern until his mind goes blank.

Mechanical work distracts him during the day, but at night while he is extending his mat on the floor he finds no way to get the alpha out of his head. And it stays like that until Ochako puts her mat next to him and whispers to him.

“The mats were taken.”

“What?”

“The guards took the mats from those who have not returned.”

An iron fence grips Denki’s heart as soon as he understands the meaning. ‘They have left,’ he tells himself, and it does not matter if he had already realized beforehand, the confirmation is always bitter.

*Where do they take them? What do they do with them?*

Denki listens to the murmurs as soon as the news runs through the others. Fear leads them to seek consolation, they stack together and embrace each other, trying to shake off the feeling of fatality that bubbles in the air. History repeats itself each time one of them does not return. The uncertainty of their destiny hangs over the rest like a sharp sickle.

Ochako huddles next to him, trembling. Denki comforts her as best as he can because he knows that she is terrified by the prospect of having to participate in the next group. Her turn will be in a week, and Denki hopes that she comes back.
His heat arrives the same day Ochako is taken away. He takes notice of the discomfort the moment he wakes up and the electrifying sensation that tickles at the tip of his fingers. At home he would have had some privacy, they would have given him space and time to relax his body and fight the need. In the prison that does not happen. The heat of an omega is used against them. They are forced to return to the dark room awaiting results. And although their jailers cannot distinguish the aroma, they recognize the common symptoms — dilated pupils, anxiety, hot flashes, lack of attention — , that is why they have perfected the art of going unnoticed.

As a general rule, the cover for each other. They try to away from any activities that brings them closer to an alpha — the only ones that could betray them — , and there is always someone with them looking out for any guards. To stay focused, they secretly chew panax, which helps them focus and provides them with energy. Some omega planted it among the other vegetables they have on the surface, their name has been lost among the countless who have been there, but the plant survives and the guards don’t even suspect it.

Each heat is the same. Denki fights against the feeling of abandonment, against the desire. Fear beats inside him when he gets up it accompanies him throughout the day. He fears that some guard will stop him and examine him thoroughly. He fears being dragged to the dark cells and never return.

Sometimes it is inevitable, sometimes it turns out that a guard is insightful enough to discover them. When that happens the omega is guaranteed to never return. Of all the stories that are told, the exception has been Itsuka, but the rest knows that it has been a combination of unrepeatable events that none should hope to aspire to repeat the miracle. So Denki uses all his will to stay attentive during the day and at night he relieves himself alone or with help.

Everything would have been easier if only he could stop imagining hands with the scent of saffron.

While Ochako is still absent Denki sweeps and cleans the cells of the alphas. He takes them food to eat and cleans their clothes. He never has to cover the same cell two days in a row and that is a good thing, because as soon as he enters the redhead’s cell, the aroma of saffron shakes him from head to toe. It has been over a month since he last saw him, but the memory of his mouth and fingers come back with intensity.

He touches his shoulder absentmindedly, but the mark has already faded away.

As soon as he realizes that one of the guards is watching him, Denki clenches his teeth and starts working. He sweeps the cell thoroughly, empties the bucket full of feces and washes it with
perfumed water, he shakes the blankets and sets them back on the floor. He does the exact same process with the one that follows, but he remembers to leave behind mint leaves for the blond alpha.

It is on these type of occasions when he remembers Itsuka. For all he knows it was her who had started giving him the mint, and she had asked him to continue with the work. That was weeks before they took her. Sometimes, Denki wonders if she made the conscious decision to mate because she could not bear to be forced to repeat the same charade over and over again.

If so, Denki does not blame her. Sometimes apathy looms over them like a dense cloud. Sometimes despair beats without respite. He can understand her agony, her surfeit. Maybe a day will come when he himself decides to give in.

When your life is reduced to a repeating cycle day after day, any changes become alarming.

It starts with the supplies from the pantry. The guards start taking the largest number of sacks, barrels and baskets, filled with flour, fresh vegetables and pickles. The corned beefs disappear, leaving only dry jerky to feed the prisoners.

Later comes the news that there no new omegas were coming, which was wonderful and terrible at the same time. Wonderful, because it meant that the last hunting went wrong and that at least their people were still safe. Terrible, because the guards are now more prone to anger.

And it ends when Ochako’s group does not return when their month at the dungeons is fulfilled, even worse, the guards take everyone from group three and leave just a handful of omegas to take care of all the prisoners.

The working became overwhelming. Cooking, washing, cleaning… the omegas spend the whole day trying to catch up. They ended up exhausted, with a few hours to sleep only to rise again and repeat the same sequence. Ten days later half of Ochako’s group returns. She returns silent and with dark circles under her eyes. Denki holds her while she cries and it is his turn to help her bathe and put her clothes on. This time the guards took the rugs without waiting.

After two weeks working tirelessly, Denki moves on autopilot. He is so distracted that it took him a moment to register what the blond said. He straightens up to look at him and realizes that he knows that expression. ‘It’s too early to ask for mint,’ he thinks while he gives him his food.

He does not expect the request he hears: *I need paper and ink.*

More than that, what really shakes him is the scent of threat, of urgency, of decision. It emanates from the blond in red waves. He realizes that the rest of the cell shudders with that aroma. It is the essence of an alpha ready to fight. Denki’s body is frozen in place, which is quite fortunate because otherwise he would be backing off, attracting the attention of the guards.

When the blond retreats, taking the scent with him, Denki straightens up without his face revealing his surprise and uncertainty. He goes to the next cell and does not risk looking back. His heart does
not stop beating violently as he climbs the stairs and drags the empty carts back to the kitchens. In his panic he does not stop feeling that the guards are watching him. He is fortunate that after dinner they are returned to their underground rooms because only there is Denki sure that there are no eyes watching.

The first thing he wants to do is tell Ochako about it, but she is sleeping and the mere idea of waking her up causes him discomfort. He also does not want to repeat the words aloud because that would make the request real. And if it is real… if it is real he has no idea what to do with it.

‘What does he want paper for,’ Denki thinks with frustration. ‘Whom is he going to write to? And when he’s finished, who will deliver the message… And if they discover him, then what. They aren’t going to punish him, they’ll punish us.’

Denki remembers all the times that the association with an alpha has brought pain: Ibara was punished by imprisoning her for a whole month in the dark cells with the alpha that convinced her to bring him a knife; after that they took them both. And when they discovered Nubia had drawn a map detailing the stairs and tunnels, they made her bleed until she could no longer hold a pen again. And just like them, there were countless of stories Denki heard from the other omegas that had been there for a longer time.

Stories whose purpose was to make sure that none of them made the same mistake.

‘I’m not going to give him anything,’ Denki says with resolution because he knows that he will get caught and he does not want to get involved.

‘You give him the mint,’ murmured another part of him, the part that missed laughing.

‘Because Itsuka asked me to.’

‘You could stop now.’

“What’s wrong?”

Ochako turns around, no doubt alerted by the uncertainty and fear emanating from him. Denki controls himself, shakes his head and sighs.

“Nothing, everything’s fine.”

He lies next to her, facing the stone ceiling. He can smell his own fear and that of his companions, it is an aroma that had become a constant in their lives. He hears the whispers of bodies seeking comfort while unconscious. He can feel the cold from the soil that sneaks into his bones. This is his life. Days are blurred one after the other, with no changes, and no hope.

“No changes?” He mutters to himself as he remembers the half-empty pantry. He turns his face around and even in the darkness he could distinguish many empty spaces, more than usual. They pieces together the dates of two groups. They had never done that before, the tradition was that one group went to the cells while the other two worked, now they had taken two and left one of them for a longer time.

More time, he shudders at the idea. He does not want to think about it, but he knows that if they had left him there another week with the redheaded alpha he would had ended up yielding. He had wanted to give in when…

Denki stops his train of thoughts and curses at the embarrassment showing in his face, the memory shakes him but when it does return so does the anxiety and the increasing uncertainty. The changes
were too flashy to ignore them, he already had enough problems with the prospect of returning to the cells for a longer time, and now it adds up when the most problematic alpha decides to give throw on him a suicide mission.

‘But, why now?’ He thinks and curses him, yet his mind paralyzes at the idea. ‘Is he plotting something?’

The thought is absurd, but he cannot get it out of his head, he cannot forget his expression, the aroma. Everything inside him was on fire. All of him cried for independence.

That night he was not able to sleep, he does not stop thinking about Nubia’s shattered hands.

Getting paper was not easy, not since the incident with the map, but Denki manages to get one of the abandoned inventory lists. On one side there is a complete list of items including the number of pieces or bags, on the back the list continues halfway and the rest of the sheet is blank. Denki folds it ten times in a row and slides it under his wristband.

Ink is an even greater challenge. He has not seen a single bottle in all the time he has been there, but he plans to do the same thing that Nubia did.

While his colleagues work, Denki takes all the blueberries. He washes them and cleans them very carefully In the eyes of everyone he uses them to fill the breads that he is preparing for the day, but no one notices the small bowl in front of him, where there is a handful of strawberries that he crushes with his fingertips whenever he gets the opportunity. When finished with the dough, Denki has three trays filled bread stuffed with cranberries and a small bowl with purple pulp.

Several of his companions have noticed the bowl but none of them comes near for fear of calling the attention of the guard. Denki takes care of putting the rest of the flour in the pantry and while doing so he makes sure to bring his small bowl with him. He entertains himself in front of the cabinet that keeps the preserved food until he notices that the guard turn his attention to the breakfast carts that his companions are filling.

Only then does he rush to uncover the vinegar. He pours the amount of what he thinks is a spoonful with a little salt into his bowl, then he walks away from the pantry taking with him the canister where the pepper is stored. While helping with the vegetables Denki takes out the paper, puts it on a piece of cloth and then empties the contents of his bowl into the bottle. The omegas next to him do not look at him, but the tension they emit is scorching.

Denki picks up his materials and with all simplicity in the world washes his bowl along with the rest of his things and when he is sure that the guard is not looking at him, he puts a few drops of water inside the jar, shakes it discreetly and hides it between the things he takes to the breakfast cart.

Under normal circumstances Denki would stay in the kitchen to help with the food, but with the lack of staff there is no choice but to go down with the rest to the cells. The boy walks all the way with his back tense, trying to ignore the expression of panic that the rest of his companions dedicate him
every time he dares to look at them. It is fortunate that Ochako remains in bed, otherwise she would be questioning him and the truth is that he is not even sure what he is doing.

His hands do not stop trembling throughout the whole journey, he does not stop thinking that at any moment one of the guards will drag him to the cells to never let him out. Fear beats within him but he does not even regret it. He does not hesitate while giving the blond the blankets that wraps around the canister and the piece of paper. At that moment, when he consciously decides to take a risk, he feels that an old part of him wakes up. He feels that maybe he is not condemned to a black destiny.

Hope.

Maybe that is what ended up condemning Itsuka, Ibara, Nubia and the rest.

[...]

Tomura does not bother to knock on the door. He opens it with strength and determination, flooding the room with the untiring energy that his body possesses.

The tall, thin man with the charcoal skin is the only one who recognizes his presence. His elongated eyes, bright yellow, lack of pupils, and you never know what emotion is drawn on them, despite all this one of the few people that Tomura tolerates having close.

“Welcome, Shigaraki,” Kurogiri mutters, bowing his head humbly as he stands in front of him.

Tomura ignores him, focusing his attention on the figure of his teacher who has occupied himself on the table with his back to him. He does not turn even when he hears him approaching, entertained as he is with whatever he has there. He is so immersed in his work that Tomura loses his patience, so he goes around the table and stands in front of him.

“You called me?” He asks, fixing his attention on the man — or what is left of him — lying between them. His complexion is thick and tall, but the cadaverous pallor snatches away any air of threat. His chest is open and his teacher carefully studies the organs that are exhibited there. From the stumps that used to be his hands, blood drips into two jars on the floor. The pink bougainvillea flower that grows on his knee is stained with blood.

Tomura contains the desire to bend over, pull out his knife and tear off the tattoo. The desire is so intense that he unconsciously scratches the portion of skin to the right of his clavicle. It is a mania that he cannot control.

“Kurogiri has brought me interesting news,” murmured his teacher, giving him a fatherly smile.

“Is it about the ships? Because I had nothing to do with it. You forbade me to participate in the spring collection.”

“And luckily I did or right now you would be under the sea.”

“Rather you’ll say that right now there would be a new group of savages for you. I wouldn’t have
“Oh, really?”

“I’ll prove it to you. In the fall harvest I’ll bring twice as many prisoners.”

“It’d be impossible.”

“What?! … I can do it!”

“And I have no doubt you would have, but there will be no fall harvest.”

“Why not?”

“Because Yuuei has decided to fight. Kurogiri’s spies inform us that the mobilizations have begun. They’re gathering food, weapons, ships and warriors. It is said that their objective is to attack our ports.”

Tomura laughs out loud as his nails dig into the scar tissue, “I want to see them try.”

“Our position is still delicate.”

“We can beat them. With our soldiers, Overhaul’s soldiers, and with the serum… The savages of Yuuei will fall before us.”

“We have to be patient, we can’t risk them to know about our alliance, much less for them to try one of their own.”

“The conceited and selfish king Todoroki requesting reinforcements? … to whom? To the savages on the north? They are declared enemies. The savages of the south? They lack the ships to move. No, Yuuei has no friends. They don’t have the strength to defeat us.”

“Even so we’ll still be cautious.”

Tomura clicks his tongue in annoyance, “I’ll take care of bringing our people together.”

“No, Kurogiri has already started the transfer of food and mobilized our men and we have sent the order to speed up the matings. Hopefully, that will empty the prisons before they attack us.”

“What will you do with those that remain?”

“When Yuuei’s fleet gets on their way, all unpaired prisoners will be sacrificed. We can’t run the risk of any of those fortresses falling into the hands of the savages.”

“Do you want me to supervise the transfers?”

“No… I have a mission for you. We have received a message from Dabi, he found the traitor and he hides near the nomu frontier. Right now he’s watching over them.”

“Watching over? Bah! A waste of time. He should just eliminate them. Are you sending me to finish his job?”

“I’m sending you to interrogate the traitor. There are Yuuei’s spied with him and I want to know what he has told them.”

“More? … We’ve got rid of all the previous ones. From the last four, only one remains. Two have
already been paired and are about to be moved if they aren’t on their way, one died because of the serum and the other is still there… but it’s a matter of time.”

“You sure?” His teacher straightens for the first time, moving away from the mutilated body. There are several bottles full of blood next to the head and in the other one the heart is floating. “It’s most likely that those two are part of the same group. It’s the first time that they send so many at the same time, without mentioning that they are still young.”

“And what about it? They will end like all the previous ones. I could even cut their heads and send them to the king, surely that would make him move faster.”

“There’s no need for anything unnecessary. Go and do your job.”

Tomura gets angry and observes with annoyance the table where the blood has stopped dripping. He points to the row of small vials arranged on the shelf in the opposite corner to the entrance.

“How is the serum for the betas going?”

“Until now it seems to work… but we’ll have to test it in the open.”

“Hmm, will you need more test subjects?”

“There’s still plenty from the last group, but if any of your spies is a beta, sent them to me. I would like to try something else.”

“As you wish.”

Tomura leaves without saying goodbye. He turn his back on him and walks away through the dirty corridors. He goes downstairs until he reaches the basements. His room is the only space occupied on the entire floor, no one else likes the aroma of enclosure and shit that rises from the lower floors. He has no problems with them.

The advantage of having a useless nose.

He takes an old bag out from his closet and fills it with clothes, a blanket, his knives, rope and everything else. He changes his clothes, choosing a thicker set, much more appropriate one for the trip. In the mirror of his room his slim and marked body is outlines, the scar tissues that he bears at his heart height makes him itch. While making a mental list of everything he needed, he scratches. It is a mania that he cannot avoid.

When everything is ready, he heads towards the lower floors. The guards on duty greet him with the respect that his position deserves.

“I need a runner and provisions for a trip of several days,” he said as he walks toward the cages without stopping. One of the guards goes to the cellars while the other begins to point out their properties.

“All of them are good runners. The fastest one is in cell five. The most resistant is that one of cell eight. The most reliable in the twelve. To fight the one in cell three. If you are not concerned about discretion, there are several flyers ready to be saddled.

Shigaraki stops in front of the last cell. The guard stands aside and look at him with evident nervousness.

“What about this one?”
“It’s good, but it has a bad character.”

As if listening to them, the beast growls. Their yellow eyes sparkle with hatred common in cornered animals. It has grey skin, six legs with huge nails that tear the cell’s cement, and the fangs protruding from his mouth are the size of a hand.

“I’ll take it.”

The guard does not protest. He hands him the syringe with the red serum. Tomura grabs it and immediately empties a few drops into his hand, then throws the rest onto the floor of the cage where it breaks into hundreds of small fragments. For a second nothing happens, until the animal shakes its head as if it had been hit. It recoils and staggers, as if drunk. Their body relaxes, its teeth retract, its nails stop sinking into the ground.

Tomura opens the grid, extends his hands toward the snout of the beast, which sucks strongly the aroma in his hand. While that happens the guard saddles it and adjust the stirrups. At the same time the other guard arrives, carrying two bags with supplies that he ties to the chair.

When everything is ready, Tomura takes the reins and guides the animal into the tunnels. He mounts in one jump and spurs the beats towards a dizzying race through the dark tunnels. The trip awakens his thirst for blood. His desire to meet the spies of Yuuei and welcome them to their lands burns within him.

Chapter End Notes

We got to see the omegas and specially Denki’s side of the story, as well as the enemies point of view... I wonder what's coming next~

Next chapter on March 10th.

"Kamui"
Chapter Summary

If nobody is willing takes the first step, how do we expect to change the world?

Chapter Notes

Thank you everyone so much for all the wonderful comments, kudos and bookmarks! I'm so overjoyed that everyone's liking the story so far and I hope you all will stick around till the end 🌝( ◠ )acey

There's also THIS wonderful fanart of Katsuki made by Canarium! It's so beautifully made and I'm as much in love with it as I'm sure Roquel is!

Enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They disembark near the coast in the middle of the night and they do not stay too long to see the ship leave since it is too dangerous to wait for the dawn, so they advance in a hurry, taking care to not leave a visible trail. The area is extremely wooded which gives them at least some sort of protection in case there were some guards lingering around. The air of the coast is warm and salty, but as they move away from it the aroma becomes a combination of leaf litter and bark. At night, the sounds of their footsteps seem to reverberate in all directions. Izuku’s heart does not stop beating unbridled as they rush away from the beach.

The full moon illuminates the sky with a silvery hue, the hooting of the owls breaks the silence suddenly and from time to time they reach to distinguish the small nocturnal rodents that run to hide when they pass by. They walk throughout the night, without stopping and when the sun rises, Izuku uses it to locate their position on the improvised map. They rest for a couple of hours just to relax their legs and to take a quick nap. Immediately afterwards they resume their march.

They walk for days only stopping to eat and rest. They take advantage of the fact that there is a full moon to continue during the night and they only sleep in shifts, wrapped in blankets next to each other. Izuku follows the rhythm of his companion without complains, accustomed to hard work and the hash nighttime climate. He accepts his watchful shifts without protest and does not allow the other to offer him preferential treatment. He eats his cold rations without saying anything and every day focuses on the activity that lies ahead: Walk, eat, watch. At night, when he has to watch, he focuses on looking at the shadows, listening to every noise, every whisper. When he sleeps, he dreams of Katsuki, but it is not the dreams he has had during the last few years, they are not memories of their childhood either, they are not brilliant and crystalline sequences. His nightmares are chains of vague images, full of water and death, in them he always sees Katsuki locked in a cage, sinking into the sea.

When he wakes up the feeling of abandonment is intense, almost suffocating, but he controls it as best as he can because he does not like to see the grief face of the alpha that accompanies him. Every
day he promises not to surrender and every day he tries to fulfill it.

They follow the sun to locate the river they are supposed to follow. They find it on the fifth day of traveling and they follow it upstream, they try not to get too far away from it but they stay under the protection that the trees provide. As the land advances, it loses its greenness, the soft grass gives way to more solid and rugged terrain, and the leafy trees begin to distance themselves from each other. They have no difficulty in reaching the waterfall—its height is about ten meters long and the rock wall extends to the sides as far as the eye can see.

The roar of falling water echoes in the rocks and the delicate white foam that forms at the base prevents you from seeing the bottom of the pond. There they do not find signs from their people—there is no sign that anybody has visited the place recently. The only thing left to do is to leave a message and wait.

They gather a lot of flat rocks that they place at the base of the highest pine. The rocks themselves do not say anything, but they will attract the attention of those who know what they have to look for. When they finish they move away, following the wall until they find a hollow space to spend the night. They light a fire at dusk, trusting that the smoke will go unnoticed while the sky is dyed in grey and white. At night they take turns to watch over while they enjoy their first warm dinner after many days.

In the distance the roar of the waterfall is echoed, but in addition to the unmistakable sound of insects there does not seem to be a single soul in miles around. As soon as the sun goes down they retrace their steps, but the signal remains the same and there are no recent tracks. The process is repeated for two full days, they make several trips to the waterfall and every time there are no changes, until the afternoon of the third day when they find that the rocks have been moved to their original position. As soon as he sees them, Shouto wields his knife and Izuku turns to watch the rear.

“Lunaria flowers don’t grow in this region.”

The voice does not scream but manages to overcome the roar of the water. Its tone is firm and serene, it has the hardness of steel and its edge. As soon as Izuku hears it he starts looking around for its origin, yet Shouto positions himself in front of him while answering:

“I have seen them grow in the village of the first men.”

“There is nothing left of them but the dust that covers the desert.”

“And nevertheless their children still live.”

It was a password, Izuku knows it and relaxes, but all calmness disappears when he sees the man emerge from the waterfall. He call him a man because he has legs, arms and a head, but his physiognomy is not something he has seen before. The man has a mahogany-colored skin, although instead of skin, it resembles the bark of young trees. His hands, that are holding a bow that is pointed in his direction, have unusually long fingers like thin branches. His head is hairless and a mask covers the rest of his face. In general, it seems like to be a trunk that speaks and moves.

“Who are you?” Shouto asks without relaxing his position despite the fact that the other has lowered his bow.

“Your people call me Kamui.”

As soon as he hears it, Shouto lowers his knife. “You’re—“

“Let’s leave the questions for later. I don’t like to stay too long in the open. The General’s spies are
many and they are in the most unexpected places.”

“Where are the others?”

Kamui turns around, “We’ll not talk about that here.”

After exchanging a glance, Shouto follows him with Izuku behind. The man returns on his steps and goes back to lose himself behind the curtain of water. Izuku advances behind the alpha, observes that the edge next to the wall is shallow and that the water only reaches his calves. As he goes along, he feels the roar of the water echo inside him, silencing any other thought. The small drops that jump from the pond soak his pants and make him tremble. Izuku stops just before crossing, stretches his hand and immediately withdraws it when he feels the force of the water hitting against it.

He takes a breath and pushes himself in, his intention is to jump through the curtain, but he immediately realizes that it is not so easy. The force of the water cuts the impulse of the jump and suddenly he is surrounded by water that lashes against his body with an immense force. In a matter of seconds his whole body ends up soaked and Izuku tries to advance blindly.

An Iron hand holds his outstretched arm and the boy notices the pull of his body. He stumbles forward with his eyes closed until he collides with a solid body. He opens his eyes and has Kamui in front of him, who beckons him to move. The area behind the waterfall is a small cave, no more than a meter wide. Kamui stops next to one of the walls where he signals them to enter the small tunnel on the ground.

Izuku looks at Shouto, who nods silently at the unspoken question. The boy takes a breath, kneels in front of the entrance and arranges his travel bag so that it does not get in the way while crawling in all fours. The tunnel is wide enough so that he can move forward without his back touching the roof nor his shoulders getting stuck, but no doubt anyone with a heavier build would have trouble crossing.

Izuku moves forward without stopping, he feels claustrophobic at the thought that the tunnel is endless, but he stifles the sensation by repeating himself incessantly. Don’t be a wimp. The scent of damp earth floods his nostrils, he notices the cold breaking into his bones and the darkness is absolute. As the cold progresses, it becomes more pronounced and the sound of the waterfall is lost in the distance.

At the end of the tunnel it connects with a cave, inside they find a relatively wide space, a nest of blankets that makes up the bed and several shelves displaying books, weapons and household items. There are two other holes on the left, without doubt, the exit of other tunnels, but there is also an entrance in the front, without a door, that leads to a dark tunnel that appears endless. The light enters through a small opening in the ceiling and when Izuku stands under it he distinguishes a rocky surface and a pile of leaves that allow enough light to pass so that a lamp is not needed.

Behind Izuku, Shouto arrives and a little while later Kamui appears with his feet in the front, evidently, because he had to cover the tunnel behind them. Up close he could see that the skin is a bright mahogany color, with little streaks like on the bark of a tree. Izuku remembers Tsuyu’s tongue and Tokoyami’s head.

“You’re Kamui, Shinsou’s contact?” Shouto asks as soon as the three of them are facing each other. Izuku trembles without being able to avoid it so the man takes a small blanket from one of the shelves and extendeds it without saying a word.

“Thanks,” Izuku mutters, noticing the fingers stiff from the cold.
“Well,” Shouto grows impatient, snatching the blanket Kamui offered him.

“I remember Seishirou,” replies Kamui while moving with familiarity through the cave. He places his bow back on the wall and supports the quiver of arrows just below. “He found me bleeding in the woods, took pity of me, healed me, and stayed with me until he had to leave.”

“Where was he?”

“Where everyone goes.”

“Who are everyone?”

“The ones who are like him.”

Izuku pulls away when the air around Shouto gets loaded with impatience and frustration. Kamui cannot smell it, but he certainly notices the boy’s tense expression because he sighs with dismay and signals them to sit down. Izuku obeys, he finishes drying and cleaning himself thoroughly before settling on the floor next to him, but Shouto remains standing, inflexible and wrathful.

“For the creator himself,” sighs Kamui, “You both are too young to be here.”

“We want answers,” growls Shouto, stretching himself to his full height.

“As all of those who have come before, but I also have some questions: Where is Aizawa? In the letter that previous group brought he said that he would come to see me three moons after the previous group.”

“How do you know it’s not me?”

Kamui rubs his face with satiety, “Seishirou described him to me—black hair and azalea flowers on his face. None of you meet the descriptions.”

“My teacher had to return, certain circumstances prevented him from being here. I come in his name.”

“Well, I’ll tell you the same thing I would have said to him: I will not help any more spies.”

“Why?”

“When Seishirou saved me I promised him that I would accept the messages that came from the man named Aizawa, I promised him that I would offer him all the help that was within my reach, but obviously, how many of those who have come have actually gotten back?”

“That’s not the point.”

“That’s precisely the point. In all the years that I’ve been doing this, the story is always the same. One of you arrives, I show you the maps, the trade routes, the roads that lead to the fortress, and then what. They send their messages, they send their reports and then they suddenly disappear. Captured most likely, dead eventually. And now, a few months ago they sent me another group. Younger than any of the above, with the intention to infiltrate the prison. It’s possible that in doing so I have revealed my position as well as endangering people I care about.”

“How did you manage to get them in?”

“I have a friend, a captain who runs one of the prisons… who ran one of the prisons.” He laughs, the gesture is anything, but funny. “Aizawa had sent me a message asking if infiltration was possible. I
investigated it and my friend told me that I could falsify the transfer notes. It is not common, but it has been done before, and so.” Kamui shrugs, indifferent.

“What happened with the captain?”

“They moved him to the citadel.”

“Why?”

“Don’t you see? The General most likely knows that he helped me. If so, your friends are under surveillance and it will be impossible to recover them.”

“You said—“

“I know what I said, but you’re not understanding what I’m saying now. The General knows there are traitors. He hunts us as if we were the vermin.”

“But he did not kill the captain.”

“He will not want to attract attention, he will be waiting for us to return.”

“There must be a way to get them out of there.”

Kamui shakes his head irritably. The air around the alpha clouds, it’s aroma is dense, suffocating. Izuku stirs in his place fighting against the desire to move away and hide, but unlike him, Kamui responds with an expression of iron determination. Unable to withstand the environment, Izuku intervenes:

“Why were you bleeding?” The question causes both to turn towards him. The surprise in Shouto lightens the threat and Izuku takes advantage of that brief moment to continue. “You said Shin— that Seishirou found you wounded in the forest.”

“That’s how it went.”

“Who hurt you?”

“Kurogiri, the General’s right hand.”

“Why?”

“Because I wanted to leave.”

“Why?”

“Because the war took my family away from me.”

“What war?”

“Our’s,” Kamui shakes his head, frustrated. “It’s impossible to explain, you wouldn't understand it.”

“I won’t if you don’t explain it to me.”

For the first time Kamui does not look at him as if he were a child.

“Well… do you want a history lesson as well? Because here it goes:”

“About thirty years ago, when I was not born yet, a rumor arose that a stranger had come to the
mountains. The story would have gone unnoticed if it were not because he came riding a nomu. It
was a feat that ran on everyone’s lips. The nomus are terrible beasts that live in the desert and
sometimes attack the border in search of easy preys. The tribes of the mountains received him and his
son. The stories that are told is that he lived with them, came to govern them and eventually united
them all under his power. This stranger extended his control throughout the length and breadth of the
continent. He united all the small states in Hosu. Those who did not want to join him were
massacred, their lands were ceded to support groups, and eventually he managed to erect fortresses,
cities and piers. I was fifteen when I got myself enlisted, and at that time everyone knew him as the
General, he had decreed that it was a requirement to serve in the army for five years, the only
advantage was that at the end of your service you could aspire to something else. It was a year before
I finished mine when Akaguro started his rebellion. On that day, he renounced his name and called
himself Stain, that was almost ten years ago.”

“It was about that time that the kidnappings began,” mumbled Shouto as he calmly took a seat in
front of Kamui.

“The kidnappings were precisely the spark that separated the two factions. The constant wars and
struggles for power had left an immense number of wounded. There were not enough hands to start
rebuilding. The general used raids to get slaves to work on his cause. Their intention was to use them
to build more ships, to expand and fortify their citadel, to extract metals from the mines, to cultivate
the fields; but Stain and his group considered your people unlucky. He was raised up in a
traditionalist environment and considered those tattoos as cursed symbols. It was impossible for them
to accept that a woman could impregnate another or that men were capable of procreating. Many
fought at his side, but the General beat them all. He snatched their titles and properties, and continued
with his work.”

“It was then that you decided to resign?” Izuku asks, looking at him with pity.

“I did not share Akaguro’s point of view, but my village was his, so when they burned the town as
punishment for the uprising, my family paid the price. I left then because I found it impossible to
continue obeying him. Of course, one does not leave because they just want to.”

“They tried to stop you?”

“They tried to kill me, they thought they accomplished it, and they would had managed it if only
Seishirou hadn’t found me. As far as I know, he was the first to come to investigate what was
happening.”

“He was,” Shouto answered meditatively. “I was very young then and I didn’t know what happened
until later. Seishirou’s wife was my teacher’s twin sister, so they both knew each other since they
were young. Both served the court, and their son was destined to be part of the prince’s guard. When
Seishirou failed to convince the king that the threat was real, he decided to investigate on his own.”

“He never came back?” Izuku asked.

“No… the last message he sent said the General’s citadel was in the mountains. His intention was to
get information about the fate of the slaves.”

“I told him it was dangerous to enter the General’s territory. There are eyes that watch and tramps
everywhere. All those who go there disappear.”

“Why would he want to go there? Why not concentrate just on the prison?”

“The prison began to be used about six years ago, before that all the slaves went to the citadel, from
there they sent them to work, but they always came back. Even now, from time to time they make transfers, sometimes they take two, sometimes more. The number is never constant but all slaves end there.”

“Why?”

Kamui shrugs. “I’m not sure… they say the General uses them to dig tunnels and expand buildings. Maybe makes them work on the fields or in the mines that are still open.”

“Why did none of our people reported about the drug they use against us?” Shouto asked.

“I didn’t hear about it until a couple of years ago, and for all I know it’s a tranquilizer. It makes them docile or something like that.”

“How does it work?”

“The only ones who can answer that are the colonels. The leaders of the eight noble houses that serve the General.”

“You friend, the captain, didn't know what it was?”

“No, they only received it and administered it. Since it has no effect on us, it is impossible to know what it does.”

“I need to send a message to my colleagues. They must know that we have come to recover them.”

“I told you I cannot help you with that. What I can do for you is send a message for your people to come pick you up and guide you back to the coast so you leave.”

Shouto tenses, he seems ready to continue arguing, but before he says anything Izuku intervenes.

“I’m sorry about what happened to your family, I’m sorry that helping us puts you at a risk, but we need you. We can do this with or without your help, but without it they will most likely capture us.”

“Even so it is most likely that they’d capture us all.”

“You told us there were more people like you: Traitors. Renegades.”

”And there are, but many follow Stain’s beliefs. None of them will help you, not if it means freeing your people.”

“But there are others who don’t follow Stain and who oppose the General, right?”

“There are, but they are young, they lost their families in the war and they grew up to become prison guards. Many do not approve what happens there, they are good guys and precisely because of that I don’t want to risk the lives of any of them.”

“We don’t want to risk anyone’s life either, but we need to find out more about the drug they use against us. Maybe you cannot tell what it is, but the prisoners can.”

Kamui sighs and shakes his head, but Izuku does not give up.

“If we can neutralize the paralytic, as you call it, we will have an opportunity to free the prisoners. Many of them are children, just as young as those you are trying to protect.”

“If the General finds out…”
“Renouncing is to offer the victory.”

“Very well,” he says in the end with resignation. “I don’t promise anything, but I can send them a message. Only one. So try to summarize the situation as much as possible.”

“How are they going to answer us?”

“First, I have to talk to someone. If I convince him, he will take care of the rest.”

“Alright, do you have paper?”

Kamui leaves that same night, just as the moon rises in the sky. Shouto tries to convince him to let him accompany him, but the ther refuses in a strict manner, so he has no choice but to wait.

The cavern seems unusually huge at night. The silver light that filters through the ceiling provides enough clarity to identify the contours of the furniture. Izuku finishes drying his hair and his face, wraps himself in another dry blanket while nibbling on rice crackers. Shouto cannot eat, he does not have the stomach to digest anything. He does not stop thinking about his friends and all the mistakes he has made up to that moment.

“If you don’t stop walking around you will dig a hole in the ground.”

Izuku’s voice is a faint murmur that paralyzes him in his place. His mind stops wandering and becomes fully aware of his surroundings. The first thing he notices is the aroma. It smells like mint, fresh and delicious like a delicate spring breeze. The aroma is surprising and at the same time disconcerting because he is sure that nothing in the cave smells like that. He inspired deeply looking for the origin of such essence. To his surprise, the origin of such a delicate and exquisite aroma is the omega wrapped in dry blankets that chews a biscuit in the semidarkness.

“What’s wrong? Asks the silhouette with his face covered in shadows.

Shouto cannot resist, “You used to smell like flowers.”

“Flowers?”

“Yeah - jasmines, aloe, lavender.”

“Ah,” the silhouette moves.

The omega leans forward to bring one of the packages from its wt bag that has been drying in a corner of the cave. The boy straightens himself up with a small wooden box between his hands. As soon as he opens it the cave is flooded with the scent of aloe, chamomile and jasmine.

“I use them in my poultices,” the omega explains, sinking a pair of fingers in the light green paste. “They are completely natural and can last up to months.”
Izuku stretches his fingers to show the mixture and unconsciously Shouto wrinkles his nose.

“Many don’t like the aroma of the fomentation,” Izuku explains, without doubt misinterpreting the gesture of the alpha, and returns the excess of the mixture to the box and the rest is dispersed by rubbing it in his hands. “But they improve the healing process and avoid infections.”

Shouto is not bothered by the aroma, it smells like plants and until a moment ago he believed that it was the natural scent of the omega. The real reason for his wrinkled face is that the aroma of mint has been completely covered and even after he gets closer the only thing he distinguishes is aloe and chamomile. No matter how hard he tries, the aroma of mint had faded away without trace.

Unconsciously, he extends his hand when Izuku offers him a cracker. The silence stretches between them like a physical barrier as they dine on their meager dinner.

“In my home we don’t have healer omegas,” the statement is surprising, even for Shouto himself. Luckily, the omega does not seem to be offended by the subject.

“They don’t exist on the islands either, but someone has to be the first.”

“At home the omegas are not allowed to work. Their job is to raise the children.”

“On the islands the omegas take care of the children, but some also weave, embroider, make pottery. I know an omega that won the first place in our archery tournament… Don’t you think that omegas also have their own dreams?”

“I had never thought about it before, my father has a very clear philosophy about what an omega can or cannot do.”

“Then maybe you can make him change his mind.”

Shouto laughs, the idea is inconceivable, first because his father does not allow anyone to discuss his ideas and secondly because he would not know where to start. In an attempt to erase his father from his mind, Shouto points to the sketchbook that dries up next to the rest of the things.

“Did they knew about your desire to be a healer?”

Shouto notices the way the omega tensed, combined with the intense scent of uncertainty, makes his question is not welcomed, but there is no time to retract. The silhouette of the omega moves uncomfortably while pressing the blanket over his shoulders. Shouto cannot even make out his eyes in the dark.

“Are we going to take turns for tonight?” Izuku asks in a flat voice, controlling each intonation, but there is no way he can hide the dense aroma of nostalgia that emanated from him.

“I’ll do first watch,” Shouto mutters as he finished eating his biscuit. “Use the bed, I’ll wake you up when it’s your turn.”

The omega obeys him silently. He settles into the pile of blankets that smell like dirt and stays still. Despite the silence, Shouto knows with certainty that the boy is awake but he says nothing, respecting his moment of mourning.
Izuku wakes up bent over in himself and with his skin soaked in cold sweat. He tries to push away the image of Katsuki drowning in a black sea. He does not allow himself to see Kacchan under the sea, lost in the immensity of the abyss. He cannot even remember what it was like before he lost him.

“Are you okay?” Shouto’s voice sounds sleepy, but there is no doubt that his discomfort has awakened him.

“I’m fine, has Kamui returned?”

“No.”

Izuku straighten up. In the opening of the rook a clear grey sky is distinguished.

“It’s dawn… I thought you’d wake me up.”

“In the end I didn’t think it was necessary,” answers the alpha, straightening in his place next to the wall, “and we needed to rest.”

“We could have taken turns for the bed.”

“I would have ended up not being able to sleep in it… let it be.”

Izuku does not have the strength to argue, he cannot get the dream out of his head. They eat their reserves and drink water that is stored in a pitcher next to one of the tables. As Kamui still does not appear, Shouto is dedicated to cleaning and taking care of his knives. The scent of pine that emanates from his is fresh and natural and gives away his calmness. He cannot help but remember the aroma of wood, Kacchan, his name is all over his mind and he inevitably feels how the nostalgia invades him. To fight against it, he tries to concentrate on something else.

“What happened to Seshirou’s family?” He asks in a low voice while still thinking about Katsuki.

“His wife got sick and died, his son Hitoshi was left in charge of my teacher. He raised him until he was kidnapped a couple of years ago while visiting relatives near the coast. We have not heard from him again.”

Izuku does not ask more questions fearing that the subject may be too delicate for the alpha.

“Hitoshi…” There is a pause in which Shouto takes a breath. “Histoshi was my friend. He was going to be part of my guard. After him there were only five left, and now four of them are here and the only of left is Tenya, who right now must be climbing the mountains in search of a tribe that does not care about my father.”

“He’ll be fine.”

“Do you believe it?”

Izuku does not have an honest answer, so he takes care of the jars that survived the trip. Each time he opens one, a different aroma floods the cave: Chamomile, lavender, jasmine and others accumulate to create a combination that completely hides the scent of pine.
Kamui returns that same afternoon bringing fresh food and news:

“The good news,” he says while the three sit down to eat, “Is that I was able to convince Cementoss to help me.”

“Cementoss?”

“It’s a nickname, I think it’s too dangerous that you know his name.”

“Alright.. Will he hand over the letters?”

“He knows several of the guys who work in the prison. I have given the description of all your friends so they’d try to locate them. He will also make sure to pick up the answer when it’s

“The only thing left is to wait?”

“Tomorrow early in the morning we will travel inland. I have a hiding place near on of the prisons. I’ve asked for the answer to be delivered there.”

Shouto looks at Izuku, who nods to confirm he is ready.

They get going a lot before the sun comes up. This time, they use the biggest tunnel and although it is completely dark, Kamui advances without stopping. Shouto follows behind him with his senses on alert and on guard. Izuku closes the march guiding himself with the aroma of pine and moss. They don’t carry any form of light, so it is impossible to determine the path they follow.

As they advance, the floor of the tunnel is tilted and slowly the slope is more pronounced. The last hundred meters are like climbing a small hill and when they get out they recieve the sun, high and bright, in the blue sky. The exit is a hole in the ground between a tight row of trees, away from visible path and covered with bushy branches. As soon as the three of them are out, Kamui moves, gliding through the forest with agility acquired after years of practice.

They walk with fast steps, following the tireless rhythm of the man who stops every so often to check the sky and its surroundings. It does not take long until Izuku finally sees it. The fortress rises right next to the cliff. Izuku takes a moment to inhale, he breathes in the fresh breeze full of familiar aromas, and takes the opportunity to study the immense grey mass that can be seen in the distance.

From his position, in the upper part of the valley, he can see the entire horizon as an endless green sea. In the lower level the prison has its rear covered with ravine at least twenty meters high. On the left side a flattened path is lost in the distance, entering the woods. On the other two fronts there are fields and pasture. Izuku is not familiar with war techniques, but even he can realize how difficult it will be to approach without being seen.

They follow Kamui for another time until he stops in front of an immense tree and he signals them to wait for him while he climbs with his bow on his back. His ascent is fast and agile, a sign that it is
not the first time he does it. A few minutes later he drops a rope with several knots in it. Izuku is the first to climb, he supports the feet in the knots and he propels himself using the strength of his arms. When it reaches the top the muscles of his forearm cannot stop shaking and his shoulders are tense, but at least he has managed to get up there.

Kamui beckons him to move through one of the thicker branches to an improvised surface. Izuku is surprised by what he sees: From the group the leaves pile up in such a way that they impede the entrance of sunlight, but being above the space is free of branches and forms a kind of invisible nest.

Several trunks tied with rope give shape to a firm floor and between the branches of the trees there are holes that had been dug out to serve as storage spaces. Izuku finds ropes, knives and arrows. He also sees the unmistakable niche of blankets that serve as beds. He is examining the work in the cavities of the branches when Shouto arrives with Kamui behind.

The space is too narrow for the three of us to sleep here. I will sleep in one of the neighbouring trees, and I’ll leave you the rope in case you need to go down to the bathroom, yet I’d prefer for you to stay up here until I return.

“Where are you going?”

“To hunt, we’ll need provisions while we’re here. I’ll be back before dark, do you need anything else?”

“Water.” Izuku replies.

“I have a reservation in a barrel hanging there,” He points to the place and shows them where he keeps the rest of his stuff. “We will not light a fire while we’re here, we’ll cook our dinner on the ground, away, and wait until they bring news.”

“How long are we going to wait?” Asks the alpha without holding back.

“If Cementoss is lucky, he will deliver your letter by tomorrow or before the moon changes. Then we will have to wait until they answer, if they can. At least a week, everything depends on your friends.”

Kamui leaves without adding anything else.

Living on top of trees is exciting and exhausting. Izuku does not get used to the routine of going up and down at least three times a day to go to the bathroom, and after a few days his shoulders are so numb that he cannot even raise his arms above his chest. To relieve the tension he massages them with chamomile and arnica paste, made for that sole purpose. It is not long before the tree’s nest smells completely like liniment.

One day in particular he decides to heat water to use hot compresses against the aching muscles of his back, and because he needs fire he convinces Kamui to take him to a clearing where he can light
a small bonfire. He takes advantage of this brief moment of privacy to touch up his tattoo and, once it was dry, he covered it with clean bandages. He was so completely immersed in his work that he did not notice the pair of crows that were staring at him from one of the highest branches of the forest, but as soon as he realizes he stays still, surprised to see them there. What catches his attention is the fur -or a brilliant black color-, the size -for they were bigger than any other raven he has ever seen before-, but mainly it was the fact that they were both looking at him, their attention almost human.

As soon as Izuku straightens up to study them more thoroughly, one of them takes flight, losing itself among the trees, immediately afterwards the other falls to the ground, pierced by an arrow with a red plume. Izuku turns to find Kamui with a tense boy while studying with frantic abandon each branch and each tree.

“Was there more of them?” His question is violent and full of agitation.

“What?”

“Was there more of them?” He lowers his bow and clings tightly to the boy’s arm. “Was there another raven?!”

“Ah! It hurts!”

“Answer me!”

“Yes! There was another one, it flew away before you arrived.”

Kamui curses and presses his fist against his forehead.

“What’s wrong?” Izuku asks without understanding.

“Gather your things, we have to go.”

Although he is unable to understand his turmoil, Izuku obeys. He dresses hastily and jogs behind the other until he returns to the nest of the tree.

“What’s wrong?” Shouto asks as soon as he sees them arrive.

“We have to go,” Kamui murmurs, stuffing food and weapons into a folded bag.

“What?! Why?” Shouto looks at Izuku but he shakes his head unable to offer an answer to any of his questions.

“One of Kurogiri’s spies saw us.” Kamui replies without abandoning his work, “As soon as it informs their master, they’ll send soldiers to look for us.”

“We cannot leave now, we have to wait for the answer!”

“If we stay here they will come for us!”

“We still have time.”

Before Kamui says anything, a thunderous voice makes an appearance.

“Eh, old tree, I have your answer.”

The three look at each other without saying a word and Shouto makes the first move, he directly prepares the rope and descends without waiting for Kamui, who comes down just after him. Izuku
goes down at the end and by the time he reaches the ground he finds that both are still arguing in front of who he supposes is Cementoss.

The man is immense, with immense arms of grey color, thick and short legs, and a square head. Unlike Kamui, which has a skin similar to the bark of a tree, it seems to be a living rock. His complexion looks hard and firm and the way he moves, no doubt his body is completely solid. Izuku cannot imagine what it would feel like to be hit by a fist of that magnitude.

“Hello,” Izuku mutters, completely fascinated.

The man nicknamed Cementoss turns to him and gives him a kind expression. A gesture that clashes with his strong and sharp appearance.

“Does your king now send kids to do his work?” The big man asks in his baritone voice.

Izuku smiles at him, “Someone has to do it.”

He extends his hand and the man hands him a piece of folded paper. As soon as he has it Izuku unfolds it and is surprised to see a studded list. Barrels of oil, sacks of flour, baskets with vegetables. The sheet is covered with ink stains and endless rows of unknown pieces. Out of curiosity he turns around and finds another list on the back, although in the end, in the only place available, there are a lot of tiny symbols in blue. The lyrics are clear, although the strokes are not firm as if the author did not have a suitable pen to write them.

Izuku does not understand a single word, so he extends it to Shouto who turns around, confused.

“Why just one answer?” He asks with a tense voice, “I sent four messages, I expected four response letters.”

Cementoss shrugs.

“As far as I know one of them is dead, two have been put on the transfer list. They will be taken to the citadel at the end of this month, perhaps earlier, it will be impossible to approach them since they are under strict surveillance. The only one that continues with the common population is the only one whom your message was delivered to.”

“Dead?” Repeats the alpha with a pale face. “Who?”

“I don’t know names, the letter is the only thing I have for you.”

The alpha clenches his teeth and focuses his attention on the row of tiny symbols. Izuku assumes that he does know the code to decipher the message. As he reads, his face pales and his eyes open in horror.

“This can’t be.”

Izuku can smell the confusion, anxiety and terror emanating for the alpha in black waves.

“What’s wrong?” He asks, trying to control his own anxiety. “What does it say?”

Shouto turns to him, his expression is pure despair.

“They are matching them,” He says in a weak voice, and as soon as he hears him, Izuku’s fear curls up inside him like a flock of bats ready to flee in any direction. “They are forcing them to mate.”

Izuku’s fear is released from his cage and flows from him like a runaway river. All the muscles of his
abdomen contract, his knees tremble, his fingers in his hands cool like blocks of ice. His whole body emits a silent cry of repulsion and terror. Such is his horror that for a tiny fraction of a second he is grateful that Katsuki is not there to suffer that fate.

Immediately afterwards he repents, but as he imagines Kacchan in one of those prisons his heart shrinks in horror.

There is no way to go back now, and Izuku does not plan to leave his people there.

Chapter End Notes

Edit 11/03: When I first came to read the original Spanish version of this story chapter 8 had been just been recently updated! I had downloaded it because I was about to have a flight and wanted some entertainment for the long 10-hour trip... Sadly, only chapter 1 got downloaded so I spent 8 hours dreaming about this fic and thinking about it because I fell in love!!

(Can you imagine my joy after the trip when I was able to binge read all the other chapters??)

So, anyways, at that moment I did NOT expects that'd I'd fall so deep that I'd want to share this with everyone else, and I'm still so glad that Roquel accepted my request to translate her beautiful fic~ And now, 8 weeks after starting this project, I still can believe I'm doing this and you guys are enjoying it! So thank you soo much everyone who's left their love and support for both of us, because even if you don't know, Roquel is also so very overjoyed with the amount of love her story was able to receive from all of you!

So, THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING! <3

*cough* Next chapter is one of my favorites *cough*

Next chapter on March 17th.

"Mint and Spices"
Everyone has their own aroma, an aroma that differentiates them from the rest. It is like a fingerprint, and none are alike.

There is no way to convince Kamui to stay another day in his nest-shaped shelter.

“Kurogiri will know about you both today,” He explains with his voice full of anxiety as he packs his belongings in a hurry. “He will send hunters after our trail. The longer we stay, the more likely we are going to be found. I have to take you back to the coast.”

“No!” The cry comes out from two different throats, but the emotion is the same and together they endow to a simple word charged in a tone of authority.

Izuku and Shouto speak at the same time: “We can’t leave/We’ll not resign. We have to help/It’s my responsibility.” They vomit words without stopping, both with expressions equally anxious, pale and terrified. It is seeing them full of dread that makes Kamui’s panic to subside.

“Okay, okay! ENOUGH!!” Both stop and watch him, panting. “We can’t stay here, it’s too dangerous... But we will not go to the coast!” He adds when they open their mouths at the same time to keep protesting. “We won’t go to the coast, but we have to get out of here.”

“We cannot give up now.” Shouto repeats and Kamui huffs.

“I heard you... but I need you to understand. We have to go. Now.”

“But—“

“We’ll talk about what to do when we get as far as possible from this place.”

Kamui finishes packing his bag, takes his bow and slides down the rope until he’s out of sight; they have no choice but to obey him and by the time they come down they only have time to say goodbye to Cementoss before Kamui pushes them into another direction.

They move as fast as they can, avoiding roads and open fields, following semicircles and turns without meaning. They walk until they return to the waterfall, only this time they are at the top. The moon has lost its round shape but it still provides enough light to illuminate the path. The cold wind shakes the tops of the trees and the water travels with such rapidity that the sound echoes in the night even when the river is indistinguishable in the darkness. With the help of Kamui they managed to climb down the stone wall, they advance fifty meters before being forced to submerge in the river to wash themselves. They leave on the other shore and rub their bodies with pine leaves to hide their aromas. Then, they return on their steps, with their feet submerged into the water to leave no trace and enter the tunnel once again.

Izuku does not stop shaking as he tears of his shirt and wraps himself in the first dry blanket he finds.
Shouto comes behind him and imitates him with his fingers, numbed by the cold. To the surprise of both, Kamui does not show signs of discomfort before the small drops of water dance on his skin.

“I’ll erase any traces in the other entrances,” Kamui explains, leaving his things in a corner. “There’s some dry clothes on the shelf there, and more blankets in case you want to dry yourselves. I’ll be back before dawn, then we’ll talk calmly.”

He leaves without paying any attention to Shouto’s yell of protest. The alpha follows him with the blanket over his shoulders and Izuku takes the opportunity to undress and change clothes. He puts his bandages away to dry and wraps his hips with his spare bandages in his bag. Because he does not have a change of clothes he has to take a camisole and a pair of pants from Kamui, which are gigantic since the man is more than a head over him. Once dry, he dedicates to create a nest of blankets in which he sets to rest. He still feels his shoulders cramped and his legs beaten, he’s so tired he cannot stop blinking, but he knows he cannot sleep, because Shouto’s words do not stop repeating incessantly inside his head: They force them to mate.

He feels disgusted at the idea… disgusted and scared, because that could have been his destiny.

It will still be if they catch them and discover that he is an omega. Izuku sighs and rubs his stomach that does not stop stirring at the thought. For the first time, he is grateful that his ship sunk.

Shouto loses Kamui in the tunnels. He curses loudly and after a moment of indecision he traces his steps. He finds Izuku in the middle of a pile of clean blankets. It is just seeing his tired face that makes his feel guilty for his anguished expression. He thinks about the letter and for the first time he regrets taking him with him.

“What does the letter say?” The boy’s voice is tenuous, just a tiny sound that reveals his physical and emotional exhaustion. Shouto sees him scratching his leg where the paint of his fake flower has begun to come and he notices the knot at the base of his stomach.

To calm himself down he turns around and changes his clothes without looking at Izuku. When he finishes he removes the letter he had stored in the holster of his knife with the intention of keeping it safe from the moisture. He takes a breath and reads it out loud, and while doing so, he cannot help but remember the redhead’s voice, with his passionate and powerful tone.

Ejirou’s answer is just like him, effervescent and full of ideas. The small symbols are squeezed together in an attempt to use as little space as possible. His natural vibe pulsed in every written word and it was obvious that he had strived to be as concise as possible.

“I’m Ejirou, and I don’t know anything about the others. They lock us in individual cages under the ground. The alpha in the cell next to mine has been here longer than the rest, and it is him who provided me with information. He didn’t want to tell me his name, and it is kind of a custom here. I’ll call him Red because of the color of the flower in his chest. With his help, and one of the omegas from here, I was able to write this letter to you. I don’t know if the rest will be as lucky as myself, so I’ll try to answer all the questions in your note. The food is passable but lean. We work in the mines
almost all day long. They control us using an incense that releases artificial pheromones and it imitates the scent of a pregnant omega. The incense calms us, induces us into a state of absolute obedience; I have no memories of what I do in that state and no control over my body. We work without protest and it is impossible to resist it. Red says that many don’t survive the first administration, that it provokes attacks that lead to death He knows there is no way to counteract the increase, although he uses mint leaves to attenuate the aroma. They work for a short time, but in the end his conscience fades. The rest had tried to imitate him, and even I had tried it once, but it didn’t work. I don’t know why. The omega sleep in another room underground. They are forbidden to talk to us, unless they are taken with us to the dark room. It is there were they force is to mate. They had tried with me. They force the omega to take care of us and then they force us to be intimate. If the pairing is successful, the couples are taken away. Nobody seems to know where. Escape is also impossible. Red has tried, without success. He knows every guard, all the routines, the passages that we travel every day and he knows the path that takes us to the surface, but the exit is a fenced field with continuous vigilance.

I know that in your letter you confirm that you will make sure to get me out of here, even if it’s just me, but I ask you not to do it. Don’t ask me to abandon them. I can’t turn my back to them. If the king does not plan to release the prisons, then we need help so that everyone escapes safely.”

Shouto finishes reading the letter; he keeps silent while thinking about the dead word. Hanta? Rikidou? Tetsutestu? Who of them succumbed to the incense?

“That’s why the kidnap the young ones.”

The declaration tears him out of his tormented thoughts. He turns to the omega who sports a frown and furrows his lips, muttering to himself.

“If they were adults it would have been possible for them to be already paired, and it is easier to force them to join than to go hunt an adult with their partner, but what is the end… Well, an alpha will not go anywhere without their omega. They can’t run away without them. The omegas would not be able to leave them behind either, so maybe it’s a form of control over them, a more permanent solution and less problematic that with the incense… The incense… It smells like an omega, but even if it were a real omega it shouldn’t be able to subdue them in that way. It’s artificial, but how were they able to create it? What is the foundation? What scope it has, what’s its duration, what are the long-term consequences…”

“Consequences?”

Izuku is startled at the question and raises his eyes to look at him. His expression is empty and Shouto understands that he is not actually talking with him, they bow was simply muttering to himself, too absorbed in his own thoughts to realize that he was speaking out loud. He repeats the question, hoping to get an answer out of him.

The omega blinks and answers him.

“It’s possible that there might me long-term consequences. There are plants that cause addiction and when they stop taking them in they could cause depression, fatigue, anxiety, irritability and sometimes death. I don’t know what ingredients were used, but if it’s homemade is most likely that it would had eventually created an abstinence if the supply is cut off abruptly.”

“And why can’t some stand it?”

“For the same reason that some can identify the heat of an omega before it occurs. They have an instinct capable of capturing subtle variations in scents, such as some beta healers that train
themselves to recognize diseases based on the aroma the patient emits.” He keeps silent for a moment before pinching his lip with force, “Aromas,” He repeats the word, “That would also explain why it is such an effective weapon.” He keeps silent once again while he keeps pinching his lip. Shouto does not speak and gives him space to order his train of thoughts. “Yeah, it makes sense. Incense imitates an aroma that any alpha associates with safety and well-being, any youngster would find it irresistible, not to mention that adolescents are more susceptible to being overwhelmed by the pheromones of an omega.”

“Does it mean that it won’t work with an adult?”

“And adult has more control over their impulses, but it is impossible to remain impassive in such a situation. In a battle, it could prove fatal.”

“And what is the advantage that Red has with the rest, why does mint work with him? Is it the mint or is he actually more tolerant to the incense?”

It could be tolerance, or maybe the mint is the scent of one of his parents, a familiar aroma; it keeps him awake, although it does not seem that the effect lasts much… If we manage to enhance that aroma, maybe the time that he gets to resist its effect would increase. That could give him the opportunity to fight… The ideal would be to find a fragrance that works with everyone, but we have neither the time nor the means.” He emits a thoughtful mmmmm and while leaving his lip in peace, he begins to bite his thumb in anxiety. “We can suggest for them to search any type of substitute for themselves. Yeah… we could send them some vials with specific essences. Flowers, plants, fruits… we could suggest for them to look among those aromas that they find familiar.”

“Will it be enough?”

“If it works with mint it has to work with some other plant, you just have to look for the right one. They also have to think of a way to counteract it for everyone, that way it could be used in battle.”

Shouto nods, “Do you have lotions we could send?”

“Some, but they will all last as much as a month before they begin to rot and expire. The best would be to use fresh essences, and I would like to prepare a version of pure mint. I know several maceration techniques, I can have some ready in two days, three at most.”

“Well… when Kamui comes back we’ll discuss it with him. For now, get ready to sleep. You need to rest.”

Izuku stops biting his finger and looks at him as if he were crazy. “I don’t think — “

“It’s an order. We have to rest. Tomorrow will be a difficult day.”

Shouto gets armed with patience in case he faces protests, but he remains still and in the end menages to make him give in. He listens to him stir among his blankets, listens to him murmur lowly, and he realizes he paid too much attention to him when he notices the exact moment his breathing rhythm changes and the scent of uncertainty and fear disperse, leaving only the mint fresh in the air. Instead of enjoying it, Shouto does not stop tormenting himself, trying to guess who among his friends has departed from this world.
Nightmares chase Izuku throughout the night. He dreams of Katsuki drowning in the abyss and immediately afterwards he imagines him in a dark cell, dying of hunger. He wakes up with his heart beating wildly, nausea rising up his throat, threatening to expel all the food from the last few days.

*Don’t be a wimp.*

He takes a breath and with his eyes closed he cites to himself the same litany he always repeats every time he needs to control himself.

“To help with scarring, pain and to reduce the inflammation, we can use lavender, flaxseed, chamomile, arnica, calendula, echinacea and green tea. Boiled or in the form of oil they are applied to the wounds…”

He tries to remember the aroma of each of those plants. He describes the shape of their leaves and the places where they tend to grow. By the end of it the rhythm of his heart had returned to normal and his anguish was under control. When he gets up he finds Shouto asleep with his arms crossed and his head on his chest, so as to not wake him up he moves carefully, he collects his dry clothes and moves away towards the dark tunnel to change.

When he returns he sits down to touch up the fake flower on his leg. He tries very carefully to erase the rivers of ink that distort his drawing and then he wraps the image in a tight bandage, leaving visible a few stems on the top. He was finishing his work when Kamui returns from the largest tunnel.

“Good morning,” Izuku greets him as Shouto wakes up when he hears him. “Did you have any problems?”

“No,” Replies the man dropping to the ground with the expression of someone who is exhausted as much as possible. “I’ve cleaned up all the traces in all the tunnels, blocked the visible entrances and sent a message to Snipe to inform him of the situation.”

“Who’s Snipe?”

“A hermit that breeds and trains messenger birds. He lives in the mountains and he’s the one who receives the messages from Aizawa. How else could they have found me if I spend my life hiding from hunters who are sent for me? I asked Snipe to send a rescue message for you. It will take time to arrive, but I’m confident that I will be able to take you to the border before it’s too late. You’ll have to wait for their ship on the desert coast.”

“We’re not going to leave,” Shouto replies firmly while Izuku is silent.

“I don’t understand how you want me to explain it to you, staying here is a bad idea. Right now you may not be at risk, but in a couple of days this area will be full of hunters and spies. Even I will have to leave. I plan to climb and hide in the mountains. I’ve done it before and I’ve never had problems. In a few months. When things have calmed down, I’ll be back.”

“No, you dare the one who doesn’t understand. The original plan was to free the prisoners and wait for our people. If there was no delay, they will arrive at any time.”

“Who will arrive?”
“Yuuei’s army. Todoroki-ou has decided to send his navy against Hosu. Two ships of the fleet left earlier because there was an alert of the slavers near the coast, one of those ships was the one that brought us. The rest had been planned to set to sail later. It is likely that in a couple of days your sails will be drawn on the horizon.”

Kamui looked at him in astonishment. It took him a moment to recover and when he did he got up with anger shining in his eyes.

“Are you telling me that the king of Yuuei has planned to invade us?!”

“It’s not an invasion. He plans to destroy the docks and the fleet of ships. If possible, destroy the fortresses near the coast.”

“And do you think your king will settle for that?! Dammit! That will unleash the war!”

“The war has been taking place for years.”

“No! Our common enemy was supposed to be the General! It was him we had to beat! But now… now they are all enemies! Even those who helped! The people who risked their lives for you!”

“No, and I can give you my word. I’ll not let what you have done be forgotten. I won’t let your efforts or that of any of your friends be underestimated.”

“You won’t let it?! What can you do?!”

“I can convince my father to offer immunity to anyone who fights for our cause.”

“….your father?”

“My name is Shouto Todoroki, and I am the third son of the king. If you help us I will make sure to do everything possible to return the favor.”

Kamui stepped back, too surprised with the revelation. “You are the king’s son?”

“I understand that staying here is too dangerous, but we only need a couple of days. Three at most. We have an idea that we want to test.” He side glances at Izuku, who silently agrees. “We would like to talk to the person who delivered the first message, we want him to deliver something else. Then we’ll leave. By then Yuuei’s ships will be here, we’ll go meet the first unit that disembarks and you can put your people on notice.”

The silence stretches across the cave like a fragile veil. Finally, Kamui sighs defeated.

“Very well…”

[...]

The same guard — Eijirou supposes that he is the same, although he is not completely sure — that delivered the first note was the same one that was presented a few days later to take the answer.
From then on every time a guard enters, Eijirou straightens up, waiting for a signal.

Each day his impatience grows, but what arrives is not a letter, but a change none of them expects.

It starts like another day, the only difference is that the omegas don’t arrive with the breakfast. The time passes slowly until it is time to go to work, but the guards do not show up to comply with the routine. Eijirou exchanges a look with the blond, but both refrain from commenting.

The guards appear a few hours later, but instead of carrying food or sticking to the transfer routines they light the incense and fan the smoke until it completely covers the dungeon. Eijirou curses in a low voice and tries to fight against him, but it is useless and the next time he wakes up he is not in his cage.

[...]

The empty pastries generate murmurs among the omega companions, but Denki is too stresses worrying over the ink and paper to actively participate in the gossip of others. Whenever he comes across a guard he is afraid of being arrested and taken to the dark cells. He does not stop remembering Nubia’s hands.

Denki is forced to focus on the present when the changes begin to happen one after the other without warning of any kind. After the empty pantries and the prolongation of Ochako’s group stay in the cells, the next change is when the guards skip the day off from Yui’s group, none of them enjoying their afternoon in the sun as dictated by custom. Then they jump to Ochako’s group. Two days later they gather everyone in the kitchens to prepare bags with food, fill them with fruits, breads, meats, vegetables and everything left in the pastries. That day, nobody attends the orchards and the clothes remain unwashed. The rugs are also not take out in the sun and nobody goes to feed the alphas.

Everyone exchanges panicked looks when the guards forbid them to eat and separate them into small groups. Denki sees Ochako in the same group as Yui while they are being taken away by the guards, each of them carrying some sacks of food.

[...]

Ochako’s legs tremble as she walks behind the guard. She clutches the bundles so tightly between her arms that her knuckles turn white. She tries to control her breathing, but every time she inhales, she feels her body tremble. Her stomach is contracting and her heart is throbbing inside her chest like a drum without rhythm. Her anxiety triggers when her group begins to descend the steps to the dark cells.
Not again, not again. She does not feel capable of recreating the same lie again, not now at least. She needed time. She wanted time to calm down, to make peace with herself.

The guard takes her arm and pushes her towards the cell with the open door. She stumbles and the sacks fall between her hands while the echo of the closing doors reverberates throughout the cell.

“Who’s there?”

Ochako is startled to hear the voice. It is full of rich, energetic nuances, with a silky and firm tone. It is the voice of a suspicious alpha.

“Me,” she replies, unable to maintain her integrity.

“And the light?”

“They didn’t give me any light.”

“What? Why?”

“I don’t know,” her voice trembles as she speaks. “My shift ended a few days ago, I’m not supposed to be...”

The word is broken before it finishes. Ochako swallows the rest along with the crying that threatens to explode. Then, they hear the guard on the other side of the door. His voice is powerful and petulant, no doubt addressing all those who are on that floor.

“This is your last chance to join the General. The food you have there is the only one you’ll receive and you’ll also receive a single bucket of water, so don’t waste it. If you mate, you’ll be transferred to the main citadel, there you will have a new life and a new home. If you refuse, you’ll be abandoned and left to die of hunger in this cell. Make your decision and live with it.”

[...]

When Katsuki comes back to himself, all the cells in the dungeon are empty, except for his and the cell on parallel to his. The incense smoke has dispersed but its effects still run in his body. He took note of his heavy head and dry throat, so he leaned over to his water bucket and drank until he felt full, then he washed his face and body to eliminate the smoke aroma that still lingered on his body. He finishes wetting his hair when the guards come back.

They are three and they wear their black uniforms with their hoods covering their faces. One of them stops between the two cells, watches for a moment the still unconscious alpha then turns around to face him. Katsuki stood up and his posture indicated that he was ready to fight if the door of his cage opens. The guards seem to read his intentions because they sigh and point to the sleeping alpha.

“It’d be better if we moved that one.”

“Won’t we move the other one?” Asks another guard.
“The incense lost its effect on him and I don’t want to bring it back. I want to finish this already because I’m starving, it’s been an endless day. Besides, all the lower cells are full and the captain told us that if they were left over we could put them in separate dungeons. He can stay here, they’ll bring him company, let them be the ones to deal with him. We still have three dungeons left to clean.

Katsuki stays alert while the two guards load the other alpha and the third delays a bit, placing a new torch. As soon as they disappear he tries to force the lock on his cage, but there is not much he can do without tools of any kind.

To calm his hunger he drinks more water and when the bell rings at a time when they usually have him working in the mines, Katsuki does not waste time and starts filling his bucket, then bends to wash his face, moisten his hair and satiate himself, his stomachs hurts before the water stops running. Now, he has no choice but to sit and wait.

[...]

Denki is part of the last group. He’s the only boy between seven girls, and it is up to them to fill bucket after bucket with water. It is him who has to offer to work with the hand pump handle that is hard and grinds every time is goes up and down. When one bucket fills up another one replaces it and Denki sees his partners come out carrying buckets with both of their hands, trying not to spill anything.

With the guards next to them, none dares to say anything, but they all look at each other with the same disturbed and terrified expression that comes and goes while carrying water. Although Denki begins to feel cramps in his back, he continues to be driven by fear, until the guard tells him to stop. Once everyone is together the man beckons them to raise the rest of the sacks. Denki takes three, but gives one to the omega that cries in front of him. Then they line up to follow the guards. On each stair one of the guards descends dragging an omega, the rest continues down the aisle without stopping, accompanied by the soft weeping of their companions. The only time Denki dares to look back he receives a punch that makes him stagger. The omega that goes next to him reaches and holds him so that he does not fall Denki nods in her direction, hugs his two sacks of food and walks with his head throbbing.

One by one his companions disappear until inly he is left. The guard in front holds his arm and drags him down the stairs of one of the dungeons, which he immediately identifies and the dungeon of the redhead alpha. To his surprise, all the guards which are going down with him stop in front of the only occupied cell

There, waiting with a fierce expression of a dangerous beast, is the only alpha with which Denki would prefer not to have to live with.

“Turn around,” the guard says as he wields a knife in his free hand.

The alpha does not show intentions of wanting to obey. He stands with his legs slightly apart, his arms bent and his back taut. From it emanates a red and terrible scent, his anger flowing in heavy waves of warning. Denki writhes on the guard’s arms trying to escape, that’s the scent of an alpha
and he wants to hide under a bed. The guards cannot smell it, but they understand the threat. So they
are placed in a semicircle around the entrance while Denki and the guard that holds him stay in front
of the door.

“We can do this by hook or by crook,” says the guard raising his knife to point to the alpha. “You
can turn around, put your hands against the wall and stay there while we open the door, or you can
try a fool move to escape and I’ll cut the throat to this useless guy I have here and among the six
we’ll take care of you. Maybe you’re strong, maybe you can think you’ll defeat us, but the truth is
that it’s enough five of us to waste your time while the other lights the incense. And I can promise
you that when the effect passes my friends and I will charge you for this absurd delay, so....?”

The guard leaves the question floating, but he brings the tip of his knife closer to Denki’s neck and
the boy feels the edge pierce his skin. He cannot stop his eyes from flying into the face of the alpha
and maybe it is because they know each other, maybe it is because his expression is screaming for
help, maybe it is because of his black scent full of fear and uncertainty, maybe he is grateful that he
brought him the mint during all those months, but whatever the reason is the alpha growls, turns
around and leans his hands on the wall with his head bowed.

The guards does not waste time, opens the gate and pushes Denki inside. The door closes behind
him with a thud and at that moment the alpha turns. His anger is so sharp that Denki moves away
from the entrance and sticks against the bars on one of the sides, wanting to merge with them.

“They’re wasting their time,” growls the alpha, stretching himself to his full height. “I’m not going to
participate in their game.”

“As you wish, but this is the last opportunity to serve the General. The food he’s carrying,” the guard
points out and Denki tightens the bags against him, “Is the last one you’ll get. If you mate you’ll be
transferred to the main citadel, you will have a new home and will be free. If you insist on you
foolishness you’ll die of hunger in this cell. We will be back in a few days to hear your decision.”

The guards leave and Denki’s legs finally fail. He slides until he is sitting on the floor, the guard’s
words are repeated in his head and he begins to realize the implications. I’m going to die here,
if there were tears left, he would cry, but inside him there is only an emptiness full of despair.

Because Izuku needs fire for his maceration, Kamui allows him to go out to the waterfall area from
where he can light a fire without fear of the smoke dispersing throughout the cave. Shouto goes with
him to offer protection and Kamui leaves to look for Cementoss’ messenger.

“What do you need?” Shouto asks as he carries the pots and bowls that Kamui packed before
leaving.

“I had planned to make twenty vials of perfume, but with the time we have, I’d prefer to do five.
Seven as much. Roses, jasmines, chamomile, strawberries, berries and some others. They are very
common aromas and it is likely that some will work. I’m also going to prepare the mint mash.
“What do I do?”

“We need ingredients. Kamui gave me the strawberries and some oil that he had in his pantry, but we’ll have to find what it takes.”

They separate, each one with a list of six articles and when they meet again it’s almost night. They rat in silence and in a hurry, surrounded by the ingredients they managed to gather: Chamomile, lavender for the lack of jasmines, mint and strawberries, despite the intense search they could not find roses or berries. Izuku would like to take another day to look for more ingredients, but there is no time to waste. That night, before going to sleep, he puts the flowers and plants to soak in different bowls. Flowers in oil and plants in water, then he stores everything and goes back to sleep in the cave.

Izuku lies down in his nest of makeshift blankets and tries to relax enough to sleep, but his brain keeps turning the incense around.

*It serves to control an alpha, and the omega? Does it work with them? ...Tokoyami would have told me about the incense if he had known, but he thought it was like a tranquilizer. In a certain way it is, but as described in the letter, not only does it controls them without leaving memories of what happened during that time, but it also forces them to obey without the ability to protest. If the goal is for them to mate and become couples, why not put them together, use the incense and give the order? ...If the incense worked with the omegas, there wouldn’t be an opportunity to avoid it, but the letter implies that they have control over their actions, they can rebel like the one who helped with the letter... Well, the incense does not work with an omega, but even so they could force an alpha to force the mating process - they could order them and no omega would have the strength to fight an alpha even in those conditions, so why don’t they do it? Does the incense not work if there is an omega nearby?...*

The thought was so shocking that Izuku needed to get up. He took note of his heart beatings inside his chest and his hands could not stop shaking while clutching the blanket.

...let’s suppose it does not work when there is an omega nearby, that would explain why they maintain strict control over them... Let’s see, the incense is homemade, it is a prefabricated aroma that can cause death and that clouds the fighting and survival capacities of an alpha, but it’s artificial... It’s like tasting strawberry syrup, it’s not a strawberry, it will smell the same and maybe taste the same, but it’s not the same... If we manage to do the test, an omega against incense, that could be the path to find a way to counteract its effects... mmmm... But the omegas live in separate areas, and nothing seems to indicate that they are present during the administration of the incense... How else could it get an alpha to have omega pheromones at hand?

Izuku does not sleep trying to answer the question, when he notices that the sky is clearing he stands up with a mind full of ideas and plans. While Shouto lights the fire, Izuku uses one of the bowls to start crushing the strawberries, when the fruit is completely discarded he adds water, a little bit of sugar and puts it in one of the smaller pots to boil. Then, he concentrates on the plants. A handful of mint leaves are put in another bowl where Izuku crushes them until they are almost dust, he waters it and leaves it soaking all night where he stirs them a bit with a spoon. He uses a piece of clothing to strain the mixture, crush a little more and repeat the operation until the liquid acquires a green tone. He lets it rest with a few mint leaves that remained intact and wraps the bowl with a leather cloth so that it is close to the fire without actually touching it.

The leaves of lavender and chamomile are treated the same was as the mint, only in this case they have been macerated in oil and Izuku is very careful not to waste a single drop.

“It’ll be necessary to repeat the procedure in a while,” he tells Shouto who is watching over the pot
where the mixture of strawberries and sugar boils slowly. “Be careful not to burn it, when you see that the water almost evaporates, set it aside and let it rest.”

“Where are you going?”

“I have an idea for the last lotion, but I need butter or wax. I’m going to look through Kamui’s things to see if I find those items.”

He had to check all the shelves, vases and boxes in the cave. He found what he was looking for in a pot next to a sack of rice. Building up his courage Izuku strips naked — he takes off his bandages, replaces them with the spare one he had and after redressing he proceeds to cover each piece of his used bandage with butter. He rolls it, trying not to move it too much and places it on a bowl with a cover. He returns to Shouto and when he asks him about the lotion, he explains his theory.

“...so I want to make a fragrance that has omega pheromones. It will not be completely effective, but if one of them gets familiar with it, they can use it to counteract the effects of the incense. Although I would like that in the note you are going to send if you could explain if they could possibly try it on an omega to see the results.”

“How do you plan to do it?”

“With butter. It’s a technique that my father used with delicate flowers. I don’t know if I can remember the exact procedure, but at least I have to try it.”

Shouto nods and after eating, Izuku returns to macerate more strawberries and the rest of his plants. That night, he falls asleep as soon as he puts his head on the bed, but he wakes up before the sun comes out and he is ready to test his theory. At the end, they gather all their fragrances in small vials that they seal with a cork tap which they bath in wax to avoid leaks.

Izuku passes him the last bottle with the transparent liquid from his experiment. Shouto brings it to his nose and inhales. The aroma is subdued, discreet, although it undoubtedly possesses an unexpected delicacy. The mint is unmistakable, there are other variations behind it, variations that Shouto cannot identify, but the whole is undoubtedly charming.

“It smells like you,” he says as he puts the cork tap back in the jar.

“Really? ...hm, I expected it to be more of a neutral scent. Do you identify any omega pheromones?”

“No really, but… I don’t know, it’s different.”

“Different to that of a plant? Could you guess it’s from a person?”

“One person maybe… but that’s because I already became familiar with your scent.”

“For real?”

“Since you changed, you haven’t returned to you plant lotion, so you have smelled like mint for two days. I’ve became familiar with it. I don’t know if I would be able to identify who it is from if I didn’t knew you.”

“Well… we’ll just have to do the test. Even if it does not work, the other four will work, and now we at least have a plan to start with.”

Shouto nods and tilts the candle to let the wax cover the cork. Afterwards they clean all the materials and eat lunch in silence. They are finishing collecting when they see Kamui appear among the trees.
on the other side of the river. Izuku’s smile fades when he sees he is not alone.

The person who accompanies him is smaller than Kamui, has pale pink skin, hair in the same color, two yellow horns, black eyes with bright gold pupils — but the most unusual thing among them all is the immense smile that is dedicated to them when they are in front of each other and Kamui is presenting them.

“They are Shouto and Izuku, the people I’ve talked to you about, she’s — “

“Mina Ashido!”

“No! I told you we were going to use code names!”

“Yeah, and I also remember Cementoss code name, and by the devil’s tail! I don’t want to become a victim of your terrible imagination.”

“Mina!”

“Don’t yell at me, it’s the truth. Mashirao agrees with me.”

“Did you tell Ojiro you were going to come with me?”

“I couldn’t hide it from him.”

“Mina! It was supposed to be a secret.”

“He knows how to keep secrets, but hey, let’s see, are you friends with the redhead who bears his lis flower on his chest?”

“Do you know him?” Shouto jumps as soon as he hears her.

“We haven’t introduced ourselves, but I have seen him. He received his note and I went to pick up his answer, what do you want me to send now?”

Shouto holds out the small leather bag, and when she opens it the girl finds five bottles, a folded note and a knife.

“No knives,” she says as she hands it to him. “I can’t take it. The jars are harmless, but the captain has strict control over our weapons. If they finds it they’ll ask questions and I don’t want to get into trouble.”

“They need to defend themselves.”

“Well, he’ll have to figure it out on his own. No weapons.”

“Alright, when will you be delivering it?”

“Tomorrow. The prison has been closed, the only ones left inside are the high ranking soldiers. The rest of us were sent home and we’re supposed to show up tomorrow.”

“Why?”

“If only I knew it, they never tell us anything.”

“You’ll any type of problems while delivering the jars?”
“No, but you must know it’s likely that they’ll have to go down again to the basement. If that happens, you will have to wait about three weeks until. If something happens you’ll have to wait about three weeks until I can give it to them.

“Three weeks?”

“It’s the time it usually takes for them to return them back to the cages.”

The commotion left Shouto speechless and Izuku took the opportunity to intervene.

“Maybe you could give them to Red.”

Shouto looks at him, “Do you think they are trustworthy enough?”

“Surely they are aware of the situation, you can’t lose anything without trying.”

“Okay,” he turns around to the girl who has stored the package inside her bag. “If you can’t give it to my friend, there is another of ours in the cell next to his, as far as I know he has tried escaping once. He has a red flower in his chest, do you know who I’m talking about?”

The girl stays silent with her eyes turned to the sky.

“Yeah, I think so.” She smiles. “But you have to know that he hates us and that he may not accept anything that comes from me.”

“We’ll risk it, just tell him who sent you.”

“As you wish.”

She leaves after saying goodbye to both of them, and as soon as she disappears, Izuku sighs.

“Well,” says Kamui, staring at them, “It’s time we head back to the coast.”

[...]

Despite rationing it, the food ends. Katsuki breaks the last piece of hard bread into two equal pieces. He extends one of them to the blond who, sitting in the corner, hugs his knees and is covered with the only blanket they have. The darkness is almost total and since no one has changed the torches they ended up going out. The weak glow of the corridor lamps slip down the stairs, but the luminosity is not enough because it still does not reach the cage where they are.

It is difficult to measure the time enclosed without sunlight. The only way to distinguish one day from another is by the routine of going down to the mines and work, but without that it is impossible to determine the time they have been there. So far no guard has taken them down, no alpha has been returned, and no one has bothered to clean the waste bin. The whole dungeon smelled of them, piss, shit, impatience and frustration.

As the hours passed by, Katsuki found it increasingly difficult to concentrate. It is the first time he
has spent so much without having inhaled the incense, because even in the dark cells they would use it from time to time to keep him calm, and the curious thing is that instead of feeling clean and clear, he feels dazed and slow. If he forced his head to focus migraines do not leave him alone. And the worst thing is that he begins to notice the orange aroma that comes from the omega sitting in a corner.

It smelled delicious, like fresh juice full of acid pulp.

His stomach roars at the thought, yet Katsuki shakes his head and growls. He wants to fall asleep, but he has been suffering from insomnia for two days, he thinks. He squeezes his eyes when the edges of his vision begin to cloud. He stirs, uncomfortable and with tense and impatient muscles. He is accustomed to confinement and hunger, he does not understand where the sudden anxiety crawls through his body, preventing him from thinking. His mouth is dry even though he drinks regularly, his body suffers from unexplainable fatigue, and his attention jumps from one memory to another without order or coherence.

His suspicion that the food is poisoned collapses when the omega does not show signs of discomfort. The boy just sat there, his head resting on his knees, while tracing incomprehensible patterns on the floor. Katsuki’s eyes, already accustomed to the darkness, manages to identify shapes and silhouettes, he can see the omega’s fingers move on the ground, although he cannot distinguish what he is writing. Impatience rubs his nose, wanting to evoke the mint aroma, but in this state it is useless. He takes note how the anger grows inside him, ready to explode at the first opportunity.

It is then when the guard arrives.

They slide down the stairs like a furtive shadow and stops next to his cell. They kneel in front of his door and use both hands so that the small bag they carry can pass through the bars.

“There is food inside and a gift from your friends from the outside,” the shadow wears the guard’s suit along with the mask that covers their entire face, but there’s no doubt that the voice is feminine.

“Why are you bringing this to me?”

“I originally had to take it to your neighbour, but I have no idea where he is. Finding him could take me hours and that is not an option. His friends have told me that I can give this to the one in the cell next to him. It was great to hear how they decided to leave you in your cell, that saved me a lot of problems, so here you go,” she gestures to the bag while standing up, “Now, I’m leaving the rest up to you. The last transfer will leave tomorrow early in the morning, so I would suggest that you wait until they leave. It depends on you, good luck.”

The shadow leaves in a hurry and Katsuki stares at it until it disappears, then he turns his attention to the package and kneels next to it to inspect it. It is a small leather bag containing five sealed glass vials. He slides his fingers on the smooth surface but does not detect marks or any signs. Between them there is a note, a piece of paper bent eight times that is impossible to decipher the message in the dark.

“What is it?” Asks the omega from his corner, but Katsuki ignores it, instead he curses. *A knife, that would have been very useful.*

He takes the vial and lifts it trying to discern its color, but only sees that they are the size of his index finger and none is thicker than his thumb. With great care, he breaks the seal of the first vial and removes the cork cap, taking care not to use too much force that could spill the contents.

He brings it close to his nose and immediately throws his head back.
It smells like strawberries. Wild strawberries. Katsuki’s stomach roars, and the aroma has aroused his hunger with such an intensity that it caused him a headache. It was too dense, too sweet, too acidic. Katsuki covers the vial and shakes his head, trying to disperse the aroma. He can almost feel his nose writhing in disgust, but in the end he has no choice but to soak his hand inside the bucket of water and wipe his face.

“What are you doing?”

Katsuki ignores him as he weighs the vials in his hands. ‘Why strawberries?’ He silently wonders, struggling to find the meaning. He assumes that the answer would be in the note he cannot read. ‘They sent it to me, why? ...I told them about the mint, and their answer was to send fragrances? To try what… try another scent?’

At the end he resigns himself to open another vial, and this time instead of bringing it to his nose he rubs his fingers on the cork tap, that way he avoids overloading his sense of smell. As soon as he smells it, he recognizes mint. The fragrance is intense too, too fresh for his taste, but it will certainly help him now that there are no more leaves under the blankets. The third vial smells like chamomile, too light for him.

_A fruit, a plant and a flower._ Katsuki does still not see the meaning behind it. He takes the fourth vial and uncovers it. The finger that comes to his nose smells like mint… again. Even in the dark, Katsuki’s eyes distinguish the shadow of the vials that he has separated from the rest, the ones he’s had already opened, and he is sure the mint bottle is the one in the middle, _why send another one?_

He rubs his finger against the cork top and inhales hard. This time, he is able to distinguish another aroma. It is not only mint, ‘Peppermint? No, astragalus? No, eucalyptus? No.’ Katsuki moves his finger away from his face and rubs it against his thumb. The smell of mint is unmistakable, that is clear to him, but unlike the previous one, this aroma is much more subtle. Richer in contrast that he fails to understand. It does not possess the astounding burden of the others, nor is it dense or overwhelming. The mint is accompanied by another scent, one that he fails to identify.

“Is is basil?” He hears the omega say, who ended up deciding to approach and raise the cork tap from the ground.

Katsuki wants to laugh at him and his bad sense of smell, but before he can say anything he realizes that, he was not wrong. It smells like basil, but its presence is almost non-existent, it is too light and too soft. There is also rosemary, and there is more. Whatever the fragrance it is, it is not like the others, it does not have that rawness that accompanies any concoction, it is something that combines mint with other spices to form a delicate and exquisite aroma.

“What is it?” Repeats the omega, but Katsuki does not hear it because he cannot unravel the aroma and that is putting him in a bad mood.

In the end he encouraged himself to take the vial and bring it to his nose. He inhales once, and that is enough. The fragrance enters him like a whirlwind without control. He feels it inside him, growing and expanding. The aroma travels through his nostrils to his brain and activates an electric shock throughout his spine. Suddenly and for no apparent reason he is standing up, tense and with his heart beating at full speed. Blood rushes in his ears as the fragrance expands inside him like an overflowing river, it disperses and is crammed to every corner of his body as if it were smoke that got accumulated in a closed space.

But it is not smoke, because instead of suffocating it activates every nerve in his body. He feels that his interior expands, he feels awake. His face becomes hot, his taste buds begin to salivate, the aroma makes him contract the muscles of his abdomen, legs and arms. He takes note of the familiar feeling
of heat on the lower part of his belly. If he could, he would have realized that his pupils were dilated ad that the black covered almost completely the red of his irises. It was like sucking fresh air after living underground, like surrounding himself with the freshness of spring. His body clings to it, and he absorbs it as dry earth absorbs water. He feels alive.

And suddenly it does not fit inside him. He must go. It is imperative to leave.

*What was he doing there?*

*What was he doing here?*

‘Yeah, him… him…. It was him?’

With uncontrolled breathing Katsuki opens his eyes and find himself surrounded by darkness. Everything around him was black and the adrenaline that roared inside him threatened to drive him crazy. The aroma was familiar, so familiar it was impossible. *It cannot be*. It cannot be and yet… and yet… Katsuki chokes. It is here, *the mint and the spices*, fresh and herbal.

It was unmistakable.

Not in a million years would he forget that scent. He thought is was lost forever and there it was.

*Izuku.*

Chapter End Notes

Roquel’s words:
“I just want to comment that I based Izuku’s scent on a book called “The Perfume” by Suskind :D
So, how are you guys? Did you imagine that Katsuki would find out like this? Now the only things left pending are Izuku also finding out and their meeting, two things that will not happen at the same time, I’m sorry.
We will see each other soon.”

SO HOW DO YOU GUYS FEEL? I’d love to know what you expected this chapter to be and your own interpretations! For me, it was *THIS* chapter that made me think that I wanted to translate it and share it with everyone! AAAAGHH Writing this scenes made me desperate for their reunion too goddamit...

Next chapter on March 24th.

"White Sails"
White Sails

Chapter Summary

Making a decision is to take a risk.

Chapter Notes

In this chapter the adults finally appear, but since Roquel uses their first names here’s a compilation of all the appearing characters with their names, their hero names and something extra.

Tsunagu Hakamata - *Best Jeanist* - 190cm, blond with green eyes.

Ken Takagi - *Rock Lock* - 176cm, black hair, works with Sir Nighteye in the arc against Overhaul.

Ryuko Tsuhikawa - *Pixie-bob from the Pussycats* - 167cm, blond hair, green eyes.

Tomoko Shiretoko - *Ragdoll from the Pussycats* - 166cm, blue hair, yellow eyes.

Yawara Chatora - *Tiger from the Pussycats* - 189cm, black hair, black eyes.

Shino Sosaki - *Mandalay from the Pussycats* - 168cm, red hair, brown eyes.

Ken Ishiyama - *Cementoss*

Shinji Nishiya - *Kamui*

Since we still don’t know about Nighteye’s real name, this is the only character who’s going to be called by their hero name.

*(On a side note, if you get easily confused by many names or you still haven't learned by heart which name is for which hero, I’d recommend to write it down somewhere if you could to have a memo for every time you get lost, that’s what I did haha!)*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sun is high in the sky when the watchman sees it:

“Land!”
The men on the deck look up at the mast and immediately afterwards focus their attention in the direction in which their arm points.

“Damnit!” Growled Ken, scanning the horizon with half-closed eyes, “I can’t see anything!”

When the rest of the crew gives up, Ken forces his sight until his eyes get wet, but even so he cannot see a glimpse of the coast, there is only bright, clear water and a dazzling horizon. He removes himself from the railing and approaches the group that plays cards in the only shaded section of the entire deck. The only ones who have not bothered to get up to check the watchman’s claim.

Aizawa’s favorite group of fighters: The Wild Cats.

When he first met them, Ken immediately understood why the nickname. The four of them had the same flower, the same large leaves of an intense green, with thick stems and delicate pink-yellow flowers with purple spots grouped around a spike. Catnip, the cat’s mint.

Shino carries the flower on her left cheek down to her chin and throat. Ryouko’s is on her right shoulder extending to her arm. Yawara is the only one who has two flowers on both wrists with leaves growing on his forearms, and Tomoko, the watchman, exhibits it between her shoulder blades from where it extends to the sides above her white sarashi.

“Did she really see land?” Ken asks, dropping by the red-haired woman.

“Tomoko has an excellent eyesight,” laughs Ryouko, sitting on the floor with her legs crossed while she finishes braiding her long blond hair.

“She could even find a needle lying in a haystack,” confirms Shino, shuffling the cards she has on her hands. “Tomoko!” She shouts, looking at the sky. “Are you going to play?!”

“Coming!”

While the watchman begins to descend used the ropes, Yawara watches her with close attention in case there is any setback. Ken imitates the action, marveling at the girl’s flexibility who glides with a feline grace until she returns to the deck.

“Do you want to play, Ken?” Shino asks, about to sort the fifth card.

“Sure, why not.”

“Hey! Where are you going?” Ryouko shouts when Tomoko passes by in the direction of the berth.

“Start without me,” Tomoko replies, brushing her blue hair back from her face. “I promised Sir Nighteye that I would warn him in advance the moment I saw land.”

“Go,” says Shino without looking at her as she picks up a card from her hand, then turns to her companions. “Ken, you start. Five copper coins for your start, Ryouko you in?”

Ken focuses his attention on his cards and curses, he always forgets that the Cats are compulsive gamblers and that he has very bad luck when he plays with them.

[..]
Tomoko knocks on the door three times before it opens. He straightens up to meet Tsunagu Hakamata, the captains of the king’s guard. She sees him in his high-ranking officer’s uniform and realizes that her baggy trousers and white sarashi are not the best attire to for standing before her sovereign.

‘Bah! It’s not even an official meeting.’

The truth is that, although she has the same jacket as he does, she finds the garment so uncomfortable, with its thousand buttons and rigid shoulder pads. If she was ever given a chance she would prefer to wear the loose sleeveless jackets that soldiers use to fight — they are broad and the cloth is very light. Even the dark vests that Aizawa uses are much better for fighting.

“What’s going on?”

Tomoko return to reality just after hearing the dry question. She smiles, trying to offer an official appearance despite her attire.

“I have a report for Sir Nighteye.”

Tsunagu nods, moves away from the door, beckoning her inside. Sir Nighteye’s cabin is abstemious, it is full of books and smells like fried fruit. At the center table, where piles of maps and plans threaten to fall to the ground, is the king next to his right hand, both wearing their rigid silver uniforms.

It has always amused her the king’s mustache and beard. The beard was too dense to be formal and the mustache is an eccentricity that seemed to have a life of it’s own, and it did not help that both are bright red with faint orange rays, yet the one time she made a comment about it her team was sent to die of boredom at the borders for three months as punishment for her impudence, so she now tried to shut up and let the rest make comments about the bad taste of their sovereign.

She has no complaint with regards to Sir Nighteye; he possesses a legendary stoicism and an amazing intelligence. He is not handsome in the strict sense of the word, but she finds him charming, in fact, she liked the blue hyacinth flower that grows on his left temple and whose leaves grow along his forehead. ‘If only he had a sense of humor,’ Tomoko heaves a sigh and tries to not fantasize.

“Pardon me for the intrusion, Your Majesty I wanted to confirm that I have seen land. I calculate that with our speed we’ll be there in a couple of days.”

“Good, something else?”

“I’ve managed to see a shadow on our left, its shape and direction makes me me think it’s most likely an enemy ship. They are a bit too far away for they watchman to see us, but if they continue with their path they’ll most likely discover our position sooner than expected.”

“It’s impossible to hide a fleet like ours,” replies Sir Nighteye, arranging the papers in his hands. “However, I would like for you to pay special attention to the shadow. Observe it carefully. If it gets close enough we will take appropriate measures. If you find more boats, inform immediately. You can retire now.”

Tomoko nods and leaves, closing the door behind her. The last thing she hears when she leaves is:
“It could be Aizawa’s ship.”

With her hand on the door knob, Tomoko struggles against her bad habit of hearing other people’s conversations. Neither she nor her friends understand why one the king’s best fighters is not here, ready to begin the attack on the slavers. The mere idea of finding out where the third prince’s tutor is tempts her quite a lot.

In the end she does not because the soldier guarding the corridor begins to look at her severely. She has no choice but to go up and gossip with Ryouko about the possible secret mission that Aizawa may be carrying out. They have to take as most advantage as possible of their break, in a few days they will be fighting.

[...]

Clean, collect, gather food, work is frantic and Izuku makes a mental list to not forget anything: water, bandages, berries, seeds. After the pink-skinned girl leaves, Izuku offers Kamui a plate of food.

“I’ll accompany you to the middle of the road,” says the man while he finishes his lunch. “From there, I’ll search for Cementoss and talk about our options.”

The three of them set off as soon as Kamui covers the tracks they have left near the waterfall. Instead of following the river, they move farther into the trees, trying to move as fast as possible. This time they don’t make detours or anything to hide their trail, their intention is to reach the coast quickly, although the trip turns out to be heavier that it seemed because they have to go up and down on slopes all day long.

Kamui says goodbye to them when they are about to ascend for the third time.

“Cementoss’ village is in that direction,” he points to his right and turns to look at them one more time. “I’ll talk to him, maybe there are other villages willing to join in a truce with your people.”

“Very well, when my father arrives I will send messengers to look for you.”

Kamui nods, he extends his hand towards Shouto who squeezes it with solemnity. When it is Izuku’s turn, the boy grabs his hand with both of his hands and smiles gently. They watch him go away among the trees until they lose sight of him. Izuku takes advantage of that moment to stretch his back while throwing his head back.

“Do you want me to carry your bag?”

When he turns he has Shouto with one hand extended towards him.

“No, I’m fine.”

He straightens up and resumes the march. They get to the least peak, the highest of them all, when the sun is hiding. From there they can see the prison on the cliff, a black shadow against the dark
grey sky, and just beside it, almost at the same distance, the coast. A yellow line that collided with the dark blue of the sea.

The most surprising thing is what they saw on the horizon.

“Shouto, look!”

Izuku points out the white sails, dozens of them grouped on boats of equal size. The boars are too far from the coast, but Shouto recognizes the shape of their masts and hull.

“Is that your father?” Izuku asks and when Shouto nods, the boy catches his arm and smiles while repeating they are here, they are here.

“If we maintain this rhythm during the night, and only rest for a few hours, we will reach the beach tomorrow.”

Izuku nods and follows him, forgetting the fatigue and hunger. The last rays of sun disappear leaving the sky colorless, and it soon becomes impossible to advance under a dark sky. The moon, which was full when they landed a few weeks ago, has disappeared from the sky and the darkness is absolute in the forest.

When Izuku stumbles for the fifth consecutive time, Shouto decides it is not worth the risk.

“We’ll rest here.”

“I can still continue.”

“It makes no sense for us to advance if we can’t see anything. We run with the risk of getting lost or rolling down a steep slope. Let’s rest and tomorrow, at dawn, we’ll get going.”

They wrap themselves in their blankets and dine a bit of the provisions Kamui packed for them. The silence of the forest is interrupted by the hooting of the birds, the sudden movement of the leaves, and the crickets that whisper in the grass; all sounds intertwine to form a unique and terrifying symphony.

“Sleep,” Shouto says in a low voice. “I’ll cover the first shift and wake you up in a little while.”

Izuku murmurs an agreement and sits on the floor, wrapped in the blanket with his bag firmly held in his arms. He closes his eyes and immediately the fatigue falls on him like a heavy veil. For the first time since he found out about the sunken ship, Izuku dreams. Not with Katsuki sinking into a black sea, nor with his cage full of water.

He dreams about the day he lost him.

He never gets to hear what Katsuki says. They are squatting, side by side, looking at a flower. A small blue flower with five petals and a yellow center. On the ground there are three buds, each with
three similar flowers. He turns to look at his friend and sees his lips move.

What is he saying? Why can’t he hear it?

*He feels him swinging on his feet. He remembers the pressure of his shoulder against his, the red gladioli pressing against his warm skin. Katsuki points to the flowers.*

What are they? Why can’t he remember it?

*But the answer never arrives because in that moment a man materializes in front of them. He comes out of nowhere, with his purple skin and white hair. He remembers it clearly. He remembers every detail of his body, the clothes he wore, and his smile. The smile that becomes an immense mouth full of sharp teeth ready to devour him.*

Izuku opens his eyes with his heart beating unchecked. He cannot see anything since the world is still dark and silent. He does not stop shaking as he straightens up, exhales slowly, noticing that his breathing shakes intermittently. He opens and closes his hands in an attempt to warm his icy fingers and finally exhales hard, fighting to calm down from his panic. When he finally manages to shake of the nightmare, he notices it. Absolute silence.

“Shouto?” His eyes take a moment to get adjusted to the darkness, but immediately they perceive the dark form that is sitting a few steps away from him. “Did you fall asleep?”

He turns to support the weight on his knees and extends his hand to the alpha, but when he touches the other he does not react. Then he smells it. He detects it because he has spent the last few years living outdoors and knows by heart the aroma of wet grass, wet earth, trees, plants, flowers and animals. The forest is a part of it, its aromas are as familiar as the plants that he has been learning by heart since forever ago. What he smells is different, it is more tenuous, it is sweet, too sweet for him.

‘It’s honey? ...It smells like milk.’

Izuku straightens up like a deer on alert. His head goes from right to left with frantic movements. He cannot hear anything, he cannot see anything, but the aroma is the only alarm he needed. He gets up leaving his blanket and his bag rattles against his side when he leans next to the seated figure and shakes it.

“Shouto,” but the figure wrapped in the other blanket remains motionless, as if it were a statue.

The crunching of branches at some point in the forest alerts him. His fear is triggered and his instincts for survival are activated as a loose spark in coal. He shakes Shouto hard and keeps looking frantically around him.

Until he sees them.

Out of surprise his hands are paralyzed. In front of him there are two suns in the middle of the
darkness, or at least that is what he thinks until he understand that they are two bright yellow eyes, waiting patiently, there, among the trees, focused on him. At some point next to them Izuku is able to see a grey trail, like smoke that comes from their direction.

*The incense.*

Although the fear shakes his body, Izuku’s mind is sharpened.

...*induces a state of absolute obedience.*

He holds the motionless alpha’s arm and yells at him as he pulls it with all the strength he has.

“Get up!” He gives his voice all the authority he can and gets the alpha to obey, although instead of moving forward he stays still. “Run, run, run!” He pushes him without ever stopping shouting. “MOVE! RUN!”

And to his relief Shouto obeys.

...)

The prison is an immense structure that rises just above the valley, from its highest tower you can see the sea and some claim to be able to smell the marine air that comes from there. Its doors open under the cry of the visit and it reverberates in the stone walls. The mount of Tomura skids on the loose earth. The animal stops panting, too exhausted to growl at the man who approaches them.

“Hey, Shigaraki! I thought you were lost!”

Tall, slender, and with dazzling blue eyes, Dabi, the leader of the explorers, offers a bottle of water to the newcomer. Tomura snatches it from his hands and drinks without pausing until he gets fed up. He emits a tired sight and stretches until every bone in his body creaks in relief.

“A long trip?” Dabi asks with his famous condescending smile. When he crosses his arms the sleeves of his camisole rise revealing the dark skin portions that contrast with the other lighter regions. His body in general seemed to be formed of incomplete patches united in nonsensical patterns.

“Shut up, what are you doing here?”

“Following Kurogiri’s orders. The prison had to be closed down, we had to collect all the leftover supplies and move the last couple of savage pairs to the Citadel.”

“Your mission was to track down the traitor.”

“I have a clue. I’ve spent the last month traveling back and forth along the whole damn border and I’ve finally managed to find a trail. We believe our treacherous rat receives help from at least one of the villages around here. That’s why it has been hard to find.”

“And the intruders?”
“Ah! Toga went to look for them as soon as we received the notice, she offered herself personally. She’s the best tracker there is here, so I don’t doubt she’ll find them.”

“Have you ever let her go alone?”

“She has a troop of three soldiers, we don’t expect the intruders to cause problems, they don’t have the incense to disarm them.”

“And the others?”

“I sent Mustard to the prison on the other side of the valley, he has orders to supervise and close the doors once the last transfer in under way. Shuichi went to talk to Ken Ishiyama, he is the leader we suspect that helps Shinji Nishiya, our traitor.”

“And while they work, you’re here.”

“I was waiting for you, I wanted to show you the newcomers. I’m sure you didn’t know they’re here.”

The Noumu approaches them, searching eagerly for an aroma that only it can perceive. Tomura rubs his hands against it and guides it with the help of the reins to one of the empty stables. He signs to one of the guards who takes care of the cargo beasts.

“Give it food and water, and don’t let it come out.” He then turns to Dabi, “Who are you talking about?”

“Come with me and you’ll see.”

They go through the empty corridors until they reach the entrance to the watchtower, and from there they climb countless steps installed in a spiral. A the top, the window blows with an amazing force and the sound of the flag that flutters on the mast is so violent that it seems to be about to tear. The air is clean and cold, an you cannot hear a single conversation in the inner courtyard. Dabi beckons him to approach the window.

The valley glimpses at their feet like an endless green field filled with slopes and cliffs. The river that comes down from the mountains meanders throughout the region until it is out of sight. The trees are drawn like small bushes crowded in sections of an intense green. The roads that lead from one village to another are thin in light colors that cross the region until they are out of sight. The other prison is a grey spot on the other side of the hills, from which they could only see its tower with its candles waving before the wind that blows from the sea.

“They have arrived,” Dabi points south towards the coast.

Instead of the blue horizon he sees a lot of tiny ships with white sails like small clouds touching the sea.

“How long?”

“Let’s see, yesterday we received another crow ordering to mobilize the rest of the soldiers to the capital where the reinforcements troops are concentrating. I was surprised, but when I came up here and saw them I got it. I always thought you’d be on the front like of the attack in the war against the savages.”

“And I’ll be.”
“Well, you’re late. Surely our troops are ready to welcome the invaders and there is no doubt that our enemies will attack as soon as they reach the port. Or maybe their intention is to disembark on the coast, near the border, and establish an outpost from there. Either option leaves you without time, you would have to leave today to have the opportunity to participate in the battle.”

Tomura’s response is to turn around and descend the stairs with an amazing speed. The reaction takes Dabi by surprise, although he immediately recovers and tries to call him.

“Hey! Shigaraki! What are you doing?”

“I’m going.”

“You’ve just arrived. Besides, you’re supposed to question the intruders. Toga will send a raven as soon as she has them. What am I supposed to do with the spy? Kurogiri said you were going to escort them back to the citadel.” Tomura ignores his as he goes down the stairs, “Shigaraki! You can’t just leave like that!”

Tomura runs knowing that Dabi detests doing it, goes down the steps in a hurry, stepping on two by two, determined not to lose a single second. When he is already back at the stables, where his mount finished devouring its dinner, Tomura stops in front of the soldier who stands on guard.

“Get it ready.”

“Yes sir.”

“What are you doing?! We have work to do!”

Tomura curses loudly and turns to an exhausted and breathless Dabi. The image makes him laugh and drives his bad mood away.

“I don’t intend to waste my time with disposable pawns. I’m not going to stay here while the savages dare to invade my lands.”

“You can’t go away! Tomorrow will come the youngest soldiers, those who still don’t go to the capital to recite the loyalty phrase to the General, and we also have to make the last transfer the day after tomorrow.”

“You can stay here and get bored all you want, but I’m not staying. I want to fight.”

“What am I supposed to do with the intruders and the spy? They are your responsibility.”

“Do you know where the spy is?”

“Not exactly, but we have a clue.”

“Yes, the village, you’ve already told me.” Tomura heaves a sigh and takes a moment to weigh his options. Think, meditate and act. “If there is any suspicion that the leader is helping our traitor, then he deserves an exemplary punishment. Everyone must understand that there is no forgiveness for traitors or for those who help them. Send a crow to Shuichi and send reinforcements. Tell him to wait until the new recruits are on their way to the capital, then he has the free way to burn every last one of the houses in that village.”

“Do you think it will be enough for them to hand over Nishiya?”

“That doesn’t matter! We want to give an example. Make everyone be accused of high treason. Tell
Shuichi to put their heads on a spike and leave an inscription as a warning for the rest of the villages. Make sure the recruits that come from there are sent to fight the savages. If they survive, we will tell them that the loss of their village was the consequence of the bad decisions of their leader, who chose to turn back on his people."

“Okay.”

“See? We’re done planning. And if you hurry tomorrow you can get out of here. Go and meet Mustard, then go to the nearest port. I bet you’ll have more fun fighting the savages than being an administrator.”

“What about the prison?”

“Damn it, let the captain take care of the last transfers. It’s their job. He has orders and he doesn’t need you to keep an eye on him.”

“What about Toga?”

“Send her a crow. Tell her to kill the intruders. We aren’t going to waste our time with them.”

“Kurogiri wants us to question them.”

“I prefer to capture an officer in hand-to-hand combat, I bet they have more information than a couple of useless spies.”

The Noumu beast shakes impatiently as Tomura climbs into it. There is no doubt that it is ready to resume the march despite the fatigue from the previous trip. It moves so much that Tomura has to take the reins and hold them tightly to keep it in place while turning to Dabi for the last time.

“By the way, I almost forgot about it. The General requires another beta-type savage. They are those that carry flowers on their legs, hands and face. If Toga finds one, tell her to send it directly to the Citadel and not to touch it The General want it unscathed, if she dares to cut off a single finger, she will have to answer him.”

Dabi laughs, “I hope the raven reaches her in time.”

Tomura walks away without saying goodbye.

[...]

Mina wakes up early to fix her travel bag. It takes twice as long to finish because her sister does not stop circling around her asking question after question.

“How long will you go?”

“The minimum service time is five years, I’m only just about to finish my second year.”

“Why do you have to go?”
“Because it must be that way. We have to go to the Citadel and sweat allegiance before the General himself.”

“And then?”

“I don’t know, I could become a guard in a fortress or a watchman in the ships. Maybe I’ll work in another prison. They could even send me to the Capital.”

“If they send you there, will you want to come back?”

“Of course I’m coming back!”

“And why isn’t Kouji going with you? He is your same age.”

“The recruiter freed him from his service because Kouji cannot speak, but Ishiyama wants to send him to the Capital to work at the information building.”

“And what’s in there?”

“Books and scrolls and a lot of boring things… Everything’s ready!”

She straightens up to contemplate her immense travel bag in which she carries almost all her clothes and uniform, a pair of extra boots and the best blanket she has. Next to it is her backpack that carries supplies, water, paper, ink and other things that she prefers to have on hand.

“What’s inside that?”

Mina freezes when she discovers her little sister pointing to the small wrapped package that protrudes from one of the sides of her backpack.

“Those are my cleaning supplies,” she says as she bends down to change the package’s place.

Upon hearing it her sister emits a cry of surprise and promptly turns around to leave. Mina laughs as she carries her things to the outside. None of her parents are there to dismiss her. Her father is a soldier that works at the Capital and her mother spends all day cultivating vegetables.

Now that Mina sees first-handed the treatment the savages who live at the prisons get, she understands why her mother resigned from the army after having fulfilled her service. She herself counts the days to resign although it is a thought that she tries to never formulate aloud, not even in front of her little sister because she fears that the girl will repeat it to the wrong person.

She’s waiting for her sister to return when Mashirao comes up carrying two bags exactly like hers.

“You have too many things,” Mina says, poking the backpack that the boy puts next to hers. “How are you going to carry mine?”

Getting a laugh from the blond is as difficult as getting her sister to stop asking questions, but the smile that he gives her is the same soft and charming gesture that he gives everyone.

“I don’t think you need my help with carrying your things, Mina.”

“Maybe not, but I don’t wanna carry them.”

The laugh is there, so close that Mina can touch it, but the desire to hear it dies when she sees the great Ishiyama walking next to Shuichi Iguchi.
“Do you know why he’s here?” She asks Mashirao, pointing discreetly at the green-skinned man. His reptilian characteristics cause repulsion, although perhaps it is because he is one Tomura Shigaraki’s men, the only person Mina hopes she never has to meet.

“He says he has orders to gather all the recruits who are going to the Capital.”

“And why now? They have never done that before?”

“Yeah, but now there are ships invading our coasts. They probably want to make sure we don’t run into enemy troops.”

“Are you going to fight them?”

Mina turns to find her sister right behind them with a panicked expression. Before she can say anything, Mashirao kneels in front of the girl and smiles at her.

“We’ll be fine,” he explains with that tone in his voice that all the kids in the village adore. “I have your sister to protect me.”

The pink-skinned face relaxes immediately and offers an immense smile.

“Where did you go?” Mina asks, seeing the two bags of cane she is holding in her hands.

“Ah! When you told me about your cleaning supplies I remembered it, I have a gift so you don’t forget about me!”

Mina takes the small bag and sniffs inside.

“I made you a soap,” declares the girl with pride as she jumps and claps in her place. “Yours smell like strawberries because I know they’re your favorites and Ojiro’s smells like blackberries. I also made mint dough, Hiryu taught me how to prepare it. If you chew it after getting up you’ll avoid the morning breath. He says they sell it in the capital but this one is made by me so it’s a lot better.”

Mina smiles, bends down to hug her sister and spins her around while she screams with excitement. When she gets dizzy she puts her down and says goodbye.

“Take care of mom and obey her. I’ll write you, okay? And if you want to write me, Kouji knows what to do.”

“Come on,” Mashirao says as he helps her with one of her bags. “The others are climbing the wagon.”

Mina lingers until the end of the line because there she can say goodbye to her sister as the carriage moves.

“Well, that’s it.” Mina says when the village is out of sight. “If we’re lucky well be back in three years.”

Mashirao nods, he does not seem to want to talk so Mina bites her tongue and tries to distract herself by looking at the changing landscapes as they go. Curiously, this trip is much longer than any other. Maybe it is the prospect of not returning home for three years, maybe it is because of fear.

‘I just have to deliver the package, that’s all. They are harmless flasks.’

She repeats the same thing over and over again in her head, but it does not calm her anxiety. She knows she is risking her family. If the captain finds out she is carrying encrypted messages… well,
she cannot even imagine the outcome.

Her anxiety does not improve when they arrive at the prison and find all of the guards in the yard carrying and moving sacks of food and trunks full of weapons. The officers try to input order, but between the noise made by the cargo beasts and the shouts of the soldiers who work in a hurry, it is impossible to achieve. Mina and Mashirao turn away from the chaos, they end up stuck to the wall next to a group of soldiers who do not stop complaining about how tired they are. Mina tries to ignore them, but then she hears them curse.

“I spent all morning cleaning, I deserve a break goddamnit. I can’t understand why we had to lock up the savages before they finished their work.”

Mina is not able to contain herself, so she asks:

“They were all moved to the confinement cells?”

The man gives her a sour expression, but she does not allow herself to be intimidated because if everyone is confined there is no way that she can deliver the package she has been hiding.

“There was not enough space,” the guard answers reluctantly. “We left the troublemakers in their cells.”

“The troublemakers?” Mina repeats without losing her calmness. “I know one of those, he’s in my block. The ill-faced blond who broke the jaw of one of the guards who was going to move him.”

The soldier grunts.

“I know who you’re talking about, the red-eyed savage. That beast should be sacrificed.”

“That’s right… he was left in his cell?”

“He could rot there if it depended on me.”

The guards chorus is distracted when a skinny young man drops a pile of knives generating a chain of whistles and boos. Mina takes advantage of the moment to take Mashirao by the arm and approach her superior officer.

“Ashido reporting, sir.”

“Release soldier.”

“Thank you sir. I ask permission to retire to my room, I want to move my things and prevent from getting in the way, sir.”

“Permission not given, soldier. Our group will leave tonight.”

“I thought we would leave tomorrow,” Mashirao exclaims without being able to restrain himself, but the officer dismisses his doubts without looking at him.

“There is still enough time to travel before we are forced to stop. It’s important that the reinforcements arrive as soon as possible.”

“I thought we were going to the Capital.”

“Change of plans. Support will be needed in the defensive lines.”
Mina and Mashirao look at each other alarmed, they recoil trying not to collide with the rest of the guards that swarm around the courtyard. Once they are away from the commotion, Mina bends down to look for the package, has it put in a bag of provisions so at least she will have an excuse in case someone interrogates her.

“Can you cover for me?”

“You’re going?” Mashirao murmurs, trying not to attract anyone’s attention.

“I have to, I promised.”

“Good, but hurry up. If someone asks I’ll say you went to the bathroom.”

Amid the chaos of the officers loading the wagons and the group of new recruits she tries not to disturb. Mina retreats slowly until she manages to slip through one of the unguarded entrances; she moves cautiously trying to merge with the shadows. Her improved sense of sight allows her to glide through the dark tunnels.

Once the package has been delivered, Mina sighs with relief and leaves without looking back. He arrives just in time to pick up his suitcase and get on the wagon with the rest of his companions.

“Everything’s alright?” Mashirao asks guardedly.

Mina smiles.

“I promise you this is the last time that I decide to imitate Kamui.”

Mashirao laughs at the nickname, “Did you finally let him give you a nickname?”

“No! And you?”

“Tailman.”

Mina laughs when she hears it. She sighs gratefully that her anxiety is gone.

‘I did what I have to do. It’s over.’

Now she has to concentrate on her work and make sure to go back home with her sister and her mother.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you’ve liked the story so far everyone! Thank you so much to those who stuck with me since the beginning and welcome to everyone who’s new~ Thank you to those who also read the Spanish version yet still want to read it once again just to check and compare the different languages!

And so, with respect to that, I’ve been asked for the sake of those who can’t read the original version if the comment section could please be left as a spoiler-free zone. I’d be glad to partake on that, and would also be happy if you could help us with it. Thank you
for those who read this and I'm sorry if I've annoyed or burdened you in any way possible!

Next chapter on March 31st.

"Rain"
Rain

Chapter Summary

How many years has it been since he has last seen rain? How many years since he has last breathed in the aroma of a humid forest? Regardless of time, the memory lives within him. Indelible and eternal.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! Thank you once again to those who leave comments, kudos and those who are just wandering around to see how’s it going. From the depth of my heart, thank you!!

So, let's jump into it and see Katsuki in action!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Even though it’s been so long, my love for you keeps going strong

I remember the things that we used to do

A kiss in the rain till the sun shined through

I tried to deny it, but I’m still in love with you

Miss You Like Crazy - Natalie Cole

The aroma is so intense that his body’s reaction is immediate. His back straightens, his muscles get tense, his arms tighten against his sides in an automatic self-defense response. His nose feels overwhelmed by the pheromones that come from the alpha. He does not understand how, but he can feel his energy, he perceives the heat emanating from him, powerful and terrifying; he remembers the
bonfires that are lit at the festivals of his land. Fires that last whole nights and provide a radiant heat, leaving behind embers that remain incandescent for a long time.

That’s how it feels now, like he is in front of a colossal bonfire, about to get incinerated. The environment is charged with electricity and he is a simple spectator. It does not matter that he only sees a black silhouette in the cage, he can feel him — smell him. His scent… God… his scent is like ambrosia and fire. It smells like the forest, like a freshly cut clean oak. It smells like smoke, not the dense type that suffocates but the aroma wood gives off when the fire touches it and one hears the crackling of the coals.

That is the scent of a living, healthy, strong and fearsome alpha.

Denki tries to swallow only to find that his mouth is dry. The most primitive part that exists within him wants to get close, to bath in that aroma and to curl up in the heat that emanates from him. He just needs to reach out and touch him, and then… then…

His insides curl into complex knots.

The other part of his brain, the one that has lived with alphas for years, the one that lives on constant alert, full of fear and uncertainty, wants to flee. He wants to become small, he wants to run and hide, but his body does not cooperate and he does not move, so Denki buries his head between his knees looking for a position that allows him to survive the heat. He’s drowning.

His instinct does not stop asking him to breath until the scent permeates every cell of his body.

Denki clenches his teeth, grasps his knees until he diggs his nails into his skin and tries to find the strength not to succumb to that scent. He is grateful that the alpha has forgotten him because he knows — with the certainty that comes from his instincts — that right now he would not be able to refuse anything. He would not be able to say no. He would not be able to say anything. He would not be able to say no. He could not.

It is minutes, or maybe hours, that Denki stays unmoving, hunched over and gathering up each granite of self-control to drown that little voice that wants to lull itself in the heat of the alpha. Until finally, finally, the scent remits enough for his body to breath without his interior contracting and waiting for something else.

As soon as he manages to move, Denki crawls back to the blanket, too tired to hold on to his legs. He receives his own aroma, tenuous and almost indistinguishable. He scrubs his face against the blanket, strives to thicken his essence until the fabric smells unmistakably like oranges, fresh and sweet, like freshly cut fruit. He wraps himself with it, wanting to recover his stability.

Surrounded by the smell of oranges, sitting in the cage’s furthest corner, and in complete control of his extremities, Denki asks:

“What was that?”
He cannot see the alpha’s expression, he only distinguishes the shadow of his body moving in the darkness, but his voice overflows with impatience and frantic energy.

“I have to get out.”

He listens to him breathe, short and irregular inhalations that reflect his mood.

“I want to get out.”

He hears him struggling with the door, sees his silhouette move from one corner to another, restless, nervous, full of explosive energy. Denki shrugs, picks up his legs and hides his face in his blanket, too exhausted to deal with the situation. He feels his head heavy, filled with the aroma of wood and smoke; he is also hungry, a voracious appetite that goes beyond the need to eat.

Denki closes his eyes and breathes in, his sole intention is to isolate himself, to evade the reality that threatens to break him.

Fear awakens him, he opens his eyes automatically, straightens his neck and freezes. The world is still black, a blanket of absolute darkness, but his instinct does not stop screaming warnings of incoming danger. It is then that he sees it, the movement of a shadow next to him. His natural reaction is to scream, he opens his mouth, inflates his lungs and his scream crashes into the hand that covers his face. His panic is triggered and when he tries to flee another hand presses on his collarbones to immobilize him.

“Stay still!”

It is the urgent whisper, coupled with the scent, which paralyzes Denki instantly. The authority that comes from the blond’s voice is indisputable despite it being a mumble.

“I hear voices.”

He must have an excellent ear because Denki does not hear anything. The question he formulates becomes an incomprehensible sound, muffled by the hand that continues to cover his mouth, but the alpha does not give any indication of wanting clarification because he simply continues.

“I’ll take care of the guards, you have to get out and prevent them from closing the door.”

As the hand does not show any signs of movement, Denki fits his fingers into the upper part and pulls it away from his face. As soon as he is free, he takes a breath and presses himself against the wall, trying to put as much distance between his body and the alpha as possible. Then, he murmurs:

“I don’t think they’ll open the gate.”

“What?”

“I don’t think they’ll open the gate.”
“They will, I’ll make sure of it.”

“It’s not use trying to provoke them. The only way they’d open the door is if they think we’ve mated.”

If they do not believe it, they will leave us here. We will die here.

“They’ll believe it.”

Denki’s heart collapses, it falls from the heights and breaks into thousand of pieces. *What. No.*

“I thought…” he chokes, pressing his hand against his chest, clutching the blanket. “You said you’ll never mate anyone.”

“And I don’t intent to,” the alpha’s anger is violent, his scent dense and defiant. “Now listen, this is the plan.”

---

*It won’t work.*

Denki repeats it for the umpteenth time while he is trapped between the wall and the alpha’s body. The situation is so uncomfortable that he has nausea. It is fortunate that the exquisite aroma of wood and smoke has been replaced by a saturated version of impatience and energy, because that way his body avoids an embarrassing reaction.

*Don’t even think about it.*

Every time the alpha breathes, he notices the warm breath on his neck and the movement on his back. It is unsettling.

*Hurry up.*

The guards’ voices could now be heard clearly, the sound going from a simple murmur to a muffled conversation. Suddenly the darkness disappears, the wall is dyed in a soft orange hue that oscillates in circles over the cold rock. Although he hears the guards, he does not understand what they are talking about because of the blood that pups in his ears.

*Come on.*

The soldiers become silent and Denki understands why. The blanket covers them from waist down, and the alpha’s pose — with his back towards the door and his arms pressed against the wall — is a clear gesture of protection and possession. Hopefully their jailers will be convinced that they are weak thanks to the hunger and exercise.

“Hey! Stand up!”

Denki is startled, his natural reaction is to attend any order given by the guards, but he cannot move
while cornered against the wall. The surprising thing is that the alpha does not react or move when
the guard begins to scream, so Denki is forced to imitate his calmness despite the knot in his stomach.

“What do we do now?” Asks a voice, different from the previous one.

“Put the torch at its base,” another voice replies, “and go for the incense.”

“Do I have to?” The second voice answers. “It’s in the warehouse on the other side of the building.”

“Your job is to bring it.”

“My job was to bring torches and chains, and that’s exactly what I did. What did you bring?”

“How dare — “

“Shut up!” The voice is loaded with authority and manages to impose itself onto the rest. “Give me
the spear.”

Denki does not listen to what they say after that, the noise does not offer any clue either, the only
thing he knows is that at a certain moment the alpha tensed, he does not move nor gets agitated, but
the muscles in his arms contract and Denki hears how he holds his breath for a long time before
exhaling again slowly without altering his posture in any way. Whatever they have done has put him
in a bad mood because the aroma that emanates from him is terrible. Dense and red, filled with lethal
warnings. It is a good thing that they cannot smell it.

“So what now?” Asked another voice, different from all the previous ones.

*How many are there? I thought there were three, are there more?*

“You will have to check them manually.”

*Is that another voice?*

“Don’t we need reinforcements?”

“It doesn’t look like they will give us problems, besides we don’t have much time. Let’s get started;
you two with me, we’ll deal with the troublemaker, and you wait over there. If anyone resists you all
have the permission to cut their necks.

*They are going to kill us.*

Denki swallows his fear, tense to avoid trembling, but when that does not work he relaxes and tries
to pretend to be unconscious.

*Remember the plan. Stick to the plan. As soon as they are on him, get up and ran.*

The years will pass and Denki will never forget that precise moment.

He knows that the door opened, he remembers that clearly. The sound of the latch jumping is an
unforgettable memory, he remembers it because at that moment his heart grew inside him,
threatening to be heard throughout the dungeon. He knows he heard footsteps, though he will never
be sure if he actually heard them or if his restless mind gave him the details. He knows that they took
the alpha away from him, he remembers when he was free from the weight and felt the dungeon’s
cold wall on his back. He knows that someone spiked his ribs, it could have been the slap of a hand
or the tip of a boot.
He remembers that instead of turning his back on him, the guard reached out and turned him around. He remembers the fear he felt at that moment, he was scared that they would discover he was awake. He remembers that when someone tried to remove the leather bag he had in his hands, the reflex of pushing and opening his eyes was instinctive. He remembers the sharp face, the grey eyes with elongated pupils. He remembers that when he tried to stand his foot slipped on the floor and suddenly a mallet, or something like a mallet, crashed against his cheek.

After that the memory stops being clear and it becomes a blur full of adrenaline, saturated with terror, but even then he cannot forget what he said to himself, a simple thought imbued with an absolute certainty.

I’m going to die here.

They sting him with the spear as if he was a piece of useless meat. Katsuki gets angry, but instead of exploding he swallows his anger by feeding the fire that lives inside him. He feels it boil in his veins, he feels it in every tense muscle that waits just the right moment to release his energy. His head is filled with the mint aroma, the scent of Izuku, and he has no intention of allowing himself to be subjected to the aberrant honey incense.

He hears the footsteps that enter the cage. One, two, three. There are more missing. Katsuki needs everyone to be inside. He relaxes his body when two pair of hands grab him by the arm and roll him until he is lying on his back. He stays still even when one of them kicks him at the hip. It is then when he hears it, the struggle and the surprise cry of the guard on his right side. He opens his eyes and encounters the omega struggling with the soldier.

Immediately after that he moves. He turns on his side and kicks the legs of the one on his left, just at the height of his knee, which he hears it crunch. He takes advantage of having his arms resting on the ground and used them to propel himself. As soon as he is standing, he avoids the two guards who rush at him and throws himself towards the door just in time to prevent the last guard from flying off in search of reinforcements.

He jumps on the man’s back and knocks him down. A soon as he has him on the ground he holds him by the hair and manages to smash his head on the floor once before another guard holds him down. When the third of them approaches with a knife, Katsuki manages to kick him in the crotch without much force, then buries his elbow into the sternum of his captor and as soon as the arm that holds him gets loose, he uses it as a lever to send the guy to the ground, where his back crashes with a thud.

Then he turns around, ready to face the guard with a knife. With his fists raised and in a defense position, Katsuki dodges his thrusts again and again until he manages to read him. When the guard tries to skewer him, Katsuki grabs him with one arm and his fists wreck his nose. He twists his arm until he hears the knife fall to the ground then holds him and plunges his knee into the guard’s
diaphragm which causes the guy to bend over, trying to breath.

Katsuki takes the knife, bends over to the guard who paws on all fours and cuts his neck without hesitation. He repeats the procedure with the other two and finally approaches the man who is holding his knee, who does not stop screaming asking for ‘Help’. Katsuki stops next to him, looks at him from above while listening to him whimper.

“Don’t — “

But whatever he tried to say dies in his mouth when Katsuki buries the knife in the top of his head. The body falls to the ground while he straightens up. He feels the cramps on his arms and his back tense. His body is covered with sweat and his stomach is writhing with hunger. His will is the only thing that keeps him standing. His will and the aroma of Izuku that he has impregnated at the tips of his fingers.

Katsuki takes a breath and turns to the last guard, the only one who has not bothered to approach because he is too distracted laughing with both hands on the neck of the omega. The growl that he emits at that moment is a low sound that resembles that of a wild animal, his anger is vibrant and terrible. In two steps he covers the distance that separates him with the guard and in a single fulminating movement the man’s neck creaks before collapsing without life.

Katsuki pants, in his outburst he did not even notice the scream he uttered until he felt the burning in his throat.

The omega looks at him from the ground, his eyes wide with fear and his hands pressed against the small leather bag. He has an ugly bruise on his left cheek, red finger marks on his neck and scratches on both arms, but otherwise he seems unscathed.

“What are you waiting for to get out of here?”

The omega is startled by the severe tone, his eyes roam the cell, stopping at each immobile body.

“You…? Are they…?”

“Dead, are you going to cry for them?”

The omega shakes his head, swallows with effort and speaks. His raspy voice is just a muffled whisper.

“Now I know why no one wanted to get into a cage with you.”

“Stop with the crap and get up.”

When the omega shows no signs of obeying, Katsuki grabs his arm and pulls him up towards the exit, he releases him to return to look for the guard’s keys. He finds them in the guy’s pants with the knife on his head and as soon as he has them in his hands he stops to look.

“What are you doing?”

The voice of the omega pulls him out of his contemplation. He looks at the blond who stands still by the door, waiting. Katsuki takes a breath, turns to the soldier again and spits in his face once. He gets up to leave, but stops, an idea germinating in his head.

“Come.”
“What for?” The omega asks in a sulky voice.

“Come and help me with this one here.”

“I don’t want to touch them.”

“Come!”

The tone of absolute authority makes the omega obey despite his reluctance. As soon as he has him besides him, Katsuki points to the guy in front of him.

“I think this one has your size.”

[...]

It is easy to ignore an alpha when you have them in a cage and you can leave whenever you want. It is hard to refuse when you have one of them with you and they look at you with eyes that can incinerate you. Denki does not even find the strength in himself to feel disgust while wearing the clothes of a dead person.

“The uniform is covered in blood,” he grunts with disgust as he straightens the sleeves of his uniform.

“It’s not noticeable,” the alpha answers in a bad mood.

Denki tightens his lips and finishes buckling his breastplate. The uniform is a little big on the shoulders and waist, the sleeves slide to the first joint of his thumb so he has to fold the excess inwards to have his hands free.

“And if they catch on us?”

“I’ll take care of the guards, you make sure no one takes those bottles from you.”

“How are we going to leave.”

“We aren’t leaving.”

“What?”

“We’ll go down to the dark cells, do you know the way there?”

Denki nods as he hides the package in one of his pockets. He has to go at the front, carrying his own torch. The corridor is empty and silent, the light forms semicircles in the walls, ceilings and floors, the prison in the dark is a totally different place than Denki remembers, on several occasions he is forced to stop indecisively on the way forward.

As they descend, they find more corridors with their stale candlesticks, the stairs and the tunnels are endless black mouths. Each step reverberates on the walls and each shadow makes Denki believe
that there is someone with them, but the place is empty.

Finally they manage to arrive, the corridor ends with an opening without a door.

“It’s a hand-lift,” Denki explains as he climbs into the metal box. “First you have to unlock and then turn the crank.”

The platform squeaks and shakes as Katsuki lowers them. At the bottom they find a door with two aisles on both sides.

“Where?” Asks the alpha swinging his torch between both corridors.

“It doesn’t matter. The door leads to the observation room, the corridors form a circle around it.” As he explains it, Denki enters the room and takes the keys that he knows the guards hide in the box embedded in the wall. “The guards manage all the keys separately,” he extends the bunch of keys with a white spot on the top. “Each group has a different color depending on the area where they are used. As far as I know, they are not supposed to leave them here, but they do it anyway because this way they avoid having to go back for them in case they forgot them.”

“You can see what is inside each cell in that room?”

“Only if there is light on the cells.”

“How many cells are there?”

“Ten, each with an iron door. They all have the same lock and a double pin.”

“Only ten?”

“This is not the only room, there are five in this wing and five on the other, all with an elevator as entry point. As far as I know this is the first time that they are all full.”

They take the corridor on the left and Denki holds both torches while the alpha tests each key, once he finds the correct one he has to remove the lock that secures the door and opens the pins on the top and bottom. The hinges creak when they push and they are immediately received by the aroma of confinement, dirty bathroom and rot. The alpha takes the torch and enters it, raising it over his head to inspect the place.

The light spills on the inside and Denki’s eyes are immediately fixed on the shrunken figure next to the door. Forgetting his fear, he kneels next to the dark haired girl leaving his torch on the ground. As soon as she opens her eyes, she lets out a cry of horror and recoils when she sees him. That awakens the alpha, who shakes off the dream and gets up emanating a warning grunt.

“Chieko, it’s me,” says Denki, raising both hands and pulling the sleeves of the black uniform to reveal the wristbands with rings.

The surprise leaves her speechless, as soon as she manages to overcome her panic, she blinks with force, makes a quick inspection of his face and murmurs.

“Denki?”

He smiles in response and extends his hands in a gesture of comfort. The girl breaks into tears while hugging him in despair.

“Who are they?” Murmurs the alpha with an expression that revealed his distrust.
The blond gives out a grunt and throws the package of keys.

“One of those should be useful for you.”

Then he leaves without waiting for an answer, taking only the key on the door.

“Where are you going?” Denki yells.

“He’s not here,” the other answers without stopping.

Denki curses, he pats the omega while trying to break free, when that does not work he has to juggle to pick up his torch and get up.

“Chieko, Chieko… listen to me, I need you to look at me. Come on, look at me… Look at me, Chieko. Good, that’s it. Now breath, take it easy. We have to move, okay? The guards can come at any time and we need to open all the cells before that happens. You have to help me get the others out, do you understand?”

It takes a moment for Chieko to recover, but in the end she manages to nod, still letting out choked sobs.

“How did you get the keys?”

The voice startles Denki and Chieko clings to his jacket with force, her fear intensifies and contaminates the air around him. When he turns to the voice the alpha is no less than two steps away from him. Denki recognizes him, he is one of the violent ones, one who likes to retaliate from the guard’s bad treatment to the omegas that are forced to live with him. He is not the only one, many of those who have been in the prison for years tend to explode with anyone they have on hand.

The guy is tall and scary, his scent is like gunpowder about to explode. In any other situation Denki would shrink waiting to go unnoticed, but at that moment… at that moment he still feels the soldier’s fingers on his neck, the blow to his cheek hurts and every time he remembers the scent of wood he gets in a bad mood, so instead of tilting his head and submitting, he raises his chin and growls.

“We took them from a guard after burying a knife in his head.”

He turns around before the alpha gets to react and drags the girl with him as they rush to the next cell. The door is opened and when they look out they find another omega girl sitting in a corner staring with terrified eyes at the entrance.

Chieko approaches her to comfort her. Denki looks at them apprehensively, until the alpha from the first cell arrives.

“Remove the chains,” says Denki, pointing to the chained alpha who has gotten up and looks at them suspiciously.

“I don’t take orders from you.”

“Well, then give me the keys and go sit at the elevator.”

The boy growls, he looks even more menacing than usual, and Denki is cursing his big mouth when the blond comes back.

“He’s not here, we have to keep looking.”

Denki takes a breath and points to the chained alpha.
“Tell him to remove the chains.”

The tall alpha stiffens, wrinkles his face and spits. “I already told you I don’t take orders from you.”

“Then give me the keys.”

“Try to take them from me if you dare.”

“I don’t have time for this, goddamn it!” The alpha’s roar startles everyone in the cell. The blond covers the distance to the other alpha and pushes him, hard. “Open the shitty padlock! And when you finish go to the next one! Do you have a fucking problem with that?!?”

His anger makes him look ten times bigger. His anger and his scent, which floods the cell with fire and violence. It is the scent of an alpha imposing itself before another. An alpha ready to fight and kill.

Denki’s stomach shrinks in fear at the confrontation, and it seems that there will be one, because the position of the other grows, his scent thickens wanting to counteract the red presence that emanates from the blond, but in the end he surrenders. The scent surpasses him and his shoulder sink when he submits.

“Get the rest out!” The blond roars with anger. “I don’t want any type of crap! Get on the elevators and then to the upper floors! Don’t allow any guard to request reinforcements, wait until the rest meets with you, is that clear?!?”

Both boys agree, one with a bitter expression and the other with hope painted on his face. The blond turns his back and beckons Denki to follow him, but he approaches the girls who embrace each other while still trembling.

“Don’t go!” Chieko mumbles urgently, grabbing him by the sleeves of his uniform.

“Everything will be fine. Gather the rest of our people and don’t separate from each other. We knows the way to the exit. Let them deal with the guards and keep your eyes open. See you upstairs.”

Both nod and Denki hurries to follow the blond who crosses the door without stopping.

Katsuki curses when the second room results in another unsuccessful search. There are only cells with the smell of shit, two of them tainted with the smell of copulation and the rest full of dirty and hungry bodies. Every time he opens the door and cannot find the redhead his sanity wobbles.

To save time he gathers a group of eight people with the order to open the cells on the other side of the prison and gather everyone on the upper floors, near the exit to the relaxation yard. He is not even ten steps away from them when Katsuki pushes the omega to go to the next room.

He cannot stand still.
He feels clean and new, full of energy, overflowing with impatience. He just wants to go out, run until his heart stops beating unchecked. He has the aroma inside him, filling every crevice of his body. If he closes his eyes he can evoke it with precision, the nuances and the exquisiteness of it. He can almost smell it and feel the warm skin from which it emanates.

He takes note that his fingers tremble, eager to spread and find the source of that scent. **I have to get out.** His stomach roars, not from hunger, but need. He feels intoxicated by **Izuku.**

**Izuku.**

**Alive and safe.** The thought is unsettling. **He’s outside.** And he is wasting time here.

In room number three his mood darkens even more. There are no traces of the redhead, but they find three cells laden with intermingled scents, a couple on the verge of starvation, and a massacre. Katsuki stops at the latter without knowing why. Inside, the aroma of blood and putrefaction are suffocating, he can see that the alpha went mad and shattered his partner before breaking his head against the wall.

Blood smeared on the wall makes him think of Itsuka.

He stays so long there that the omega manages to reach him. As soon as he hears him stop at the entrance Katsuki turns around, grabs him by one arm and drags him to the next door.

“What…! Who…!”

His questions are choppy, filled with agony and hopelessness, but when he tries to let go, Katsuki clings to him more strongly.

“You can’t do anything about it.”

“...are they…?”

“You can’t do anything about it!”

He keeps him close as they inspect the last cells and does not release him while repeating the same instructions as before, but in the middle of his speech he is interrupted by a faint sound, like a distant buzzing, that begins to rumble on the walls.

“What’s that?” Asks one of the alphas.

“Let’s find out.”

Katsuki and the omega climb the elevator in the company of a group of four people, the maximum capacity of the elevator. Upstairs the noise is more pronounced, still indistinguishable, but insistent and annoying.

“Where does it come from?” Someone asks and to Katsuki’s surprise it is the omega who answers.

“It’s them,” he murmurs without a voice, staring at the ceiling. His face is white, his eyes are open and his lips have begun to tremble. His expression full of horror is fixed on him. “It’s the alarm, the emergency alarm is ringing.”

Katsuki looks at him, recognizes the fear in his eyes and does not waste time asking him if he is sure. Instead, he turns to the group and starts barking orders.
“You, go and call the rest. Have an omega show you the way to the upper floors. You guys! Come with me.” Lastly, he turns to the blond omega without losing time. “Gather the omegas, free the rest of the prisoners from this wing. Make sure you send everyone who can fight to the entrance yard. Then go up and wait near the main corridor.”

Immediately afterwards he turns around and runs, followed by the rest of his group.

Upstairs the buzzing of the alarm is even worse. Katsuki wrinkles his forehead, irritated by the shrill scream. In the main corridor he finds a bunch of immobile bodies, all guards covered in blood, surrounded by boys with angry expressions.

“What the hell happened?!” Katsuki roars as he reaches the front row.

“When the group of guards went down the stairs we jumped over them and managed to reduce them, but one of them escaped.”

Katsuki grinds his teeth, ready to explode at them, until he perceives the aroma that comes from the outside. It smells of fresh air, cold wind, wet earth and wet stones.

Rain.

If he pays enough attention he can hear the unmistakable patter of water droplets against the dry earth. The sound moves him back to his home. It is the first time he hears rain in years, for the first time he smells the unmistakable aroma of wet leaves. It is so close he can almost feel it on his skin.

He closes his eyes and inhales until his lungs protest. He remembers.

*Izuku’s finger on his thumb, tracing the outline of his scar. The weight of his body against his. His scent.*

The memory is radiant despite the time elapsed. It has been years since he thought about that day. It hurt too much to think about him.

When he opens his eyes he finds a lot of faces waiting, in each one he finds the same hunger he feels inside him. Freedom.

*I won’t go back to that cage.*

His anger turns into cold determination. His scent thickens around him and as soon as the rest smell it, they straighten up, square shoulders and refine postures. Ready and on guard.

*I’ll ruin this place until none of them are left standing.*

Chapter End Notes

If somebody has any doubts about the memory, it references one that’s on chapter 6: Wistfulness.

And well, we’ve got ‘the prison breakout’ part 1, guess we will see each other soon for part 2~
Next chapter on April 7th.

"A Grey Sky"
A Grey Sky

Chapter Summary

When it rains the sky is grey and the clouds prevent us from seeing the stars, but even then they are still there, waiting for the sunrise.

Chapter Notes

Thank you everyone for the your kudos, comments and bookmarks!! I LOVE reading them and it makes me soo happy to see you all enjoying this story <3 Thank you SO MUCH!

AND HAVE YOU SEEN TODAY’S EPISODE?? AAAAAAA THIRD SEASON HAS STARTED AND IM CRYING BECAUSE MY FAVORITE ARC IS FINALLY GETTING ANIMATED /SOBBS

Those shoulders, Kacchan! (But gods, HIS GIRAFFE NECK on the op PFFFF)

There's another villain joining us today!
Atsuhiro Sako, or more commonly known as Mr. Compress

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rain starts at midnight, without thunders or warnings of any kind. Most of the guards are asleep and only those in shift are aware of the sudden drop in temperature. Hachiro opens his eyes to feel the cold drops on his face, he abandons his post on the wall of the backyard and runs to take refuge. Instead of going downstairs he marches on the wall towards the lookout spot, a circular room with four poles that supports a small thatched roof. From there he can see the inner yards, the orchards, the roof of the stables and the light coming from the soldier’s barracks.

Hachiro removes his bow and rests it against the alarm on the floor, a device that occupies the entire room and its handle is the size of his arm. Although his intention was to go back to sleep, it became impossible because of the wind blowing strongly against the tower; at least he could to sit down back at the wall and get covered from the blizzard, here he had to stand up.

Unable to sleep and too cold to try, Hachiro leans against one of the poles in anticipation of the dawn. At that time there is no one to scold him for distracting himself so he takes his time looking out at the completely dark sky—there is not even single star in sight. At some point Elok’s group came running through the outer yard to the iron door, he listened to the unmistakable squeak of metal as it was opened and then sees the four of them running towards the stairs that descended to the cell.

After a while he hears about Malakay’s group and unlike the previous troop, they do not seem to be
in a hurry to start their activities. He sees them walking on the yards, stopping on each covered area before reaching the deck’s roof, where they stay to curse the rain.

Hachiro cannot see them thanks to the roof that covers them, but the guard post is just above one of the columns that holds the door so he can still hear them.

“Damn it,” says one of them. “I hate the rainy season.”

“Oh, tell me more,” answers someone else. “Traveling in this type of weather sucks. The roads will become puddles of mud that’ll stick to our clothes, we’ll be soaking wet, and any slope could turn into a landslide zone.”

“Fucking hell!” Grumbles a third one, “Can you imagine the trouble it’ll be to take the wagons with the savages? Those things get stuck constantly. We’re going to spend half of the trip pushing and placing logs so that they can cross. We’ll finish with our boots filled up with water and frozen bones.”

“Hopefully everyone of them will stay here to rot.”

“I hate this, the sun has not even come out yet.”

“Damn it, why the hell do we have to check the dungeons?”

“You didn’t know? Malakay lost a bet.”

“What?! My ass is frozen because of that bastard?!”

“Shut up! Here he comes.”

Hachiro looks towards the external yards and he instantly locates the man who runs towards the door, sinking his boots in the ground’s puddles.

“Everything’s ready?” Malakay asks as soon as he arrives. His voice, as Hachiro remembers, is a deep echo. “Well, let’s finish with this shit. We have to do a general inspection at the south wing. We’re separating, each one will check a different room, I want an inventory about those who are still alive, those who aren’t, and those who can be moved. Let’s finish as soon as possible, the captain wants to leave before noon so the best thing right now would be for us to hurry.”

Hachiro sees them moving away from the roof and running through the inner yards towards the entrance. He yawns, he just wishes for the sun to come out so that his shift could finally end.

On the periphery he manages to capture movement, so he turns around towards the shadow and sees a guard running back. ‘What could he have forgotten’, he thinks with boredom until he realizes that the man runs without rhythm, like a cornered animal.

What.

Then he sees them. Behind the guard emerge several more shadows, shadows that stop before the rain. None of them were wearing the uniform.

“EH!” He shouts instinctively, the vociferation rising from him before his brain could processes what was happening.

He heard the echo of the door closing again. Despite the frantic beats of his heart he distinguishes the pin’s noise that return to their place. Hachiro turns to the alarm, takes the crank and turns it. The
sound it produces is so scandalous and sharp that he fears his ears would start bleeding, but that does not happen, what actually happens is that the whole prison wakes up.

“What happened?!”

“I don’t know.”

“Why did the alarm rang? Is it a simulation?”

“No, they say they had escaped.”

“Who? The savages?”

“Who else could it be?”

“Escape? That’s absurd…”

Atsuhiro ignores the gossip and he tries to approach to hear the story a soldier who trembles in front of the captain is telling, his voice has a frantic pitch—the type those who are in shock carry—and the story is dotted with verbal phrases: And then, afterwards…

“How many were they?” Asked one of the lieutenants interrupting the story which causes the boy to be confused and to start over when another person demands to know what happened.

“Enough! The captain shouts. “Enough! We don’t have time to continue with this interrogation. We have a leak and we have to control it. Atsuhiro, gather your men, I want them on the barricade, if any of the savages emerge from the stairs I want them dead. No incapacitating arrows, this time aim at the head or the heart. The only exit that exists is this, we have the door closed so they cannot disperse. The only thing they can do is go out into the inner courtyard, I want everyone to be ready to knock down anyone who sticks his nose out. Ryu, gather a group and have them transfer the excess incense from the store.”

“But it's raining.”

“We won’t use it at the courtyard, I want you to prepare the slings, we’ll let out a load at the entrance. Once it extends into the interior we’ll send a cleaning group. We’ll use the loads to fill the dungeons before going down. We are going to clean up this mess.”

Atsuhiro moves away from the group while the rest shouts "yes, sir" as one person. In a matter of minutes he has half of his group running to bring arrows and the other collecting as many arcs as possible.

At that moment the watchman at the wall shouts:

“They’re outside!”
Hachiro releases the crank and the alarm beep ceases immediately. From his position he can see that the outdoor patio is flooded with soldiers and the mere sight of his companions manages to calm his anxiety. He takes his bow and goes to his post just at the precise moment when a shadow leaves the safety of the stairs and runs towards the rain.

_He cannot escape_ , Hachiro thinks holding his bow, _the door is closed_ , behind the first shadow emerge more of them, as if a dam had been broken.

"They're outside!" He shouts to the sky, fumbling for his bow.

_They cannot get out_ , Hachiro repeats himself by tensing his bow and firing. Immediately afterwards, he takes another arrow and repeats the action. In that fraction of a minute, while knocking down two silhouettes, the shadow that came out first climbs the wall. Thanks to the surprise Hachiro is stunned, he makes the mistake of hesitating and when he tries to reach another arrow he becomes paralyzed because in a matter of seconds he has the shadow within his hand’s reach.

Although he only saw him as a black man, with high boots.

Although he was dressed like him — black garbs, knee high boots — Hachiro immediately understood that he was not one of his own because he did not know of anyone who had bright scarlet eyes overflowing with anger.

[...]

Ochako wakes up when she hears the tinkling of the chains. Instead of getting up, she turns her body towards the source of the noise and tries to catch a glimpse of something between the black veil that covers the entire cell.

"You're going to faint again," she murmurs tiredly as she hears the squeak of metal and the heavy breathing of the alpha.

“I’m… I’m almost done.”

The voice is filled with of incomprehensible energy and it has a rich and thunderous timbre. It is vibrant, clean and thick. Ochako would find it charming if she did not know that she was going to starve in that cell.

Her stomach roars, the sound reverberates in the room causing the noise of the chains to stop.
“Are you okay?” Asks the kind voice.

Ochako has not even seen his face, but she knows, just by hearing his voice, that the boy is nice, energetic and deluded. The last one is what angers her the most.

"We could get out," she says for the hundredth time. "We could mate and gather the strength to face whatever comes."

“We've already talked about this.”

“We've talked about it? Because from what I know you talked, you flatly refused and you've been trying to break that chains off the wall all the time we've been here. And without success for your information. The only thing you have achieved so far is to faint because of the effort. I'm sorry, but it doesn’t seem that we are any closer to leaving now than from the first day.”

“We aren't —"

“Half of the decision belongs to me. Maybe it's the only chance we have. What else matters if they're forcing us, we can keep fighting tomorrow, when we're still alive, when we get out of here, but if we refuse, we'll die here, is that what you want?”

The alpha’s response is a deep sigh.

“You know,” answers the caramell voice. “When I'm hungry I also get into a bad mood, why don’t you drink water to calm it down?”

Ochako snorts. Yes, hunger makes her irrational. The hunger and the aroma, for the alpha smells like saffron. Delicious and thick. Every time she inhales, she sucks in the powerful essence and cannot help but think of the sugary saffron desserts that her mother used to prepare once a year. She remembers that in her house there used to be no money for certain luxuries, but her father always managed to get saffron. They used to call it red gold for its value, they used to associate it with beauty and elegance.

Overwhelmed by hunger, flooded with memories, Ochako shuffles in her place, crushes her knees to her chest and thickens her own scent. The memory of her parents gives her strength, she does not want to die, not here, locked in a dirty dungeon. And if it depended on her, that would not be her end; so even if she has to force things, she will stay alive.

“Don't do that.” The alpha says when he notices the aroma.

Ochako ignores him. The meal is over so it's a matter of time before the guards return.

“Enough!”

She becomes paralyzed by the severe tone, but she does not give up. The alpha can refuse, but it is impossible to resist the aroma. If Ochako forces him, she knows that he will end up yielding. She is so focused on her mission that she does not hear the lock on the door. When she reacts, she panics.

She sits in a hurry, so fast that the ground shakes. At the entrance the light is so bright that she has to squint to see. An alpha enters by jingling the keys and behind him a smaller silhouette with black hair appears.

Unable to resist Ochako screeches.

“Yui!”
The girl pounces on her and Ochako hugs her unable to understand what is happening, but that does not stop the tears from clouding her sight.

“Can you stand up?” Yui asks, detaching herself from the hug.

“Yes, what’s happening?”

“We'll get out and leave.” Answers Yui with a voice that combines fear, joy, panic and hope. “Leave!”

As soon as they move away from the cell Ochako sees omegas hugging huddled near the elevator. When they see her, her companions hug her and she holds on tightly trying not to burst into tears; upon detecting the aroma of saffron she turns.

Her cellmate is tall, beefy and handsome. His red hair rises in uneven peaks, he has large and expressive crimson red eyes, and a beautiful lis flower right at the center of his chest. When he feels her gaze, the alpha looks her way and smiles. A broad and devastating gesture.

“I told you would get out.” Ochako is surprised that this caramell voice can convey so much hope in a single sentence. “Let's fight.”

[...]

Although Katsuki understands that time is against him, he does not throw himself headlong as if he were stupid; even when the alarm fills him with impatience, he allowed himself and others to make mistakes. He takes a moment to interrogate the rest, throw orders and instructions without pause. He does not stop to doubt, he does not hesitate, he does not let himself get scared. He has trained since he was six years old and has spent centuries locked in a cage recreating imaginary scenarios waiting for the right moment to leave. It's time.

After presenting his plan and distributing obligations, Katsuki turns to the group of omegas who chat in low voices.

“I want weapons.”

The blond omega looks at him, nods, then pushes his companions and screams without stopping.

“We’ll bring whatever’s left!”

Katsuki smiles, a feral and hungry smile, immediately afterwards gives orders so that an alpha stays behind to receive the rest. Just at that moment the alarm goes off and only then he moves.

He runs down the stairs and out into the rain. The rain. Cold and fresh The sensation revives his energy, fills him with strength, with it he manages to silence hunger. He runs through the courtyard noticing at once that there are no guards on the wall; as he approaches the wall, he remembers that the first time he tried to climb he scraped his knee because he pushed himself forward instead of upwards. In the end he managed to master it and was able to ascend to a height that doubles his.
It's been a while since he has last climbed, most people would have to practice again to repeat their success, but not him; because even as a child Katsuki could recreate a movement, a blow, an attack, just by seeing it. And this time is not different.

Above.

Instead of waiting for one of the others to boost him, Katsuki jumps to the wall when he is one step away, raises his leg and rests the front of his foot against the wall. He keeps his head up and arms raised, and uses the fulcrum to push the wall down. With his impulse he steps up and repeats the same operation. It's not easy, it depends on his reflexes, his strength and his ability, but now more than ever, Katsuki has no intention of surrendering.

He extends his hands before losing the momentum and grabs the edge of the wall, from there he pushes upwards using the muscles of his arms. As soon as he has the guard in front of him, Katsuki attacks.

[...]

A group of archers, led by Atsuhiro, run down the stairs in an attempt to neutralize the savages at the courtyard, but upon reaching the top they find a handful of them who immediately strike back.

With no chance to advance, and with his group clogging the rear, Atsuhiro pulls his bow away, raises his knife and tries to clear the area. His mission is to clean the top of the wall, install his archers, and kill anyone who is inside the courtyard. He does not expect that the hungry, dirty and young savages would respond with a ferocity bordering on abandonment.

The savage in front of him wears the uniform of a guard, Atsuhiro plans to capture him and interrogate him, but the boy defends himself with overwhelming brutality.

[...]

Denki remembers the tool depot as he runs to the kitchen; instead of accompanying the rest, he deviates to the right in the first corridor he finds. Luckily, the door does not have a lock, and Denki understands why by raising one of the torches to illuminate the room.

The only thing left inside are the sacks with soap for the clothes, several packages with cloth destined to make blankets, fertilized earth, old seeds, splintered clay pots, a barrel of old oil, and other seemingly useless things. Like a bunch of twisted wooden plates.

As soon as he sees them, Denki stops. Two seconds later he is running back down the hall towards
the kitchen.

“I’ve got the knives!” Chieka shouts when she sees him arrive. Behind her the silverware cabinet is wide open with spoons and ladles scattered on the floor.

"Bring the rope too!" He replies, signaling his companions to follow him. "And then meet me at the tool depot!"

Without wasting time, Denki pushes others into the hallway.

[...]

By the time he returns Ryu finds that the wall of the courtyard is filled with savages. The first line of defense keeps them at bay at the top, but there is no doubt that at any moment they will go down the stairs to destroy everything.

Without wasting time Ryu and his team distribute the small tranquilizer bottles among the group of archers who are next to the captain. Usually it is used in darts to carry out individual transfers, but now his team begins to wet the tips of the arrows with the intention of neutralizing all those on the wall.

"Accuracy does not matter!" Shouts the captain, aligning the archers. "With a single scratch it’d be enough! Attack!"

The archers shoot and Ryu begins to prepare the slings with the incense.

[...]

Eijirou is ready to run up the stairs to the upper floors when a small hand stops him. When he turns around he finds his cellmate, small and with big brown eyes.

"Are you really going to fight?" She asks.

“Yes.”

"But you don’t have any weapons."

“We’ll have to improvise.”

“No... The guards store the picks in a cupboard next to the mines’ entrance. If they are still there — "
“Show me.”

The omega detaches herself from her friends and runs down one of the corridors with Eijirou and her group behind.

Luckily for them, the entrance to the mines is closer to their section, so they find the closet almost immediately. With the help of a steel bar and the combined strength of two alphas, the padlock breaks. Inside they find a small room full of worn and old peaks.

Eijirou takes three and runs, along with the rest, following the omega girl. As soon as he goes out into the courtyard, the rain falls on him, paralyzing him. It takes a minute of inspection to see a group of their own at the top of the wall, fighting the guards.

*How did they managed to...*

The answer to his question is three meters away from him where a group of his own people are boosting others to get to the edge of the wall. He immediately notices that those who are propelling are the largest and those who reach the top have a more slender build.

Although the wall is full of their people they have no way to fight against the group of archers that attack from the outside, some fall down the fence with arrows crossing their necks and chest. The rest bend to take refuge behind the half-meter walls.

After handing out the weapons he was carrying, Eijirou prepares himself to return to look for more when he sees one of his people stumble a few steps away from him. Before another wave of arrows falls, Eijirou removes him from the center while his companions leave to look for more weapons.

"Are you hurt?" He asks in an anxious voice. "Where?"

He finds a semi-deep cut along the shoulder, no doubt the result of an arrow that managed to withdraw without problems. The wound does not bleed, it does not seem mortal, but the alpha has closed his eyes and does not respond to his voice. Eijirou finds the arrow three steps away and while examining he notices the faint aroma that comes from the steel tip. Immediately after it he moves:

“Be careful with the arrows!”

He has not even finished speaking when a wave of them rise in the sky towards the courtyard.

[...]

The archers get a crushing victory by firing the first charge. The second one is less effective because the savages in the wall are covered immediately. The third and fourth aim to fall on the courtyard, but it is impossible to confirm their effectiveness because they have no way of seeing the results.

The soldiers on the stairs have retreated after an order from the captain, who organizes them in front of the door, leaving the archers with orders to keep the savages at the top of the wall.

"As soon as they flee into the tunnels, throw incense loads at the entrance!
Ryu's group advances at the rear with their hand slings ready to be used. All the forces of the prison line up near the entrance, waiting to break into the courtyard and force the savages to retreat.

[...]

Squatting by the stairs, Katsuki takes a breath. Thanks to everyone they’ve managed to prevent the guards from taking over the wall, and finally the captain has decided to open the door.

It is exactly what Katsuki wants.

He brushes his wet hair from his face, takes a breath, grasps the knife of the dead guard and stops to listen. He does not need to look at the courtyard to know that the rest of his people have armed themselves and are ready to defend themselves, the only thing they are waiting for is a signal.

“Door!”

Kastuki screams at the precise moment when he hears the iron plates grinding open. He does not even think twice before dropping himself off the wall over the horde of enemies that are entering.

[...]

The captain expects to meet a group of savages violent and suicidal, he expects the screams of anger, but he did not expect to meet a group of savages armed with picks, using old wooden plates wrapped in rope as if they were hand shields. He did not expect the barbarians that fell from the sky.

The two forces collide at the entrance with unexpected power. Many of the first line fall, some crossed by knives, others being hit with mining spikes. Although the attack is tremendous, the captain's men maintain their formation and are soon recovering ground.

It is true that the wrath of the savages is overwhelming, they fight with an obsessive frenzy and a blind despair, but slowly the signs of physical weariness begin to be visible. Hunger, rain, heavy activity, everything is combined and makes the soldiers remember that they’re facing young people, children in some cases, none older than eighteen.

The captain regains his confidence and starts shouting orders without stopping.

“The incenses! Bring the incenses!”

As the rank of soldiers enters through the door forcing their enemies to retreat, the last group with the loaded slings passes through the entrance arch. They are all inside when the counterattack arrives.
One of them collapses when struck by what looks like a cloth ball. When the soldier behind him bends over to inspect the ball, he discovers that it is actually a broken clay pot filled with dirt wrapped in a piece of cloth. He is straightening when one of those things hits him suddenly.

The pot throwers are huddled close to the wall, near the entrance to the cells. A handful of them rotate the projectiles before releasing them and immediately one of his companions gives him another before leaning to make the next one.

The incense bearers collapse either or are forced to retreat due to the bales that fall on them. This counterattack manages to break the soldiers’ formation and the group of armed savages renews their attack without hesitation.

The captain is forced to retreat, he and his men retreat towards the entrance by striking their short swords against the improvised wooden shields. As soon as they manage to take cover under the roof, the captain shouts:

“Archers!”

But before getting an answer, the savages stick to the walls while the rain of arrows falls to the ground.

“AAH!” the scream comes from a savage who dresses with the uniform of the guards, it is a feral, dark and terrible sound, he has not even finished speaking when he moves. He runs to them and immediately everyone follows him, roaring with one voice.

The captain and the rest of his forces retreat with the intention of requesting the help of the archers.

“Shoot!”

Behind their group appear the savages with their splintered shields, at the same time the group that is at the top of the wall runs down the staircase towards the outer courtyard. Cornered on both sides, the archers are forced to raise their swords to defend themselves.

The puddles in the courtyard are dyed red as the sky begins to clear.

Some try to flee, others give up. None of them are granted mercy.
The rain does not stop, the dawn does not bring a blue sky or a bright sun. The world is a dull gray, cold and damp.

Denki closes his eyes as he raises his face to the sky. Next to him, Ochako cries with her knees buried in the wet floor and her hands clutching her body. Her crying, like that of others, is a hodgepodge of happiness, disbelief and pain. Denki knows it because he feels that way too. I could cry and laugh, I could sing and dance, but the truth is that the emotion is so strong that it paralyzes him.

He is afraid to move, afraid to wake up and realize that he is actually dreaming.

“I didn’t recognize you with the uniform.”

He opens his eyes and turns his head towards the voice. The red-haired alpha is there, unscathed, immutable, observing him as if they were friends and he was glad to know that he is still alive. The most amazing thing is his smile, wide, warm and wonderful. It is the same smile he had in the dark cells, but this time, instead of feeling uncomfortable, Denki wants to smile back.

Maybe he does it because the alpha’s response is to approach slowly as if afraid to scare him.

“Your hair’s growing.”

Automatically Denki holds a hand to his head where he notices that his blond locks stick out from between her fingers. When they were together his hair resembled that of a porcupine.

No more mandatory haircuts.
He laughs, he cannot help it. The thought is wonderful. Discounting the handful of laughs that the alpha managed to tear off during his stay in the black cells, it has been years since he has last laughed like that. Years ago something as simple as the length of his hair did not make him happy.

He laughs and suddenly he is crying. The door has opened and cannot stop. He does not know how to do it.

Then he has the alpha in front of him, surrounding him with his arms, emitting that faint aroma of comfort filled with saffron.

[...]

Katsuki does not stop until he has the certainty that the victory has been absolute. He organizes cleaning groups with the intention of going through each barrack to make sure that no one in the prison is left, he sends another group to gather weapons, another to count dead, another to gather the wounded, and another to inspect the outer wall to know if any of the soldiers managed to escape.

Only then does he turn around to go find the redhead. He finds him comforting the blond omega, who straightens up when he feels him arrive. The boy has red eyes and his voice has the characteristic tone of those who have cried, but instead of collapsing, the boy nods in his direction ready to attend his instructions.

Katsuki does not waste time.

“We need supplies.”

“Our pantry is empty,” answers the omega immediately, without stopping with unnecessary question. “There’s only old oil remaining down there.”

“Organize your team, look for the guards’ supplies. There must be something, enough for the trip they planned. We need food.”

“All right.”

“Give me the package.”

The omega takes it out of his pocket and holds it out, then turns to the girl who is kneeling on the ground looking at him with her eyes wide open. The boy manages to lift her up and is ready to push her when she plants her feet and faces him.

“We want clothes.”

“I don’t make clothes, if you want it, then go look for it.”

Before she can say anything else, the boy drags her away. Katsuki turns to the red-haired alpha, who has not stopped shifting his eyes from one to the other as if trying to understand something.

“You’re also wearing the uniform.” It is the first thing he says when the other two move away.
“Don't waste your time with stupid things and tell me what says here.”

He pushes the pack of jars against the other's chest and beckons him so they could take cover under the roof of the entrance of the courtyard. From there he can see the bodies of the fallen, including another group that moves the wounded to a dry area.

The redhead takes the package and unwraps it. He finds five glass vials the size of a finger with their cork stoppers and a small folded note stuck between the jars. When unfolding it begins to read in silence.

“Aloud!”

The redhead obeys.

Hello Eijirou.

So far you’re the only one who has answered. I have no news from Hanta, Rikidou or Tetsutetsu. It’s impossible to say what has happened to them.

Your letter confirms our theory, the incense incapacitates our troops, it’s beyond me, to imagine why none of our spies knew about its existence, but it is undoubtedly an important detail that my father must know. As soon as we learned about it, an ally of ours suggested the possibility of using tissues covered with perfume with the intention of minimizing its effects, your friend Red has tried the theory, but it’s important to know if his success can be repeated for the rest and if it is possible to neutralize its effects completely. With this goal in mind we sent five vials with natural lotions.

The hypothesis we have is that maybe the mint aroma is effective because Red associates it with his home. Maybe that's why it didn’t work for you, maybe that's why it doesn’t work with anyone else. Our suggestion is to find colleagues who recognize some of these scents as family members and try to temporarily resist incense.

The vials contain chamomile, strawberry, mint, jasmine, and the last one is a special elaboration.

The latter contains omega pheromones. The hypothesis we have is that the omega are not affected by incense. Are they present at some point during the application of the incense? If so, has there been any change in the results? If possible we would like them to use the essence to prove the theory that in the presence of the natural aroma of an omega the incense is less effective. Any conclusion you can get from this would have immense value to ours.

Don’t make hasty decisions, Eijirou, my father's troops must be coming. If there was no change in his itinerary, his ships should appear on the horizon at any time. I’m afraid that we can’t stay to continue offering you help, we’ve been discovered and our contact suggests an immediate withdrawal. We’ll leave today, they have told me that they’ll deliver this letter to you in two days, by then we will be close to the coast. As soon as I meet with my father, we’ll send a group for you.

Don't give up.
Ejiro takes a breath, the prince's letter has the dry tone that characterizes him, but he still can read the concern for the rest of his companions. The same that he feels now when he thinks that one of them is dead.

“And what else?”

The question brings it back to reality.

“It's all it says... Hey! What are you doing?”

“I will keep this one,” replies the blonde while taking the the bottle with translucent liquid.

“What scent does it have?”

“IT doesn’t concern you... Does it say anything about how they got the omega pheromones?”

“No, why?”

“Answers.”

“What says here is what you’ve heard, nothing more... besides, those who extract this type of perfume are beta herbalists. They have an excellent sense of smell.”

“Maybe that’s how it is where you come from, but in the south healers make their own lotions and pastes.”

“Really? ...Hum…”

“Whether it’s a herbalist or a healer, where did your prince get it from?”

“There’s a herbalist who serves in the court, maybe he asked him for it.”

“How is he?”

“Like, his character? Impossible. He doesn’t like anyone getting into his garden.”

“Is he old?”

“As a sour pass.”

“Is he alone?”

“He has two assistants, and a year ago he admitted another apprentice.”

“Do you know him?”

“The apprentice? …Yeah, he's an old friend, why are you asking so many questions?”

The blonde does not answer him, he simply looks at the bottle in his hand until finally he seems to make a decision. He unclogs the vial and brings the cork to his nose.

Ejiro inhales and immediately detects the mint aroma with a hint of something he can not identify. It is light, fresh and adorable in its simplicity. As soon as he smells it, he imagines a field in spring,
full of natural and herbal aromas.

“Is there some omega at your home that smells like that?”

Eijirou exhales slowly, wondering vaguely which area of the body has an aroma so rich in contrasts and depth.

“No,” he answer at the end.

The blonde clenches his teeth and growls when he asks:

“Your prince speaks in the plural: We have, our... Do you know who he’s traveling with?”

“I don’t. I’d bet that it's Tenya, the only beta of our group, it could be Hizashi. It’s possible that Aizawa-sensei is also with him.”

The answer gets the blonde to expel the air with force.

“If you are so interested,” Eijirou says trying to calm the environment “I can ask Todoroki-ouji.”

The scarlet look is sharp and firm.

“Once we get to the coast.” Adds Eijirou with a smile.

The blonde smiles. Eijirou begins to get used to that maniac gesture that reflects a carnivorous desire.

“Let's go look out for your prince's army.”

Chapter End Notes

KATSUKI'S FREE!! HOORAY

MORE SWEET KIRIKAMI!! HOORAY

We are now going to shift scenarios, so get ready because on ch 5 we found out that Izuku had more information than Aizawa did: He knew about the adult beta's kidnapping and the drug (even tho' he didn't know exactly what it was).

Izuku had planned everything so he had the highest probability for a safe trip, he took in count every single detail like learning all the maps and the conditions he would challenge, he was not blind through his path and he received Tokoyami's help, who's father had worked at a prison.

It's now time to take all that information back on display and answer them all. Some questions that Shouto made on his letter may have been floating around Aizawas mind:

How is it possible that the government that sent spies regularly didn't knew anything about the drug?

How is it possible that every one of their spies has been captured or had disappeared without any trace?
How is it possible that no one knew about the adult beta's kidnapping?

Do you have any questions of your own? Roquel would be very glad to hear about them! You could suggest your own down at the comments and we may get to know the answer as we read through the future chapters!!

_I really do want to know more about this, because all the blank spaces do leave me waiting for all the answers agshd_

Next chapter on April 14th.

"Check"
Chapter Summary

Where there's pride, ignorance shines—when pride overrules, misfortune arrives.

Chapter Notes

Thank you all SOO MUUCH for all the support the story is getting!! I get soo happy every time I read everyone's comments and I'm sure you all also paint a smile on Roquel's face whenever she passes by to read the comments she get's here!! <3 <3 YOU ALL ARE JUST AWESOME I LOVE YOU

About the title: Check is a move on chess where the king is under attack by at least one enemy piece; in the case of Checkmate if the king can’t move or defend itself then it’s gameover.

(So no guys, this ain’t gameover)

Here’s again a character list with some characters from Ch 10 and other new ones who’ve made their first appearance here~

Tsunagu Hakamata - Best Jeanist

Ken Takagi - Rock Lock

Ryuko Tsuhikawa - Pixie-bob from the Pussycats

Tomoko Shiretoko - Ragdoll from the Pussycats

Yawara Chatora - Tiger from the Pussycats

Shino Sosaki - Mandalay from the Pussycats

Taishiro Toyomitsu - FatGum

Jin Bubaigawara - Twice

Kenji Hikiishi - Magne

Muscular - Masukyura (Since we still don’t know his real name, Roquel is using the romaji of his kanji name.)

<3 Let's jump into the story!
Aizawa stays on deck until Hosu’s shore vanishes. Unable to sleep or to calm down, he spends the following week training Tenya in the customs of the barbarian tribes, forces him to memorize entire maps and tries to appease his born prejudices.

“You must always show respect to their leader,” Aizawa repeats for the umpteenth time while his student twitches in his place.

“I don’t know young Togata’s nature, but it’s important that you don’t contradict him. He’ll not possess the title of a king, but he’s one in the eyes of his people. He deserves the same respect as Todoroki-ou. Don’t make the mistake of belittling their traditions, they’re proud people and they’re not afraid to accept a duel to defend their honor.”

“But their way of life is—”

“Tenya, no.”

The boy nods calmly.

“I will not disappoint you, teacher.”

Aizawa says goodbye to him at the peaks. He watches him go inland while his ship sets course back towards Yuuei. The trip is unbearable, he does not stop thinking, does not stop shuffling theories and every day regrets leaving Shouto behind.

When he arrives at the port he manages to understand that he is too late; the royal fleet is gone and only a handful of ships remain with the mission of patrolling the coast. Aizawa immediately orders the ship to start, but the captain warns that they need at least three days to perform routine checks, refueling supplies, cleaning and other details.

“We're going tomorrow at dawn,” Aizawa orders in a tone that does not allow a reply.

While the captain is in charge of the preparations, Aizawa leaves the alpha pups under the care of one of the officers, he also says goodbye to Hizashi, who is preparing to leave for the south.

“Maybe I should go with you,” meditates Hizashi next to the ship he plans to travel on. “You'll need help to convince Todoroki-ou.”

“Getting reinforcements should be our priority.”

“But all reports indicate that our combat power is superior to Hosu's army, I don’t think reinforcements are necessary. With our Ou travel his personal guards, the Cats were recruited and there will be no plan that Sir Nighteye doesn’t approve. I fear reinforcements will only cause you problems. Todoroki-ou won’t take it kindly that you took diplomatic matters into your hands.”

“If they turn out to be unnecessary I’ll apologize and accept any penance imposed by the king.”

“I still don’t understand, why do you insist on bringing help? ...Are you worried about what young Midoriya said? Maybe it’s not true.”

“That’d make everything easier, but he knew the detailed positions of every village residing at Hosu, the itineraries in their patrols, the trajectory of the commercial ships. No matter how many times I interrogated him I was never able to detect any lies or found any sort of contradictions. His information was solid.”
“Well… then there is an alliance: Hosu and Overhaul.”

“It’s not only the alliance, the boy knew about the disappearance of ships much before us.”

“Shipwrecks are common in the sea.”

“I talked with the captain. It’s been two years since the number increased, there’s not always a storm when the boats disappear, but they do it without a trace.”

“If it’s so unusual, why did no one notify the king?”

“They did. The captain told me that they sent a message to the court over a year ago. They received an answer: The matter was dismissed. A couple of months ago they sent another informative note, and this time nobody took the trouble to answer.”

“Maybe the matter wasn’t part of his priority.”

“Or maybe he never knew about it.”

“Do you mean that there are messages that don’t reach the king?”

Instead of answering, Aizawa takes a breath and releases it slowly. Doubts do not stop fluttering inside him without pause. His dubiety has become a fragile certainty, each day getting firmer and more concrete. In the end he cannot help speaking out loud the idea that does not leave him alone.

“I’m afraid there’s a traitor in the court, one that filters the information we receive.”

Hizashi looks at him with astonishment, his forehead wrinkled at the thought. When he speaks his voice lacks the high and strident tones that characterize him—it is a quiet whisper, full of confusing nuances.

“...that's a serious accusation.”

“I know, and I can’t stop thinking about it. None of our spies knew about the drug, not even a single one. And every time I think about their reports, I realize that they’re almost exact replicas, with enough changes to go unnoticed. The majority lasted less than three months before disappearing. And it’s not just the drug, the kidnappings continue. Our fleet patrols the coasts day and night, the schedules change, the routes are altered, and the slavers still find some way to keep arriving. In addition, the captain confirmed to me that the missing ships have a crew composed entirely of beta men. There are too many coincidences.”

“But we've had victories. We managed to avoid this year's capture.”

“Because the prince ordered the immediate mobilization of the ships. The captain had orders to maintain vigilance in this area. He wouldn’t have moved from there without a direct order.”

“...nobody expected the prince to be there.”

“Everyone thinks he’s resting with his sister at the Night Forest. That was our alibi.”

“Wait, wait, we've had other victories. The attack on the fortress was possible thanks to the spies’ information.”

“Spies that were sent to Kamui, a contact that only I have access to and whose real identity has been kept a secret. Thanks to him we’ve managed to coordinate that attack. Mitsuki and her people managed to get it back, but all the prisoners had long before their doors fell. That was the first contact
we had with the drug, but we never knew about it. Someone made sure to keep that information hidden.”

“Then what, is there some conspiracy going on within the court?”

“I don’t know... there’s either a spy or a group of traitors, but the truth is that someone’s capable of manipulating information records.”

“If a traitor existed, he would’ve tried to end the life of the king.”

"I doubt their attempt would be something as crude as a knife in the back or a piece of poison in his wine. I'm afraid they're leading our king into a trap.”

“The attack on Hosu?”

“Think about it. The king’s travels blindly, unaware of the alliance or the weapon they use against us. If his attack fails…”

“In his absence, Shouto assumes his obligations, all the families of the court are loyal to him.”

“What can a seventeen-year-old king do with his army on the other side of the sea when the enemy troops arrive first?”

Hizashi runs a hand through his hair, still in a state of disbelief.

“Do you think that Hosu's intention is to invade Yuuei?

“Todoroki-ou took his whole army; I left a minimum of men, enough to maintain order, but his right hand, the captain of his guard, the patriarchs of the council, all of them travel with him. If Hosu attacks, while they are away, we won’t have the strength to face them.”

"Sir Nighteye suggested to keep the king here and send Tsunagu with the exact of half the militia, not even one more man.”

“Do you remember who convinced the king to participate in the fight and gather all his men?”

Hizashi looks at him, the wrinkles in his forehead deepened. He swallowed, unable to pronounce the name he had in mind out loud, instead he murmurs.

"Will you be able to catch up to the king's fleet?"

"He's five days ahead of us, but hopefully Sir Nighteye will study the situation before organizing an attack.”

“What will happen if I can’t convince the Council?”

“Yuuei will be left unprotected and if it falls there will be no one to oppose Hosu.”

Hizashi takes a breath with trembling lips.

"Damn it, Shota, I really hope you're wrong.”
Tomoko leans on the railing of the crow’s nest with her eyes fixed on the horizon. It is night, but the light of the stars that reflect on the water allow her to distinguish the shadow that approaches them. She immediately realizes when behind the shadow begin to outline more silhouettes. All looking the same size, sliding across the sea at the same speed.

When she sees the lights twinkle on top of the masts in a pattern she does not recognize, Tomoko screams.

"Enemy in sight!"

Her scream reverberates in the night, warning the crew and their companions to sound the alarm signal. Without wasting time, Tomoko takes her oil lantern, which she keeps burning at the crow’s nest, and turns to the left, where she covers the flame and uncovers it in a regular pattern alerting the rest of the fleet. She immediately receives a response from the nearest ship—a light that flashes, goes out and flashes again. The signal is repeated on another ship and follows successively until all the ships of the fleet answered to its warning.

Without wasting time Tomoko slides on the ropes and falls gracefully on her two legs before running towards the staircase leading to the inside. She goes down to meet the king who is leaves his room without his battle uniform.

“How many are they?” Todoroki asks as soon as he sees her descend.

"I can count two dozen ships, Your Majesty, there is probably more behind.

“Are our men aware?

“The fleet is ready, Your Majesty.”

“Then it's time to fight.”

Tomoko nods, she is about to turn around when the quiet voice of Sir Nighteye rises with the king.

"It may be wise to send an offensive ahead.”

"An excellent idea," Tsunagu adds, materializing alongside the king's right hand. "If our welcoming committee is so small, then it's not worth wasting your time with them.”

Silently and completely motionless, Tomoko studies the environment. Her eyes wander from the king’s impatient expression to the calm and firm face Sir Nighteye bears. Next to them Tsunagu exhibits a relaxed posture, but his eyes betray his nervousness. It is obvious that they are trying to convince their monarch not to participate in battle without pronouncing the request aloud.

“They’re right,” answers a fourth voice with the happy and carefree timbre of those who do not have doubts in their hearts. Jin Bubaigawara, the king's personal guard, taps Tsunagu in the back and offers a confident smile to his sovereign. “Let the pawns in the hands of pawns. I’m sure that His Majesty prefers to conserve his energy for the battle on land.”

"Is that your advice?" Mutters the king with his angry expression.
“A recommendation. When we disembark at the port our men will see their king guide the offensive, unless he prefers to wait on the ship while we clean.”

“We haven’t decided—”

“We’ve come to fight!” Todoroki-ou replies, cutting off the protest from his right hand.

The king moves before them. Sir Nighteye follows him immediately and Tsunagu turns to Jin.

“Why did you have to open your mouth?”

“Hey! I was trying to help. I thought that the idea of fighting in the port would change his mind about fighting today.”

“And how did you plan to convince him not to fight at the ports?”

"Sir Nighteye would’ve devised a plan by then. I just wanted to make time!”

Tsunagu leaves with his teeth grinding. Jin sees them disappear before turning to Tomoko.

“Our king is like a little boy, huh?”

Tomoko tries to keep her expression neutral, she still remembers her punishment the last time she complained about her king, but there’s something about Jin... his smile, the expression in his eyes, the familiarity with which he moves, urging Tomoko to relax.

In the end she gives up and sighs.

“Nobody likes to be banned from things.”

Jin gives her a huge smile, all bubbly and natural.

“You’re Tomoko Shiretoko, right? A member of the Wild Cats. I’ve heard many stories about you. They’ve told me everything about your group and your way of fighting..., they’ve also told me that you’re one of the few friends that Aizawa has.”

“He doesn’t usually socialize with anyone.”

“I know, he's an unfriendly cat, maybe that's why he gets along so well with you... by the way, where is he, huh? I didn’t see him tackle.”

“I’d also like to know.”

“It's strange. I’ve always believed that his intention were to recover his nephew.”

“And it is, but he has obligations.”

“Taking care of our prince?”

“That’s his life.”

“I’ve heard that the prince retired with his sister to the Night Forest, is it true? They’ve not been there for years.”

Tomoko smiles excitedly at the prospect of exchanging news and rumors, she looks around for indiscreet ears and when she finds no one she turns to Jin. She opens her mouth and hears Ryouko
call her from the top of the stairs.

“Tomoko, come here!”

Her body reacts instinctively, she moves towards the stairs without thinking and she has her foot on the first step when she realizes that she has not even said goodbye. She turns her face with the words of goodbye on the tip of her tongue when he meets Jin's expression as he returns to his cabin.

What she sees is incomprehensible. Jin does not smile, his mouth is twisted in a gesture of mockery and mania so alarming that it paralyzes Tomoko instead.

“Tomoko!”

Her feet move alone. Jin's grimace follows her and it's a fixed memory until she sees the black silhouettes silhouetted against the horizon. She immediately assumes her battle mentality and pushes that bad feeling to the bottom of her consciousness.

She will never think of him again.

[...]

As soon as the rain starts, Ryouko curses.

She detests fighting wet, she detests that her hair sticks against her skull and that her bangs covers her eyes. She hates fighting in the sea with the ground that sways and threatens her to fall overboard.

“I don’t see anything!” She exclaims with anger.

“Then open your eyes!” Tomoko shouts at some point to her.

Ryouko grinds his teeth. Tomoko loves the sea, has amazing eyes that allow her to observe the world miles away no matter if day or night, knows how to navigate, loves to climb the masts and sit on the poles to study the blue horizon. She can fight on a ship with the same agility and dexterity as on the mainland.

Ryouko detests her perfection, also abhors her meager sense of self-preservation.

When the first boat approaches, Tomoko jumps towards it with the ropes ready to build a bridge. She does not hesitate, does not doubt. Ryouko curses herself because she is also an alpha but in comparison to Tomoko she feels relegated.

Enticed by her audacity, Ryouko jumps behind her partner and wields her sword without hesitation. With the enemy in front of her she forgets her hatred for the sea and concentrates on the fight. She dodge attacks to right and left, then she hits, uses her sword to cut the soft areas of the body. Blood stains her clothes, but the rain keeps her face clean.

Suddenly she senses a warning scent, dense and compelling, that makes her react automatically. She pulls away when a huge man, with his upper torso covered in dark hair and two horns in a spiral
shape, rammed against her. Ryuoko slides down the wet floor unable to support the leg to get up, but when
the man attacks again, Yawara pushes him sideways, taking advantage of the boat’s shaking to
unbalance him.

The beast man shakes his head, turning the water from his eyes and immediately afterwards focuses
his attention on Yawara. When he charge against him, Yawara leans forward as if he intended to
face his brute force, but just before the collision, when the man bends his horns to skewer him,
Yawara moves. He uses his left leg as a point of support, holds the horns and instead of pushing
forward, turns using the impulse of his enemy to throw his opponent off the board.

Then he holds out a bloody hand.

“We fight in pairs,” he says in his powerful and kind voice.

“Tell Tomoko that, she jumped without permission!”

Yawara laughs.

“Don’t worry, Shino will talk to her!”

Ryouko smiles, shakes the hair from his face and straightens up. She is ready for another round.

The victory is crushing. Hosu's troops fall under the massive and indiscriminate attack of the Yuuei
fleet. The king fights between Sir Nighteye and Tsunaga, roaring every time an enemy falls for his
sword.

The morning reaches them and does the last cleaning.

Yuuei loses two ships in the contest because of the fire, but they get eighteen vessels captured in
good condition, although extremely old, and another ten with meager provisions that end up sinking.
All of the enemy forces are thrown to the sea, the few interrogations they carry out do not provide
more information except for the news that the reinforcements are approaching. The day ends with the
fleet divided into two groups, one of them moves away to port with the intention of attacking the
second harbor.

The king's ship is anchored off the coast. Sir Nighteye decides to postpone the attack with the
intention of preparing the assault, all while waiting for the appearance of enemy reinforcements, but
the king's patience is short and in the end, two days after the sea battle, he gathers his group to
finalize the details.

“Tomorrow early we’ll invade the harbor,” exclaims Todoroki-ou studying the face of each of those
present. “I want my group to be in the first row.”

Nobody dares to contradict him. Not even his right hand—Sir Nighteye tightens his lips—neither the
captain of his guard—Tsunagu takes a slow breath—nor any of the men of his personal escort. Jin is
the only one to nod energetically, as if he were ready for battle.

"I only have one question, Your Majesty," interrupts Jin, smiling with diplomacy. "Who’ll stay to coordinate the forces that we’ll leave protecting our rear?"

"Do you want to stay?" Tsunagu asks with a frown.

“No! I want to fight..., I propose that Sir Nighteye remain on the ship.”

“It's a good idea,” replies the king crossing his arms.

“I’d prefer to accompany His Majesty’s group. I'm interested in inspecting the maps and books they keep here. Maybe it's appropriate that our king—”

“I'm not going to stay.”

“How about Tsunagu?” Jin proposes pointing to the captain.

“No.”

“Well, someone has to stay,” insists Jin. “We can’t leave the ships without a leader.”

“It’ll be your job,” the king exclaims firmly. “You will stay here, Jin”

“I want to fight,” replies the alpha with amazement.

“That's an order. You’ll stay in charge while we are on land. If the enemy reinforcements appear you have the authorization to organize our troops.”

Jin's face contracts with grief, but he assents to his king's orders without saying anything.

"I'll leave Taishiro with you," exclaims Sir Nighteye, suddenly looking at him with overwhelming attention.

Jin looks at him, the smile falters for a moment, but emerges wide and immense like he always does.

“It’ll be the most sensible,” he responds with a neutral tone. “And since your group has a less fighter, I offer you one of mine. Take Masukyura, he is an excellent warrior and will cover the space that Taishiro left free.”

With that, the meeting dissolves, it only remains to sleep and rest for the battle that is coming.

[...]

They disembark early in small groups of ten or fifteen using the assault boats to reach the coast. Once there Tsunagu separates groups, determines objectives and ensures that his army extends along the port with the intention of destroying everything around them.

The Cats are assigned as a reconnaissance group that aims to advance ahead of the king to prevent
any ambush.

"I have a bad feeling about this," murmurs Sir Nighteye as his group steps into the harbor which, curiously enough, is empty.

“It’s normal that there’s no one,” answers Tsunagu without being distracted. “It’s presumably that the majority fled.”

“Let's get this over with. Find the administrative offices after we set fire to everything.”

Tsunagu nods as the rain continues to fall unchanging.

Ryouko and her group arrive at an intersection without having seen anyone, the only thing she can hear is the incessant clatter of water falling on the wooden roofs. Without saying anything they form two groups and separate, alpha and beta fighting together, mixing the strength of one with the intuition of the other.

Ryouko's natural impatience is softened by the calm and stoicity of Yawara. She makes decisions and directs, he supports and offers advice. They communicate through gestures and gentle changes in their aroma.

They have worked for years, getting to know each other in such a way that Ryouko stops when she notices that Yawara issues a warning signal. She does not detect anything, she only hears the delicate sound of the falling water, aspires the aroma of sweet honey and although her eyes wander restlessly she does not distinguish a single threatening shadow.

He signs Yawara and Yawara responds by pointing to his nose. Ryouko wrinkles his brow and inhales deeply. It only smells like honey, delicious and sticky honey. Exquisite in its golden density.

Ryouko releases the air slowly and her body lets out a quiet sigh of calm. It does not even detect the warning scent that Yawara emits. She can only smell the honey, it is so intense that she imagine the sticky feeling at the tips of her fingers.

'Do you also smell it?' She wants to ask aloud, but for some reason she cannot muster the strength to move her tongue. She closes your eyes and inhales the sweet essence until she feels it settle down in her stomach.

The honey resides inside her, covers her completely. She has no strength to move, she does not feel her hands, feet or fingers. She sees nothing. She hears nothing. The world around her is a blank space.

[...]
Tomoko is a force of nature, she is the living representation of a cheerful, enthusiastic alpha, full of energy and determination. Yawara is too soft on her, the beta nature submits too easily. Ryouko's alpha nature always clashes with Tomoko's, they are always competing, they are always pushing themselves to cross limits. The only one capable of keeping her at bay, of making her react is Shino, who does not possess Tomoko's amazing eyes or Yawara's nose capable of separating aromas that others do not even identify. Neither does she have Ryouko's strength or her skill with knives.

Shino is characterized by her mind, her ability to make plans, to observe, to obtain conclusions just by looking.

They are at the top floor of one of the warehouses where they store milk when she realize it. As she looks through one of the windows of the building, trying to stay hidden, she sees them: Endless silhouettes, hiding in the tree line, grouping and preparing to move forward. Her first reaction is to thicken her aroma, to warn Tomoko of the enemy detachment, the second is to find an escape route and return to the king.

She was making a quick count of the number of enemies when she saw that a group separated themselves from the main branch and started headings to where they currently are. Shino moves away from the window with the intention of searching for Tomoko and starting their retreat, but she stops when she sees her companion standing in the middle of the hwarehouse with her arms at her sides.

Without wasting time Shino leans over the railing looking for the threat that has paralyzed Tomoko, but there she found nothing. In an attempt to attract her attention, Shino thickens once again her scent and concentrates on issuing a warning without raising her voice, but it does not work. Tomoko stands still in the middle of the warehouse, without issuing an answer.

Shino aspires slowly, hoping to elucidate the mood of her partner, but nothing emanates from her. The atmosphere smells like milk. Milk and honey. It seems familiar. She distracted herself for a moment trying to remember from where she knew it and then her mind clicks. At that same moment the side doors open and the group of demons rams against Tomoko without her raising a single finger to defend herself. Shino moves.

"Tomoko!"

She runs down the platform and down the stairs, still screaming, but it's useless because she does not react. She does not even fight when an enemy's knife is pressed against her neck. The image paralyzes her. It reacts when the demons scream and signal her.

"Kill her!"

Shino's survival instinct pushes her back, although she can not take her eyes off of Tomoko's fallen body. When the demons reach the ladder Shino reacts, with her eyes filled with tears she turns and runs back to the upper platform. She looks at the window that faces the front, hides her face in her arm and throws herself against the glass window that shatters under her weight.

Shino falls on the roof and rolls to the edge from where she unhands herself, from there stumbles and runs without stopping crying. In her mind the red and bright blood springs from Tomoko's neck.
Sir Nighteye is not superstitious. He does not believe in luck and does not believe in curses. His life is guided by concise, demonstrable and logical facts; and that is precisely why it is extremely painful to admit aloud:

"I have a bad feeling about this."

It is not an admission that he is willing to verbalize without reason, he does it so because he cannot stop feeling like someone is pushing him in that direction with his eyes closed. It does not matter that he has planned every little detail with care, it does not matter that he has considered every possible threat, in his mind there is a small voice that does not stop whispering danger.

The empty harbor is another silent alarm that is added to those that are already ringing inside his head. It is a relief to find the administrative building and while he goes up to investigate with two comrades, the rest watches the surroundings.

While feeling observed, Sir Nighteye looks out the window. On the outside all the men of the group have assumed a defensive position. Tsunagu and the rest form a circle around the king inspecting the surroundings. As everything seems in order Sir Nighteye resumes his search. He repeats the same action a couple of times until he sees Masukyura separate from his column in a furtive attitude.

In an attempt to understand what he is doing, Sir Nighteye directs his attention to the nearest buildings looking for some sign. What he sees is a faint trace of smoke, almost indistinguishable in the rain, gliding towards the king. Curiously none of the guards seems to detect it.

Without wasting time Sir Nighteye opens the window and shouts:

"Fire!"

He turns around and runs outside with his two companions behind. As soon as he is with the king, he inspects the surroundings looking for the source of the fire, but the air does not smell like smoke.

"Do you smell the smoke?"

"S'mok?" Tsunagu asks and there is something weird in his voice, lacking the iron and alert pinch that he usually possesses. Sir Nighteye abandons his frantic scrutiny and sets his eyes on the captain.

"The smoke."

"S'mok."

"Tsunagu?"

It is when he sees his lost expression when he feels that his fateful premonition materializes in front of him.

"Get the king out of here!" He pushes his two beta comrades to move. "Now, hurry!"

The laughter he hears at that moment makes him shudder from head to toe.
"I'm sorry, but I want an audience with your sovereign."

Sir Nighteye clenches his teeth, wields his weapons and screams.

"Everyone with me!" He runs to close ranks in the street. "Protect the king!"

Half of the group remains motionless and the rest are beta men who rush to obey while Sir Nighteye's aides drag the king's heavy, immobile body back to the ships.

[...]

Shino runs in the rain without stopping thinking about Tomoko and the blood flowing from his neck. She is so absorbed that she collides with Yawara and rebounds, landing on the ground.

"Shino!"

When she hears his voice she feels the fear gripping her stomach without mercy, but instead of sinking and crying, Shino takes a deep breath and concentrates.

"It's a trap! ...We have to warn the king!"

"Where's Tomoko?"

The question unleashes anguish, spreads around them carrying the air with despair, agony and sadness. It is enough that Yawara detects her pain and then imitates it by reflex.

"Come on."

Yawara helps her get up and together they go back to the coast. Only then Shino notices the body that her partner carries on the right shoulder. From there, Ryouko swings like an empty sack, her eyes are wide open but her expression is blank.

Shino remembers Tomoko, she clenches her teeth and accelerates her pace.

[...]

Tomura laughs as he fights and savors the adrenaline that runs through his body. What improves his humor is that his opponent does not fear him, his enemy looks at him with his judgmental eyes, full of anger and aberration.

Tomura mocks him, laughs when he hits him, and laughs when he spills his blood. He entertains
himself in such a way that he forgets that his mission is to capture the king. By the time he remembers it he has his enemy bleeding through the wound in his chest while his men finish cleaning the area by cutting the neck of all the savages who remain immobile.

"Oh just look at you," he murmurs in mock disappointment as he watches the beautiful blue hyacinth that sits on his enemy's temple. "You made me miss my date."

"How can you...?" The man on the floor gasps, holding the wound in a vain attempt to stop the bleeding.

"I do it with pleasure."

"Who are you?" The puddle at his feet has begun to turn red.

"The one who will destroy Yuuei."

"You won't win..."

"Oh, really?" Tomura laughs, "Because if you payed attention, you'll know I already did."

The savage moves, tries to reach his sword, but Tomura kicks it out of reach. He squats next to him, takes out his knife and buried it under the skin of his cheek, ignoring the savage's cry of pain. Tomura traces the contours of the flower that is born in the right temple and extends over the eye.

By the time he finishes, his hands are covered in blood, but in them he holds a piece of skin where the blue hyacinth flower is clearly visible.

...[...]

Hosu's attack is devastating. The scattered troops along the coast face an invisible enemy. No alpha is aware of the attack, they all remain paralyzed, wrapped in the aroma of honey and milk, unable to resist. The troops lose their captains and more than half their strength. The betas, immune to incense, are ambushed, outnumbered in men and information; many escape, they flee back to the coast, unable to understand what is happening.

...[...]

Shino and Yawara find the king's group, or what's left of it, staggering down the main street. Immediately Yawara pushes to Ken, one of the beta that loads with his majesty, gives Ryouko to him and he himself is in charge to raise to the king on his back before undertaking the way towards the
coast.

"Where's Sir Nighteye?" Shino asks what Ken shakes his head unable to say a word.

They are about thirty paces from the nearest boat when they hear a voice behind them.

"Hey, wait."

Shino turns to welcome Masukyura who is advancing towards them.

"What are you doing here?" Shino asks, scanning her surroundings in search of his troop. "Where are the others?"

"We've got separated." Masukyura answers, stopping in front of Yawara. "That looks heavy, let me help you."

Yawara hesitates, a fraction of a second, and immediately thickens the scent around them with a warning that Shino immediately grasps. Masukyura also detects it because he moves quickly, without hesitation, wields his dagger and launches himself against Yawara.

Shino is on him the next moment, but the strength and reflexes of the alpha is amazing. Shino does not manage to dodge the elbow that breaks her nose, but she hears Yawara's roar of fury and when she manages to shake off the pain she sees the two fighting in a fierce way while a beta drags the unconscious king towards the ships and Ken returns after leaving Ryuoko at the ship.

When Shino approaches she discovers with horror that Masukyura's dagger protrudes from the king's back, sunk to the hilt. She is about to bend over and help when Yawara's scent of urgency catches her attention.

Shino runs to where Masukyura is pressing his knee against Yawara's neck. With her nose throbbing with pain, Shino pounces on the back of the alpha and holds him by the neck with her arm exerting force backwards to force him back.

The strength of the alpha is immense, with one hand holding her hair and with the other holding her arm; he tightens his wrist until Shino screams from the pressure on her bone. However, the distraction works because Yawara manages to push his body, moves the knee that presses his neck and pushes Masukyura aside, then throws a punch that the alpha avoids when throwing Shino against her partner.

Without wasting time both rearm their defensive posture by standing in Masukyura's path towards the king.

"You will have to die, betas." Murmurs the alpha getting ready to fight.

"And they will," another voice murmurs.

A thin man with light skin and blue-washed hair approaches them from the main road. Shino studies him intently, trying to identify him, but her eyes stop at the piece of skin in his hand.

"Is that...?" She cannot help saying and the stranger laughs.

"Oh, yes, it's another piece for my collection. I think I'll add yours. I like the catnip flower you have on your cheek."

Before Shino replies, Yawara issues a subtle withdrawal signal. Masukyura detects it, but he reacts
slowly because he is not used to their signals. They run towards the boat that moves away from the coast. They splash with water up to their knees until they manage to board while the blue-haired man laughs out loud.

"We need a doctor!" Taishiro shouts as he helps transport the king to his quarters.

Jin watches him go away with the king’s group of personal healers, he observes with indifference the trace of blood left in his path and directs his attention towards Ryouko, motionless and with her eyes open, who is also being transported indoors. Finally, he focuses his attention on the rest of the group: Yawara tries to recompose Shino's nose and Ken seeks to overcome his stupor. Jin tries not to let the disappointment show on his face.

"Where are the others?" Taishiro asks when he returns to the deck.

"How's the king?" Jin asks modulating his tone of consternation.

"The doctor's with him. I didn't stay long to listen to a diagnosis. Where's Sir Nighteye?"

Ken Takagi answers. "He stayed to defend our rear."

"And Tsunagu?"

"He was with him."

"How did they ambush them?"

The question is for Shino who has her head between her knees, struggling to control the pain.

"They betrayed us," she raises her bloody face and looks at him with anger. "Masukyura ... the bastard was with them!"

"What are you talking about?" Jin asks, containing the urge to growl.

"It was him who stabbed the king! It was him who attacked us on the coast! Everything was a trap! ...They wanted us inside the harbor."

"What happened?" Taishiro intervenes.

"I don't know. There was something in the air. It smelled... it smelled sweet. Like honey, but it wasn't the same. I smelled like my sister... like when she was... when she was about to have my nephew ... It smelled like an omega."

"There were omega prisoners helping the enemy?" Jin asks calmly.

"It wasn't natural," Yawara intervenes. "It smelled like honey and milk, but I was also able to detect the aroma of poppy and valerian. Both were faint, imperceptible at first... but their effect was
immediate. As soon as Ryouko breathed it in, her body lost its defensive posture, I saw her relax, and the more she breathed, the less she stopped moving, until she stayed still, she didn't answer when I tried to call her."

"Tomoko," the name breaks on Shino's lips. She takes a deep breath and tries again. "Tomoko also reacted the same. She remained immobile. She didn't rebel, not even when the demons went to her."

Yawara kneels beside her and rubs her back with affection.

"The same thing happened with the king's party," mutters Ken, hunched over in his place, looking at his bloody hands. "It was Sir Nighteye who ordered us to drag Todoroki-ou back to the ships. The king... the king didn't move whatsoever. We had to push him while Sir Nighteye organized the defense on our backs. "He raises his eyes and lets his eyes wander from the Cats to Jin and back. "How can they... how did they managed do that?"

"They neutralized every one of the alphas with that aroma," commented Shino, looking at Jin and Taishiro.

"We don't need any absurd conclusions." Answers Jin raising his hands;

"It's not absurd! Ryouko, Tomoko... and the king!"

"It's still a guess," says Jin before turning to Ken. "Were there any alphas obeying Sir Nighteye's orders?"

"I dont know... everything happened so fast."

"There you have it," Jin says, looking at Shino. "Maybe it's a coincidence."

"Coincidence?" Growls Shino as she stands up.

"It's something we have to investigate."

"Do you plan to send more troops?"

"Our mission was to disable this harbor."

"Ordering an attack without knowing what that thing is is stupid!"

"Stupidity is to wait for a counterattack!"

"Why don't you blindfold us and throw us overboard?! It'll be faster!"

"Don't be absurd! You'll do what I say!"

"You are not my king! I don't owe you obedience!"

"I am in charge and I have orders to comply!"

"You are a fool if you don't listen to what we have told you!"

"Enough!" Taishiro interjects and looks at them harshly, imposing himself. "Both of you. Our priority at this moment is the king. We have to go back."

"We can't go back," interrupts the healer who comes to join them.
"What's the diagnosis?" Jin asks.

"I'm afraid the knife pierced the lung, but since Todoroki-ou is under deep sedation, I have no way of confirming it."

"What kind of sedation?" Taishiro intervenes

"I don't know, his body doesn't show visible signs of stress or pain. He doesn't react to our questions, his heart rate is very slow, and that's what has kept the blood loss to a minimum, it also stopped the spreading of the poison, but..."

"Poison?"

"We have extracted the blade and by the smell we can affirm that it was corrupted, we still can't identify the composition. We'll have to monitor his condition for a couple of days."

"We can't stay here."

The king won't survive the return trip. We need him to regain consciousness, I need for him to be out of danger before considering submitting him to the stress of the journey."

"Okay," Jin exclaims taking control. "We'll wait."

"We have to send a patrol to look for others," Shino exclaims. "We have to warn them of the danger!"

"I'll go," announces Taishiro. "I'll bring them back."

"Very well, Shino and Yawara will go with you."

"No," says Shino. "We'll stay with the king. It's our obligation."

Jin is ready to protest when Taishiro intervenes.

"It's for the best. I'll take five escort ships and we'll go for them. Shino, you'll stay with the king, but remember that Jin is in charge, it's your obligation to obey him."

Shino nods stiffly. Jin says goodbye to them and leaves to distribute obligations.

[...]

Aizawa's ship crosses the sea at an impressive speed. The winds are on his side and they get to travel the sea in just ten days without having to face any serious storm. Unfortunately, they arrive too late. His ship raffles the escort ships until it stops next to the real ship, as soon as Aizawa jumps to the deck Shino intercepts it.

"Where were you?!" Replies the woman with a swollen nose and black eyes.
Aizawa is surprised to see her, but her urgency is even greater.

"I have to talk to the king."

"Todoroki-ou is unconscious," replies Jin appearing next to him. "Where do you come from?"

"And Sir Nighteye?"

Shino takes a breath and explains it to him. Two days have passed, but her voice is still breaking when she talks about Tomoko, when that happens she takes a breath and resumes her story immediately. She talks about the battle, about the smoke with the smell of omega, about the loss of the right hand of the king and the captain of his guard. She explains that only the patriarchs of each family of the court that Taishiro tries to reach remain of the royal council.

"A small fleet of ships attacked us yesterday," Shino concludes with his controlled voice, "but we managed to repel it. We had to get away from the port to avoid being cornered."

"I've arrived too late."

"Where's the prince?" Jin asks sternly. "Your job is to keep him safe."

When thinking of Shouto, Aizawa reacts.

"I need a ship, I need Shino and Yawara to come with me."

"Why?" When Aizawa tries to divert the conversation, Jin straightens up. "The king left me in charge, that means that I am responsible for his son. You have an obligation to tell me what you've been doing and why the prince isn't with you."

Aizawa looks at Shino who nods stiffly. Despite his reluctance, he tells them about the rescue of the alpha puppies, the hijacking of beta boats, the existence of the drug and the alliance between Hosu and Overhaul.

"Who told you this?" Jin asks in a tense voice.

"That doesn't matter now. Everything that's been said has turned out to be true. Including Masukyura's betrayal, although I didn't expect it to be him," he says, staring at Jin.

"Where is the prince?"

Aizawa is silent.

"You'll tell me now or I'll take your silence as an affront to the king himself." When the silence is prolonged, Jin swings his head in an attempt to relax his muscles. "Bring the captain."

Jin's authority over the beta crew is absolute because at his command two men leave the deck to fulfill their mandate.

"Hold him." He orders later and another group of guards cling to Aizawa who tries to move away. "Don't let him intervene."

As soon as the captain shows up in front of them, Jin prevails.

"I am Jin Bubaigawara and at this moment I am the highest authority that exists below the king. You will tell me exactly what you did from the moment your ship left the port for the first time."
The captain takes a breath and tells him. As soon as he finishes talking, Jin starts to laugh. He calms down enough to take a breath.

"I'm sorry, but the idea is hilarious," says Jin, staring at Aizawa. "You're saying that our prince, the heir to the crown, is in a hostile land, in the hands of a suspect who could well sell him to our enemies to recover his position? And you allowed it to happen?"

"Kamui is trustworthy, as long as Shouto listens to his recommendations he'll be safe."

"I wouldn't put my faith in one of them. Guards! Lock him up."

"What are you doing?" Shino protests furiously.

"He's put the life of our prince in danger! Shota Aizawa, I remove you from your obligations until you can confirm that your imprudent actions have not resulted in the death of our prince."

"You can't do this!" Shouts Shino.

Jin ignores her. "If the prince dies because of you, I'll make sure your punishment is exemplary."

"You can't do this," Aizawa says with all the authority he possesses as the guards drag him into the cellar.

"The king won't forgive you," says Shino.

"When the king wakes up, he can give his opinion on this matter."

But that same night Enji Todoroki, sovereign of Yuuei, dies; and almost at the same time a black crow flies from the ground to the stern of the ship. Jin caresses its plumage and places the message in the bag of its leg. The note is a piece of rolled paper that says:

*The king is dead and his heir walks around Hosu.*

Jin stays there until the bird loses sight without ever stopping smiling.

Chapter End Notes

We now have answers to several questions and the consequence of Yueei's assault. This is the first chapter (and most likely will be the only) where our protagonists don't appear at any time, but without a doubt everything that happened here affects them.

Yuuei has a monarchy where the first alpha of the family becomes the heir to the crown. Shouto is the king's third descendant, but he's the first alpha so now, after his father's death, the crown belongs to him. We don't know where he is or where he's going, but I'm afraid that enemies will soon start looking for him.

And now, Katsuki and his group can't count on anyone looking for them, since Jin has orders to keep Yuuei's troops still. Something to mention is that Katsuki doesn't know that Izuku is there, he knows he's still alive, but it didn't even pass through his mind that someone would be so foolish to bring an omega to enemy land, so for him Izuku is far
awar, his concern now is to get out of there and go look for him.

And something to comment about: The incense used at the prisons is the lighter version because it's used in closed and controlled spaces. The incense that's designed for adults has a much higher density and consistency; its effects have been tested in closed spaces, outdoors and in the rain - In all cases it's unavoidable.

The war is progressing very quickly and Yuuei doesn't start it on a very good footing.

Next chapter on April 17th.

"Myosotis"
Myosotis

Chapter Summary

Myosotis is a flower commonly known by the name of forget-me-not, the flower of desperate love or eternal love. It is a flower with the shape of a pentagram, and it has five blue petals that grow around a yellow center.

Chapter Notes

New chapter so soon?! It's a compensation after the tragic chapter we recently had. It must've been so easy to get lost in the middle of the many unfamiliar names (I remember I accidentally swapped Best Jeanist and Twice's names lmao), so I hope this chapter manages to bring at least some peace of mind.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There are customs, traditions, that are lost as time passes; some are forgotten, others are transformed into something completely different. Few are those that survive the passage of time.

In the islands there are many traditions. One of them is that at the age of twelve the young alpha are sent to train for four years in nautical matters. The intention is to teach them to navigate, to recognize currents, how to face a sea serpent and survive in storms. Since fishing is Kohei's main commercial activity, every alpha, even those who decide not to become sailors, must have basic training at sea.

One of the traditions that has fallen into disuse is the delivery of the myosotis flower. Many years ago, when the young alphas were preparing to leave for their training at sea, some used to give a flower of myosotis with the intention of establishing a commitment to courtship. The flower was a question in itself.

"Will you wait for me?"

The tradition dictated that the alphas would climb the mountains in search of the flower, which grew on high ground, at the home of feathered serpents. The task itself involved a trip of several days, it was in turn a demonstration of the kind of commitment that the suitors were willing to offer, and of the dangers they were willing to face. The risk was high and many returned with open wounds, so the adults in the village tried to change the tradition. It took time and effort, but eventually it became customary to offer a seashell, much easier to find and of longer lifespan.
In the spring that Katsuki turns twelve, the tradition of the flower of myosotis is a distant memory, unknown to most, remembered by a few.

Every day Katsuki gets up early and walks the beach looking for a perfect seashell. None of those he finds meet his standards, so the boy returns with a bad mood for breakfast.

Izuku is waiting inside, sitting at the dining room table, chatting animatedly with his mother.

"Have you returned?" Mitsuki asks with a mocking smile that makes him angry.

"If you're talking to me, it's because I'm here," he growls between his teeth as he drops into the chair next to Izuku.

"Did you find it?" Mitsuki asks with that tone of voice that indicates that she knows what he has been doing.

Katsuki looks at her and growls.

"Shut up."

"You've been trained since very early, Kacchan."

"It's not your business, Deku," he replies while his father serves him.

He eats with his head glued to the plate while his mother makes Izuku laugh, he listens to him chatting about the new remedies he has obtained and how excited he is to accompany his father to the capital in search of ingredients. Katsuki keeps his mouth shut and entertains himself with his meal until everyone has finished and Izuku says goodbye.

"I'll come back when you finish your training, Kacchan."

"Hm."

Izuku smiles nervously and leaves. As soon as his footsteps are not heard anymore his mother turns and looks at him with raised eyebrows.

"If you treat him like that, he'll not accept your seashell."

"Haah?!" He drops his spoon violently and straightens up to face his mother. "Shut up!"

"It's just advice, don't be a jackass with the person to whom you're going to offer a seashell!"

"Advice!?!" He jumps out of his chair and points "Why would I want advice from someone who didn't give my father a seashell?!"

"Who says - ?"

"He doesn't have one! I know!"

"Because I gave him - !"

At that moment his father intervenes. His scent floods the house, dense, calm, filled with tranquility. Katsuki sees his mother inhale deeply, he witnesses how the aroma calms her, sees her lose the stiffness in her neck and her pupils calm down.
Against his will, Katsuki stops feeling violent.

"It's late," says Masaru, looking at them firmly. "And the teacher should never be late."

Katsuki leaves his house without saying goodbye, he does not even wait for his mother because he knows her, as soon as he arrives at the training zone he begins with his stretching exercises. The rest of his companions imitate him and when his mother arrives, twenty minutes later, they are ready to train with short swords.

The training manages to calm his anxiety, but in the end he feels it again, even more intense and suffocating than before; while he is helping his mother to collect and store all the materials he cannot help but ask her.

"What did you give him?"

His mother does not even pretend not to know what he's talking about. She bites her lip, keeps silent and seems to have an argument with herself.

"A flower of myosotis," she confesses quietly as they walk back home for their afternoon meal.

"A what?"

"They call it the forget-me-not flower," his mother replies before telling him about lost ancient traditions and their meaning.

That afternoon Katsuki eats in silence, in the afternoon he accompanies Izuku to swim and sits with the alpha around his age who spend hours talking about seashells and prospects. That night, after dinner, when the whole house is under a blanket of silence and darkness, Katsuki gets up to rummage through the kitchen.

He freezes when his mother's scent appears through the door.

"You'll need more food than that."

Katsuki does not move, he has a bag half full with dried fruit and bread in his hand.

"I can make a map," she adds as she pulls out a chair to sit down, placing her lamp on the table.

"No," his voice, although faint whisper, manages to convey his reluctance.

Instead of becoming indignant, his mother smiles.

"That's what I said." She rests her chin on her hand as if the situation is funny. "Our family has maintained the tradition for years. My mother went to look for it, and before her, her father. It seems that we like challenges. Your father made me promise that I wouldn't let you go, but I can't forbid you if I don't see you, right? I'll distract Izuku while you are away."

She gets up quietly and leaves, leaving her lamp for him.
"Kacchan!"

The scream is full of emotion, of happiness, when he raises his eyes he finds Izuku running towards him, but he stops abruptly at an arm length away and wrings his hands anxiously.

Katsuki remembers how touchy Izuku used to be when they were little, but he cannot remember when he stopped the habit. Maybe since that time at the forest, when they were trapped in the rain.

Sometimes Katsuki dreams of going back to that day.

"You're back, Kacchan! Where did you go?!

"Stop screaming, Deku."

"I'm sorry, but you left without saying anything... and your mother didn't want to—"

"Did you talk to my mother?"

"I went to have breakfast at your house as usual and your mother told me many stories: The first time she won a tournament, how excited she was when she left to train, the first time she faced a sea serpent, did you knew about the time she gave your father a blue flower to court him?"

"She told you about that?"

"Yes! I didn’t even know that used to be a tradition!... "

Izuku prattles on about the blue flower and about his parents, until Katsuki gets fed up.

"Come," he orders and Izuku silences himself at once. They move away from the village to the dense area near the beach "What did my mother told you about that blue flower?"

Izuku smiles and repeats the same story that Katsuki knows; while listening to him, Katsuki tries to contain his anxiety. He has a knot in his stomach and his hands do not stop sweating, he feels like running and screaming.

He stops suddenly and Izuku imitates him. For a long time neither of them says anything, Katsuki is sure that Izuku can detect his impatience and anxiety, but refrains from saying anything.

In the end he manages to gather enough courage.

"I'm not going to give you a seashell, Deku," he says, swallowing the ball of nerves that has stuck in his throat. When he sees Izuku's displeased face he feels his stomach melt into bubbling acids. "I'm not going to cut a flower for you either, those things die."

Izuku pales, nods and is about to open his mouth and ruin everything when Katsuki takes him by the elbow and makes him cross through the row of bushes that covers the clearing. He drags him to one of the trees in the area, and forces him to squat down next to him. Shoulder to shoulder, leg to leg.

"Here we will plant a field."

The 'if you want to' is implied and Katsuki does not waste time vocalizing it. In his place he contemplates Izuku's expression, who observes the three buds of newly planted blue flowers, each one with three equal flowers and small buds that promise to open soon.
Those green eyes study the petals with an obsessive attention, they go through the shape of the leaves, the petals, the thin stems, then they turn towards him and Katsuki experiences, not for the first time, the electric waves that shakes him from head to toe.

Izuku has immense, dark green eyes like wet moss. They are bright and deep with an infinity of thoughts behind.

"I'm going away, so I'm not going to give you a flower that will be dead by next week," Katsuki repeats, wanting to drown in the green well that is Izuku; he moves next to him, putting pressure on his shoulder. Still looking at him he points to the flowers. "So we'll plant a field. You'll be able to come every day. They'll expand throughout this area and whenever you see them you'll remember... when you see them you'll think..."

He cannot verbalize the end of his speech.

Yet he does not need to do it because Izuku smiles at him, a beautiful smile, exuberant and delicate, all cheeks and happiness.

"I'd remember you even though I didn't have a single blue flower, Katsuki."

And when he hears his name he feels that something blossoms inside him, it is warm and immense. Extraordinary.

But that's until Izuku loses his smile and Katsuki finds out why. There, in front of them, a man with purple skin, white hair and a malicious smile materializes. A man who rams towards them, destroying everything in his path.

Katsuki wakes up with a start, his body is covered in cold sweat and he cannot control his breathing. It takes a moment to shake off the feeling of emptiness and bitterness.

If only…

If he didn’t…

He shakes his head and forces himself not to sink into the sea of guilt that ate him away during the first years. Instead he leaves the bed and goes out into the yard. The prison remains silent, most of them asleep, gathering their strength to start the journey at dawn; a small group stands guard, but he tries to ignore them.

The rain has turned into a light drizzle so Katsuki takes to climb the battlements to look at the moon. He leans against the railing, wraps the perfume bottle between his hands and places it against his lips.

Within him impatience is stirred, his desire to go out, to seek the prince of Yuuei, to question him about the perfume, but he knows that he must not make mistakes, he cannot go wrong. Izuku is at the other side of the sea and he has to find him.
It has been more than four years, but he still has a promise to fulfill.

*I'll be back, I have to go back.*

And somewhere, high in the mountains, a small blue flower with five petals flutters in the wind. *Will you wait for me?*

Chapter End Notes

And now guys, I officially declare to you that we are *halfway through the story*!

This chapter, even though short, had two main goals: *One*, to establish the start of the second part of the story and *two*, to make up for the monster that ended up being the previous chapter. To everyone who had the strength to comment after that, thank you!

This is the memory Izuku isn’t able to remember; it appeared on the first chapter and it has been repeated a couple of times, but unfortunately the horror of the abduction provoked Izuku to block his memory. It will eventually come back to him, but for now Katsuki remembers it.

Oh, and I totally agree on this with Roquel: She’d like to think that even with all that bravado that exist in Katsuki, not even he himself would be immune to the nervousness, the anxiety, the uneasiness one feels when confessing for the first time. Does anyone remember what it was like?

Next chapter on April 28th.

"In the Land of Hosu"
In the Land of Hosu

Chapter Summary

Under the sky, soaked, cold and hungry, I prefer it a thousand more times than to live under the ground behind black bars.

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody!! It's been some time and I'm so glad I was able to finally post this chapter!

I'm very sorry for the lateness, I've been very busy with exams and I still got pending some school-related projects, weh...

I thought I would have this chapter ready by April 28th with two weeks for translating, compared to my prior one-week schedule, but well, I thought wrong.

Still, thank you soo much for your patience and here you go, enjoy the chapter~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

From afar, the caravan seems to be a group of ordinary soldiers: Six wagons guided by riders covered in black, a troop of soldiers up front, on the flanks and in the rear, all dressed in their unmistakable army uniform and covered with thick layers specially made to travel in the rain.

But up close and under a more detailed examination the differences are easily exposed. At first the soldiers advance without the coordination that characterizes the militia, there are no formations, there are no ranks, there are no superiors riding and supervising the caravan. In second the soldiers have problems handling the beasts of load that seem to always choose the smoothest route, where the tires of the wagons finish sinking, that makes clear that the troop do not know the zone.

Despite their difficulties, the group does not move blindly. They have soldiers in the flanks studying the surroundings in search of threats, every so often they send small outposts in three directions with the intention of choosing the most accessible route, at night they make guard rotations to avoid surprises or ambushes, and the most important of everything is that they have explorers cleaning the area through which they pass.

So no, they are not a group commanded by an army captain, but they certainly have a leader who guides them.

Togaru has been two days after them since he crossed the group on his hunting day. At first his intention had been to hide until he lost sight of them, he knew that if they found him there would be many questions and he preferred to avoid them. That was before he understood that the caravan was made up of people who were not originally from the area.
Now Togaru is trying to guess if the troop has been sent by the General himself.

As he has the advantage of knowing the region, knowing where the best camping and hunting areas are and having all the possible shortcuts, Togaru has no problems finding hiding places where he can observe the group as they advance. He always moves through the high zone where the trees are thickest, far from their explorers and their hunting ground.

For almost three days Togaru attends the same routine: the wagons move slowly along the muddy roads, sometimes the wheels get stuck and the group gathers to help, they rest three times a day, the first ones are short stops to eat and to de-stress the legs, the last one is at dusk where the whole camp is installed. They light fire in the rain and soon the patrols spread around while the rest of the group sleeps. The next day the routine starts again.

Togaru gets bored, he was seriously thinking about turning around and leaving, until he gets to see the leader's face.

Among many hooded people it is difficult to follow the group leader's trail, the guy is in constant movement and only distinguishes himself from the rest when he starts pointing and everyone moves to obey. Togaru has lost the hope of identifying him, luckily for him, the rain stops on the third day and the whole caravan welcomes the sun.

Perched on his tree Togaru leans over the branch with his eyes on the leader, who begins to mobilize the rest. Around him many have begun to discover themselves, but he keeps giving orders without showing intentions to imitate them.

'Come on,' Togaru thinks anxiously. 'Take off your hood, who are you? Dabi? Shigaraki?'

When the leader finally discovers his head, Togaru blinks confusedly. The guy is too young and does not have the strong and broad constitution that characterizes all the captains of the militia; his face is pale, like white milk, he has no horns in his blond hair or any other characteristic sign.

Then the leader of the group imitates the rest and strips naked to wash. As soon as he removes his overalls from his uniform, Togaru sees it.

The red flower just above his heart.

Shit.

Togaru's body shakes with fear and his hands fly towards his things, in two beats he arms his posture with his bow tense and ready to shoot. It stops when it manages to process that the leader is not the only one. All the men around him exhibit a flower on his chest, shoulders, or back.

An assault troop.

The enormity of the situation shakes Togaru. He has seen the ships on the horizon and knows that the savages have arrived for the war, but he is surprised to see a group of them so far from the coast.

'How did they get here? Where did they get those uniforms? Where are they going?'

That last question makes him react. No doubt the assault troop intends to clear the area, perhaps they intend to attack the villages by posing as army guards.

'I have to warn the Colonel. We have to prepare an offensive line. We have to expel them from our
Togaru studies once more the leader of the savages, leaves his tree and runs straight back to his home.

Nightmares have accompanied Denki since he lost his home. Sometimes he dreams of his mother bathed in blood, sometimes he remembers his father withering in his bed, but most of the time he dreams of the dark cells, about the first time they took him there, the fear and terror of losing his bandages. He dreams about the hands of Nubia and with her empty rug. He dreams that he falls down a well and wakes up feeling the vertigo of the fall.

It was customary to wake up three or four times at night, shake their heads, inhale the familiar aroma of confinement and emptiness to go back to sleep and repeat the sequence.

He still has nightmares, still dreams of black cells, occasionally dreams of his youngest self lying in a cell inside a moving ship, but now he also dreams of steel fingers that close over his throat. He dreams with merciless eyes that look at him while they try to kill him.

He wakes up with a ragged breath and the ghostly sensation of his thumbs pressed against his trachea, but instead of inhaling the scent of the cell, what he smells is the rain. If he turns, he can feel the earth against his cheek and the felling is enough to ward off his nightmares.

It is still early when Denki straightens up carefully, trying not to wake up anyone. He gets up and advances on tiptoe among his sleeping companions. Wrapped in his blanket he approaches the edge of the improvised tent; one side of the tent is attached to one of the wagons and on the other are stakes that keep it fixed against the ground, leaving the front and back uncovered.

Denki sits on the edge and extends a hand outwards. The soft drizzle is cold, but it does not compare to the cold in the prison.

They have been free for five days and Denki still cannot believe it. Sometimes he is afraid to wake up back in prison, on his rug, without the strength to face another day; but every time that fear tries to install itself, he just needs to remove the hood of his uniform and inhale strongly. It smells like rain, wet earth, plants... It smells like freedom.

Every time he breathes, Denki wants to laugh, but he knows that if he does, the sobs and wails will return and there is no time for that. As much as he wants to take off his boots and splash in the puddles while screaming with joy, he cannot afford it.

Denki extends both hands towards the rain, forms a hole with them and when he gathers enough water he washes his face. He repeats the process until his skin feels cold and clean, then he rinses his mouth and combs his hair with wet hands. What he really wants to do is to bathe, but he still does not feel ready to take off his uniform.
He is afraid that if he takes it away he will not be able to use it again and the very idea of going back to the fundoshi fills him with dread. He assumes that they all share the same irrational fear because, although everyone is used to bathing every day, none has taken the trouble to voice out the request.

So Denki grooms himself as best he can without taking off his clothes, then he folds his blanket and moves away from his group towards the wagon they have next to them. Inside sleep the omegas in heat. Denki opens the door and immediately the omega that stands guard at the entrance wakes up. As soon as she recognizes him, Chieko smiles.

“Good morning, is the sun up?”

“Not yet, you can still sleep more, I just come to leave my blanket. How are you?”

“Well, Andu woke up at midnight, crying, but we managed to calm her down. Everyone is exhausted and hungry, do you think we can enlarge the morning rations?”

“I'll see what I can do, do you need more panax?”

“Not for now, we are saving it for when it is necessary. How are the other groups?”

“I was just about to go over there. Rest, as soon as the sun rises I'll send someone to help you with the breakfast rations.”

Denki closes the door, puts on his hood and runs the four meters that separate him from the other wagon. He finds Ochako awake, with her eyes fixed on the door and clutching her knife with a white-knuckled hand. Although her eyes lose alarm when she recognizes Denki, at no time does she make any gesture to release her weapon.

"You're awake," murmurs Denki calmly, reaching out to pet her hair.

“I couldn’t sleep,” answers Ochako without smiling. “I heard noises outside and I thought…”

She does not finish her sentence, but it is not necessary because Denki remembers the first day when one of the alpha caught the aroma of an omega and lost his head. From that day, the guards were installed and it was customary to have an omega by the door watching.

"It’s okay," says Denki, trying to calm her down. "Sleep now, I'm awake."

He strokes the edge of her hair until her fist relaxes and she manages to fall asleep. Denki closes the door and gives a nod to the alpha guarding both wagons. It is still early, but instead of falling asleep, Denki moves away from here.

The last omega group sleeps next to the third wagon, the wounded and sick rest in the vehicle. Discounting all the losses due to the battle in prison, for the wounds and the dead in the cells, their total number has been reduced and most of them are omega.

Inside the wagons number four and five all the food is stored, next to them half of the alpha group sleeps, and the rest is around the area, guarding or exploring. Beyond that group is the first wagon, next to which nobody wants to sleep.

Nobody except the leader, who always sets up his campfire next to the wagon that carries the incense packages.
The caravan had been prepared by the prison guards; they had packed the food and enlisted the transports, so they only had to procure uniforms and boots for the trip. When they were preparing to leave the fortress many insisted on leaving the vehicle behind, but the alpha did not yield and his will prevailed, Denki has never asked him why.

He knows there is no guarantee that he will receive an answer.

During his trip, Denki has learned a few things from the alpha: His patience is minimal, he does not like to relate to the rest, he always takes the heaviest surveillance turns, he never answers personal questions—he managed to tear out his last name by bothering and insisting—and apparently does not sleep because Denki always finds him watching.

Like now.

"What's wrong?" Asks Bakugou as soon as Denki stops next to the driver's seat. He asks the question without turning, watching the herd of animals that sleep peacefully under a makeshift tarp. From where he is—Denki’s head is at the height of the seat—it is easy to see the glass vial that the alpha rotates between his fingers.

“Here,” he extends the cloth bag that he sewed the previous afternoon. When the alpha does not make a gesture to take the gift, Denki adds: “I sewed an inner lining with rice to keep it from moving too much; it will cushion the blow in case it falls. The string is thick enough if you want to wear it around your neck. Better than having it in your pocket where it will end up breaking.”

When the alpha turns his hooded face towards him, Denki faces his grim look with all the strength he can muster. He keeps his hand extended until finally the alpha takes the bag from his hand. Without waiting for a thank you, Denki walks around the front of the wagon that leans against the wet floor and climbs into the passenger seat.

He rubs his hands, yawns and pretends that he does not realize how carefully the alpha puts the jar inside the bag. He still remembers the aroma, the faint essence of basil and mint, but what he will never forget is the powerful reaction he unleashed. Every time he remembers the aroma of burning wood, his stomach shrinks.

He removes the memory with a mental slap while the alpha finishes hanging the bag around his neck and hides it under his uniform.

“Do you think the rain will ever stop?”

“The clouds look less dense. It’s most likely that today the sky clears.”

The idea gets him excited. Denki raises his eyes, but cannot see more than dark grey clouds.

“If the sun rises, can we take the day off?”

“No. Our current pace is slow enough, we won’t delay it more.”

Once, Denki would have remained silent, he would not even have asked the question in prison, but now that he breathes in clean, cold air and can stretch his limbs out in the rain, he finds no reason to be silent. His old self, buried under layers of fear and anxiety, pokes his head and stretches, the scent of oranges emanates from him in faint tones that speak of submission and sweetness.
“But traveling with the wagons is difficult,” his voice is full of soft nuances, those that appeal to the protective nature of any alpha. “We’re continually stuck and the animals are too stubborn to obey. The sick resent the trip, and the omega—"

“Enough. We’re not going to stop even one day.”

Denki wrinkles his nose, unaffected by the sudden change of the alpha's smell. It stirs up in its place and the aroma of orange thickens around it in an attempt to get the alpha to soften. It is only with him whom he dares to use that tactic, the he used to do at home when he wanted Allana to pay attention to him.

Bakugou's response is to turn and look at him with a frown.

“I said no.”

“Just one day.”

More than a request, the words have the playful timbre associated with flirting. Denki cannot help it, the aroma around him sweetens, his posture relaxes and he even dares to reach out and push gently.

“Only for today,” he repeats without stopping smiling.

Bakugou's nose wrinkles, his frown pronounces even more. In a quick movement he pushes him with his elbow and growls:

“If you don’t stop with those stupid things, you’ll end up with your face on the ground.”

Instead of being embarrassed, Denki laughs, both at the gesture and at the sudden sense of security that invades him. Knowing that the alpha does not see him as a prospect fills him with a freedom and confidence impossible to explain.

“What’s up?”

His laughter dies as he turns to the voice. The redheaded alpha—Eijirou Kirishima—is standing, looking at them. He recognizes him by his voice, by the shape of his body when standing in the rain in all its height. He recognizes him by his eyes, by the way he looks at him.

"Good morning," replies Denki, refraining from using the name that the alpha has not stopped repeating every time they speak. He straightens in his place, trying not to writhe in discomfort.

“Hello, Denki.”

Every time he hears his name pronounced in the alpha's silky tones his stomach collapses, melts inside him in hot pieces. Denki chokes when he remember those hugs that smell like saffron. Sometimes he dreams of that moment in the rain and he cannot shake off the electrifying feeling.

“What are you talking about?”

Denki shrugs.

“About taking a day off.”
"We're not going to stop," answers Bakugou without hesitation.

In response Denki wrinkles his nose and dares to push the alpha with his open palm. He does it with force, as if they were both equals, he rebozes confidence and it is completely different from the soft and tempting gesture he used before.

"We could stop," Kirishima intervenes, drawing their attention. "These days have been exhausting and everyone would appreciate a break."

The emotion flows in Denki, his expression lights up, his back straightens, his happiness disperses in the air flooding the forest with the scent of fresh morning juice.

"Yes!" He says loudly, raising his fists in the air. "That would be awesome."

“We don’t have time—” Bakugou starts but Kirishima interrupts him.

“We could take advantage of the day to do more tests with incense; In addition, the map we have shows that there is another prison nearby. We could send a group to inspect it.”

Bakugou grunted. "I thought you were in a hurry to find your prince."

“Todoroki-ouji has at least a week's worth of advantage; right now he should be safely aboard on the Fleet's ships. In his letter he told us that he'll send troops to recover the prison. It's most likely that they are on their way. Resting for a day won't change anything.”

"It might not change anything, but every day we spend in this damn place the chances for an ambush increases."

“That possibility will exist even if we continue advancing without rest, but at least in this way we could minimize the danger of the wagons sliding down a slippery slope. The herd of animals are tired and they have become difficult to handle.”

Bakugou growls while Denki holds his breath.

"Very well," he says after a moment of grinding his teeth. "We'll stop for today."

“YES!”

“But—!” Adds the blonde looking at Denki irritably. "It won't be a day to loiter. We have work to do."

"Of course!" Denki nods, jumping out of the wagon.

“And you’ll participate in the incense tests."

“I don’t think that's necessary—”

"I will," replies Denki, cutting off Kirishima's protest. "But since we'll use the day to gather strength, can we double today's ration?"

The blond's face darkens, “Okay,” he spits with annoyance. “The area is full of game animals. A double ration will not affect our provisions.”
Denki smiles and walks away before anyone changes their mind. At no time does he turns to look back.

"I should leave them all here," Katsuki growls as he gets off the wagon. "Especially you and your stupid, complacent face."

The other awakens from his contemplation and begins to babble. It is surprising that even under the hood he can distinguish the sound of his nervous smile.

"I don't know what you mean with a complacent face, but only I can ask Todoroki-ouji about pheromones. And we cannot abandon the rest of the group."

"Shut up! I don’t need reminders. This stop will delay our itinerary."

"So you do understand that it is necessary."

"Dammit! You don’t have to repeat what I already know. The only thing that makes me sick is seeing you asking for his approval."

"What...?! What are you—?"

"Enough! Leave your stupid, useless verbiage!"

Katsuki opens the car doors and takes a moment to extend the map they took from the prison captain's offices. It shows the roads, the villages, the position of the rivers and the fortresses. Katsuki takes a moment to measure the distance to the nearest prison and another to make calculations of time.

"At least it's close."

"How close?"

"A light patrol could make the trip last half a day without any breaks to rest."

"We can wait for them."

"Yes," says Katsuki pausing to decide. "We'll send a small group. Two, no, three people. They will travel with basic provisions. Go and collect information."

"And look for survivors."

"After a week? I don’t think so. The prisoners can barely take a few days without food. It's
impossible for someone to remain alive for that long.”

“We'll see.”

Katsuki sighs.

“Well, since you insist, you'll go.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you, the stupid ponytail and me.”

“You mean Hiryu?”

“What makes you think I know his name?” He walks away with the rolled map in his hand, gesturing to the most distant sentinels. “We'll travel light, minimal provisions and small weapons. Ready our things.”

Kirishima obeys and Katsuki heads towards the alpha's bonfire while the sky above him begins to clear. Many have their heads uncovered, others keep their hoods on even though it has stopped raining.

“Today we won’t advance,” he announces loudly and immediately everyone's voices rise up around him. “You,” he points to the boy with the blue bandana on his forehead. Although he doesn’t know his name he knows he comes from the islands, Katsuki has seen him work and has never given him problems. “You’ll stay in charge. If we don’t come back tomorrow morning, you can move, we’ll catch up. Here's the map with the route mapped,” he hands over the rolled paper. “Today's rations will be double, and you all will make incense tests throughout the day.”

Murmurs of protest rise among the group, but Katsuki silences them with a sinister grunt.

“No complaints! If we’re attacked, our weakness is the incense! We have to find a way to counteract it. That’s the difference between life and death!”

Silence sets in, some settle with expressions of iron determination. Katsuki takes a moment to look at each one of them before resuming his speech.

“The patrols will maintain their rotation. Those who are free will participate in the hunting group. Don't walk off too far and don't deaw attention. The pieces collected will be cleaned by the omega —“

"Omega?" Shouts someone, their voice distilling outrage and disbelief.

“Do you know how to do it?” Katsuki's questions them and when nobody answers, he continues. “I don’t want to come back and hear any complaints. Our top priority is to get out of here. Don't do stupid shit!”

A chorus of agreement follows his words and immediately everyone disperses. Several of them take advantage of the rest day to start uncover their faces, some get naked to bathe. The boy in the bandana immediately approaches him.

“What...?” Asks Katsuki taking off his hood.
“I’m Yosetsu,” the alpha is presented without flinching. “Who’ll go with you?”

“Only two more. The rest stays here.”

“When do you plan to return?”

“Tomorrow, but don’t wait for us. Follow my orders.”

“What if you need reinforcements?”

“Your work is here, nothing more.”

“As you say.”

“One more thing, do you identify the blond omega?”

“You omega—“

"He's not mine! But you know who I'm talking about.”

“Yes.”

“Well, he stays in charge of his group. If you need something from them, you ask him. And if he asks for something, you give it to him.”

Yosetsu nods and withdraws. Once everything is ready Katsuki uncovers his head and uses one of the rainwater buckets to wash himself. For a moment he hesitates to soak his hands inside the bucket, he knows that as soon as he does, the mint aroma will disappear and the idea manages to annoy him. At the end he tightens his lips, he undresses and bathes in a hurry, removing the sweat and mud from his body. He shakes off the cold water and dresses quickly, without wasting time. As he heads towards breakfast area, he continues to feel in his sternum, where he can feel the cloth bag that contains Izuku's vial.

[...]

Ochako straightens and wipes her mouth with her forearm, she uses the piece of cloth she has next to her to wash her hands and then covers the nakedness of her companion with the blanket at hand. The omega purrs under the blanket and shrinks underneath to sleep again.

Around her there are faint sighs, movements from those who shake themselves in their sleep and faint brushes of skin against the skin of those who have just awakened. Ochako leans over each
sleeping pair, in some cases she uses a damp cloth to cool them and if necessary she helps them with her hands and mouth to relieve their need.

It was the custom they had at the prison, where everyone took turns during the heat season to calm their companions before going to sleep and immediately upon waking up. During the day they could chew panax but now that they travel in the wagons they can do without it and keep it for special occasions.

The wagon smells like them; intermixed aromas that soften or intensify as the day progresses. Ochako bathes in it and when finally all her companions sleep she leaves the makeshift bedroom to stretch her muscles under the open sky.

It has stopped raining and the sky is a bright soft grey. The sun is hidden under the clouds and sometimes she can distinguish its rays when they go through the clouds. Ochako inhales the forest's aroma and her stomach flutters at the sensation. She smells the open field and wet leaf litter.

Yui approaches her chewing with excitement a handful of crackers.

“'I come to relieve you,’” she says with impetus, her back straight and with her head held high.

She is a completely different person from the shy girl who used to stoop when walking through the corridors of the prison. Ochako also feels that way: free and effervescent. Ochako still has trouble getting used to the sensation.

“Relieve me?” She asks, accepting the biscuit that Yui gives her, “But it won’t take long for us to get going.”

“We won’t travel today. We’re going to rest and eat.”

Ochako’s stomach struggles against fear in an involuntary reaction. Despite the joy that she can feel now after being free, the suspicion is still there, lurking inside her, stimulating her imagination and endowing her nightmares with strength.

“Where’s Denki?”

“With the group that prepares the alpha's food. Our bonfire is over there,” she points to the fire away from the last wagon. “Chieko is organizing the food for the sick and asked me to ask you if you could take care of the food of those who are sleeping in the wagons.”

Ochako moistens his lips and nods.

“I can do it, but first I have to talk to someone.”

She says goodbye to Yui and moves away from her wagon towards the bonfire where the alpha have lunch. She gives herself courage as she approaches because the scent surrounding the place is charged with energy and strength. Many of them look at her, yet Ochako does not dare to look back at them because she does not want to meet familiar faces from her visits to the dark cells. They are memories that she does not feel ready to face. So she walks with her head held high, despite the feeling of an iron fist that grips her stomach, with her eyes fixed on the path in front of her.

She sees Denki standing by the fire and stirring the soup in a huge metal pot. There are a handful of guys with him who serve the food without reacting to the comments that they can hear. The person Ochako is looking for is sitting near the front row, beyond the fire, with his eyes on her friend.
Ochako heads towards him.

“Hello,” she says, sitting next to Kirishima.

The alpha nods, though his attention never leaves the bonfire where the omega serves food.

“I heard we’ll not travel today, why?”

“It’s the first day it doesn’t rain so we’ll do tests with the incense. We'll hunt fresh food and we'll send a patrol to examine the prison nearby.”

“Another prison? What if they discover us? What if they attack us? What if they come for us?”

“The fortress will surely be empty. In the orders that we found in the captain's office they were talking about emptying the prisons and concentrating all their forces in the capital to confront the invading troops. It's most likely that there are no soldiers nearby too. All the troops have been mobilized.”

“You can’t know that for certain.”

Her bad mood escapes her by overshadowing the air around her. The aroma of chestnuts intensifies, becomes bitter, it concentrates in an attempt to get the alpha to comfort her.

Kirishima turns to look at her. “What's wrong?”

“I don’t want to stay here. I want to go home.”

“Are you afraid?”

“Who isn't? I'm afraid they'll catch us. Afraid to go back to the cages. Afraid to wake up and see that I'm back there, underground.”

“No body will return there, I can promise you that.”

Ochako shakes her head, unable to express with words the anxiety that is stirring inside her. She covers her face with her hands and takes a deep breath, concentrating on the scent of saffron that emanates from the person next to her. Sweet and intense, full of rich nuances that manage to alleviate her bad mood.

“Who will go?” She asks with a tired sigh.

“It'll be a small group, the idea is to go and return as soon as possible. Bakugou, Hiryu and me. We'll leave as soon as breakfast is over.”

“Who stays in charge?”

“Yo setsu.”

When she hears the name and she feels the tension in her shoulders dissipate. Her relief is so palpable that Kirishima turns to her.

“Do you like him?”

"You can reason with him," Ochako explains sharply. "And he has never considered us useless objects.”
“Does anyone treat you like that?”

Ochako frowns when he looks at her, hesitant to open up or leave the topic to die. In the end she shrugs in an ambiguous gesture. They remain silent for a while while the redhead finishes eating, although in reality he only plays with his food without his attention deviating from Denki.

Ochako sighs, "Why don't you go and talk to him?"

"He hates me," Kirishima explains without stuttering. "I don't know why, but he hates me. Every time I try to talk to him he shies away and he doesn't even look at me in the eyes. He doesn't stand me, he hates me."

“You said it.”

"Why does he hates me?"

“He doesn't hate you.”

“Of course he does. He doesn't speak to me. He doesn't laugh.”

“He doesn't have many reasons to laugh.”

“He laughs with... he was laughing with him.”

“With whom?”

“You know with whom. You've seen them.”

Ochako nods. Yes, she has seen them. Everyone in the caravan has witnessed the familiarity with which Denki treats the leader. He does not even flinch when the other answers him in a bad way, despite the alpha's bad mood, Denki never seems defensive and never acts as if he was afraid of him. She understands him, the other omegas do also, but she assumes that for an alpha the situation is incomprehensible.

"He doesn't hate you," she says softly, trying to keep her words just for them and no one else's ears. "He just doesn't know how to treat you.”

Kirishima looks at her again, and this time his expression is of absolute stupefaction. It is such an adorable expression that Ochako smiles and softens. She explains it to him.

“Denki slept with you,” she says with the tone of a mother with infinite patience. “You weren't the first... but you were one of many... I can't tell you how long we've been underground, I really don't know, but I can tell you how many of you forced us to intimate and I would lack fingers in my hands to list them. Not everyone was friendly, not everyone knew how to control themselves, not everyone was able to tell apart a 'go on' from a 'wait'. Some don't understand that we did it to survive, to avoid even worse punishments or a terrible fate, some believe they have a right over us... The only way to prevent that from destroying us was to define a clear barrier between you and us. We all build walls. Denki has one... he doesn't hate you, but he doesn't know how to treat you. He doesn't know what you want from him.”

“But it's not like that with…”

“Because he feels safe with him. Denki knows that with him he isn’t in danger, he knows that regardless of the situation he'll never be forced to repeat what we did in the dark cells.”
Kirishima looks at her with his mouth open, Ochako can almost see the ideas and conclusions that are stirring inside his head.

“I... he doesn't speak to me... but you do…”

Ochako smiles and raises her eyebrows.

"Oh!” Exclaims Kirishima as soon as he understands. "Just like them... you feel safe with me?”

“And?”

“And if I want him to stop running, I have to show him that I won't hurt him.”

“Very well, what else?”

“I have to give him his space.”

”AHA.”

Kirishima nods absentmindedly, looks down at his plate and for a moment is silent. Finally he turns to her.

“Does that mean I shouldn’t like him? ...Because if it's like that... I don’t even know how to avoid it.”

Ochako sighs and smiles at him.

[...]

Instead of feeling free, Mina notices the knot of anxiety that grows inside her. There is something deep within herself that does not let her sleep, a warning that resonates in her ears every time she gets up and starts the march with her group moving away from her village.

"Maybe it's the certainty that we won't be back soon,” Mashirao tells her when he dares to express his discomfort.

Mina nods, distracted.

“You're right. I'm thinking too much.”

She tries to dismiss her concern, tries to concentrate on the task of moving forward; It does not help that her commanding officer keeps her group away from routine activities. It is as if they are limiting their contact with the rest of the troop. All the boys in her village huddle away from the main party, eat and rest in a separate area, some laugh and make jokes about the future that holds them. Mina tries to participate, but does not stop looking back. She does not stop feeling anguished.

‘I've delivered the bottles, everything's done,’ she says to herself once again, three nights in a row. 'Even if they're found there's no way they can point me out.'
She cannot erase from her mind the image of Shuichi Iguchi walking through her village, with his green skin and reptilian eyes. Usually the visit of one of Shigaraki’s men would not cause her such anguish, but her guilt does not allow her to get it out of her head.

"Stop thinking about him," Mashirao says to her that night while they set up tents to sleep.

Her friend tries to distract her and she listens to him half-heartedly. That day, their commanding officer sends them to sleep early and releases them from the night watch; while her companions applaud and rejoice, Mina's anxiety is shaken.

"Isn't it weird?" She asks, sitting on her blanket and listening to the rain falling on the roof of her tent.

"What's weird?"

"This trip. We left earlier than planned, we don't participate in the exploration groups. They're going to send us to the defensive lines and not to the capital, don't you think they're treating us like criminals and not like new recruits?"

"Are you complaining because you'll sleep all night and you won't have to be in the rain soaking for hours?" Shihai intervenes, leaning on the blanket on Mina's other side. "You should be thankful to him! I certainly do prefer this."

"Why are they keeping us away from the rest?" Mina answers, facing her partner. "Why are they sending us to the front to fight?"

"Because the savages are here and we have to defend our home."

Mina bites her lips and turns her eyes away from him.

"If it bothers you so much," Mashirao says with a benevolent smile, "we can go with the captain and request that they let us participate in the night watch. They can't refuse a formal request."

She nods and they both go out into the rain. They surround the edge of the camp and move quickly wanting to soak as little as possible. They have not even come halfway when they hear the conversation between two sentinels.

"Betrayal?" One of them asks in an incredulous voice. "On whose behalf?"

The interlocutor is not a sentinel. Mina immediately recognizes the voice of the Captain, a firm and serene voice that, even whispering, manages to transmit authority.

"Ken Ishiyama," as soon as they hear the name, Mina and Mashirao look at each other with equal expressions of fright, "Let this be between us. None of the recruits should know. Shigaraki's orders are to send them to the defensive lines and keep them under surveillance."

"As you order, Captain, what will happen to Ishiyama?"

"They've sent an Officer to establish the charges against him."

"Who?"

"Shuichi Iguchi."

The rest of the conversation is lost when they both leave, Mina and Mashirao wait a moment until they are sure that no one is left. Immediately after, they return.
"You have to tell them," murmurs Mashirao; before he can get away Mina holds him by the arm. She sees his expression full of panic and completely forgets about her companions.

"Is this my fault?" She murmurs, her eyes wide and lips trembling.

"Of course not," says Mashirao, rubbing her back in a gesture of comfort and support.

"I left the vials, carried the letters—"

"If they knew what you did, they would have interrogated you, but they didn't. They don't know about you."

"They know about Ishi—"

"Don't pronounce his name out loud. Just in case. Yes, they know about Cementoss. It's most likely that they knew about Kamui too."

"We saw Shuichi in the village, before we left."

"I know. He was supposed to be there just to help with the recruits."

"He stayed behind. He stayed in our village."

"Easy, Mina, it probably doesn't mean anything."

"I want to go home."

"We can't leave now. If they report us as deserters it'll be even worse for Cementoss. We have to stay here."

"I have a bad feeling, Mashirao. Please, please, let's go home."

"And when they go looking for us?"

"We'll decide then... please, I want to see my sister. I can't stand to think that Iguchi is in the same village as her."

Panic is drawn in such a way on her face that Mashirao cannot find the strength to refuse her request.

"Very well, we'll return, but we need to think of an excuse for why we left. It'll have to be a very convincing..."

"We'll think about it, are you ready?"

"Aren't we going to tell the others?"

"No, they'd be forced to lie. It'll be better if they don't know anything. If we leave now it will take them some time to realize that we're gone, that will give us time to erase our trail."

"Are we leaving our things?"

Mina's answer is to turn around and disappear into the bushes.

They travel in a hurry, familiar with the area. The rain falls on them unmercifully, but none protest as they rush through muddy puddles and slippery slopes. Instead of continuing on the main road, they deviate to the lower areas. They avoid taking the direct path to their village and descend through the...
valley with the intention of ascending at the other end.

They eat some berries and fruits that they manage to collect on their way, they chew bad-tasting leaves that discourage hunger. On the second day, when the rain becomes unforgiving, they build a small shelter made of branches to rest.

The third day is the worst of all because it is their turn to ascend. They march at a slow pace, sliding on the wet slope. They do not even get half of the way done when they decide to take a break. They sleep under cover of a tree, back to back, waiting for the sunrise.

The fourth day dawns without rain, fresh and clean like a summer afternoon. They eat their meager provisions and ascend quickly, taking advantage of the day. Above them rises the second prison on the other side of the valley. Both know that it is deserted, they are determined to spend that night safe, maybe get a change of clothes and hopefully appropriate themselves of some abandoned weapon.

"One of Kamui's shelter is nearby," says Mashirao when the sun begins to hide.

"Which one?"

"The one that is shaped like a nest, I think. I remember hearing Cementos say that he'd commonly see Kamui in this region... Maybe we can find him."

"I doubt it, when I went to him to pick up the jars, he told me that one of Kurogiri's ravens had tracked him down to his nest. He wanted to leave immediately, but his spies insisted on staying. He worried about the three days he was forced to wait, he told me that as soon as he came back for them he had plans to take them to the coast. He didn't want to waste more time."

Mashirao stops. "What about if we go looking for it?"

"If it gets dark we won't see anything."

"If we don't find it, we'll continue our path to the prison, but we've got to at least try it. Maybe there's food and blankets."

Mina nods and they turn to the wooded area on the side of the fortress. Looking for the nest in the semidarkness would be impossible for someone who does not know what they are looking for. Mashirao knows how to recognize the difference and when he finds it he helps Mina to climb.

Mashirao climbs with the help of his tail and between both of them they spend a while digging between the shelves and the abandoned bags. They find a skinful full of old water, a jar filled with clean water, biscuits, and many nuts. There are also blankets and a pack of knives hidden among the tall branches. They devour the food they find and rest their legs aching muscles.

"Do you want to stay here?" Mashirao asks while chewing slowly.

"No... we're already very close, I prefer to continue and arrive as soon as possible. The moon provides enough light to move forward."

She gets up and accepts Mashirao's help to get down. They move slowly, without stopping. Mina advances behind, following the path that her partner opens for her. Suddenly and without reason, Mashirao stops short.

"What—?"
Mashirao raises his hand to ask for silence. He signs quickly and immediately Mina assumes her defensive position. She does it just in time because suddenly a dark shadow pounces on her like a wild beast.

Mina falls to the ground with the shadow on top of her. Without losing her calm and full of adrenaline, Mina throws a punch that connects directly to the head of her attacker. As soon as she notices that the hands holding her hesitate, Mina pushes herself to turn the position she is in. Once she is on top, she raises an arm to avoid the punch that is launched towards her face and then sends another one directly to her enemy's nose, only that this time the shadow to defends itself.

Her enemy pushes her and Mina manages to straighten up in time to avoid the shadow's attack. They dance in synchrony, throwing punches and kicks. Mina is quick and manages to hit in succession, but it is enough for the shadow to hit just once to inflict the same damage.

The shadow manages to hold her by the neck and Mina leans forward, forces her torso to turn it in the air. The shadow falls to the ground with a dull thud, Mina's leg rises and falls into the space where moments before the head of the shadow was.

The shadow turns and jumps up. Mina kicks it, but miscalculates the angle and the shadow takes advantage of her distraction to hold her down and knock her down. Mina falls to the ground and immediately the shadow is on top of her. Her right arm is caught by the knee of her adversary and her left arm ends immobilized on top of her head.

With the weight of her opponent over her chest, Mina is motionless.

Only then does she find time to contemplate the face of the shadow above her.

"You?" She murmurs in surprise, contemplating the blond hair and steely scarlet eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter on December 1st.

"Preparations"
Interlude: Alliance

Chapter Summary

Tenya's mission won't be easy, but he doesn't plan to surrender.

Chapter Notes

- Have any of you ever tasted blue cheese? It has a very intense aroma and a salty and strong taste, not everyone likes it.

- At the palace the people consume mainly meat, fresh fruits and vegetables from the region. In Yuuei rice is one of its main crops and some families devote themselves entirely to raising livestock.

- In the barbarian tribes the area makes it difficult to maintain crops or raise livestock, yet they manage to grow legumes (chickpeas, lentils, beans, peas), and their animals are limited to pigs and goats. From them they obtain meat, cheese, milk and butter. They hunt birds from the region and during the winter there are groups that go down to the Meadows to hunt or collect food.

- At the Islands the main food eaten is fish. The weather allows planting throughout the entire year, some of its main crops are sugar cane and melon, the disadvantage is that pests are very aggressive and can end up with entire fields. And frequent storms increase the risk of devastation.

Did you know that in deserts, camel feces are burned to ignite fires?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tenya bids farewell to his teacher until his silhouette is a black spot in the immense ocean. Only then does he take a breath, he turns around to contemplate the mountains and begins his march.

Unlike the coasts of Yuuei, the Peaks are an extremely rugged region, when the tide rises the small beach of the region is completely covered and there are only rock ridges capable of sinking boats. There are no defined trails, only mountain trails that are difficult to find. The coast's weather is cool, the sun is hot, and the wind that blows has an unmistakable marine flavor.

Tenya is the tallest of all his companions and the heaviest of them, yet he is also the fastest. He usually wins in the races that Aizawa organizes.

("You have to be fast, Tenya. You have to find Toshinori Yagi, you have to explain the situation to him and ask him to intercede for you before Chief Togata.")

("I will, sensei.")
With fresh promise in mind, Tenya moves as fast as he can; he alternates running, short jogging and walking, with the intention to cover as much distance as possible before being forced to rest. His stops are brief, he eats and drinks while massaging his calves. He only stops when the world is submerged in an impenetrable dark color, he sleeps while sitting down and he is lulled by the distant sound of the waves, hidden behind rocks that protect him from the cold wind coming from the sea, and by morning he resumes his march as soon as the sky clears.

His bag of provisions hits his back with rhythmic movement, loose rocks roll down steep slopes, the sea roars in the distance, and in the sky the seagulls croak, announcing his steps. These are the sounds that accompany him throughout his ascent.

As the cold rises, he becomes relentless. On the third night the weather forces him to unpack the coat he keeps in his bag along with the extra trousers. He tries to sleep with his double layer of clothes and his blanket on top, when it is impossible he is forced to light a fire.

Unfortunately there is no wood nearby, although he finds several green leafy shrubs. His attempts to get a small flames results in an asphyxiating emanation of white smoke rising towards the sky without direction.

At the end Tenya surrenders, leaving the leaves to one side and he decides to accommodate in a small space sheltered by rocks on the sides. He lays in a comfortable position, covers himself with the blanket and embraces his bag of provisions with the intention of maintaining body heat.

He sleeps as soon as he stops shaking and is so exhausted that he doesn't even get up at dawn. As soon as he wakes up he is forced to squint before the dazzling morning light. Yawning, he rubs his eyelids and jumps as soon as he hears a voice.

"Stay still!"

A skinny girl with purple hair and sharp eyes of the same colour aims a sharp spear at him.

She has a pretty purple flower on her right cheek with intense green leaves extending towards her ear. Her whole body is covered with grey skins despite the fact that the sun is high above.

"Look at this, Kyouka, he doesn't even know how to light a fire!"

Tenya turns to the second voice and finds a boy, around his age, apparently kicking his failed bonfire; although he wears the same outfit and carries the same spear, his posture seems to indicate that he does not consider him a threat.

"We saw the smoke and came to see," explains the boy turning to him. "We usually have no visitors coming by this route, who are you and what are you doing here?"

When Tenya tries to open his bag, the girl snatches it from him using her spear. The movement is dizzying, a moment later the spear is pointing back at his face.

"No tricks," says the boy, still as a stone. Now Tenya understands why he does not seem worried. "You will tell us your name, right now."

"I am Tenya Iida. Personal guard of the third son and heir to the crown of Yuuei. My prince sends me to speak with Toshinori Yagi."

The two sentries exchange glances, only to fix it on him again.

"What're your matters with Yagi?"
"My apologies, but my message is only for his ears."

"Your prince doesn't even know him, and King Endeavor ceased all relations with our tribe years ago."

"It's not the Ou who sends me. And yes, the prince never met the former leader Toshinori Yagi, but my master did and he hopes that his name will be enough to get an audience."

"Who is your master?"

"Shota Aizawa. Personal trainer of the prince and personal guard of the palace."

"How do we know that what you are saying is true?"

"Inside my bag there's an envelope with the seal of the court signed by Aizawa-sensei. I must hand it over to Yagi."

"You don't convince me," says the boy kicking the bag without daring to search it.

"It's not you whom I have to convince," says Tenya still immobile, his eyes going from one to the other, "and it's your duty to not make judgments in your lord's stead, but to do your job."

"Ha, my duty? My duty is to pass through any beast that dares to break into our territory."

"I am not a beast. I am a messenger. And if you don't know the difference—"

This time it is the boy's spear that stops in front of his face, five centimetres from his nose.

"You Yuueans think that all those who aren't part of your kingdom are ignorant barbarians. I should pierce this right through your skull for your insolence."

The threat remains in the air, Tenya shifts his eyes from one sharp point to the other.

"Luckily for you we're not beasts without honor."

The two spears move away from him at the same time. The girl lifts his bag while her companion looks at him with an expression of deep abhorrence.

"You'll have the immunity of the messengers," says the boy in a firm voice. "We'll escort you to our village, our regent will decide if he wants to grant you an audience. Any act of aggression against our leader or any of our brothers is considered sufficient motive to condemn you to death. Just because you have immunity doesn't mean you have freedom, do you understand, Yuuean?"

The boy beckons him to follow him and Tenya obeys with the girl named Kyouka closing the march.

The fasting climb is even worse, but Tenya holds out until lunchtime and his companions settle in to rest. Having his backpack, Tenya manages to eat and drink in abundance until it is time to resume the march.

Tenya knows that he has a first class condition, but his companions are not left behind, and in fact their knowledge and adaptation to the environment give them a superior advantage. They move quickly, avoid difficult access areas, use shortcuts and hidden paths. They have no trouble breathing the cold air that Tenya begins to resent.

The lunch stop is the only one they make and Tenya's stomach starts roaring when they finally get
there. The last two hundred meters are the worst because his hunger is never unnoticeable, his lungs are battling the regional air, and his legs have begun to stiffen.

The barbarian village is hidden in a small valley high in the mountains. The rock houses are embedded against the slope of one of the mountain ranges that delimit the valley. If it had been morning Tenya would have seen an immense field of greenish yellow extending down the valley, but at nighttime all he sees is a dark area that seems to never cease.

His guides accompany him to one of the houses at the eastern end of the village and signal him to settle in.

"Kyouka will stay with you," says the boy from the entrance. "I'll talk to the Chief about your request. Give me the envelope with your message."

"I prefer to introduce myself personally to Toshinori Yagi."

"You'll give it to me if you want the Chief to receive it. If you refuse we'll accompany you back at this very moment, I bet your legs will appreciate the effort."

The boy smiles, but his expression is not friendly.

"I still have to talk to him."

"The Chief will decide, will you give me the envelope or not?"

Tenya refrains from grimacing, searches his suitcase and gives him the piece of paper with the seal of the royal family. After the boy leaves, Tenya falls into the hard cot against the wall.

Once he is seated the tiredness falls on him like a pile of bricks, instead of falling asleep, Tenya is forced to dine. He chews slowly and with annoyance, too exhausted to make conversation.

In the end he cannot resist.

"When can I talk to Yagi?"

"The Chief will decide the date of your hearing based on what he reads in your letter. It can be tomorrow or up to a month from now."

"A month?!"

The only reason Tenya does not stand up is because he does not have any strength left.

"Calm down," Kyouka says, examining her spear while holding it close, "even if you shout or exalt yourself you won't be able to rush things. I suggest you rest, hopefully tomorrow you might be making the return trip."

Tenya breathes impatiently, but in the end he obeys. He sits on the hard cot, under blankets of skin that smell of dust, and despite the discomfort his tiredness manages to bring him down in an instant. He sleeps without dreams as he only manages to do when his body is beyond the point of exhaustion.

No one comes to shake him, so Tenya opens his eyes past noon. He immediately rises in a bubbling panic inside him, and as soon as his body moves it protests at the effort, making him groan. He notices the tense muscles and his general mood of tiredness that results after a long workout.

"You're back," murmurs Kyouka from her position at the door.
The girl gets up, leaving her spear behind and without wasting time starts to prepare the eating table. She extracts plates, cups, bread and many other things from a basket that was not there the night before.

"Where did that come from?"

"Kousei brought it earlier today. It's a welcome gift from our leader."

"Are you going to receive me?"

"In three days."

"Why?!"

"It's a formal hearing, as a rule the elders have to be present."

"Which elders?"

"There are six main tribes, each of them has a leader and they all submit to the will of Chief Togata. They are the elders."

"I only want to speak to Toshinori Yagi."

"Do you want breakfast? Wash yourself," she points to the bowl of water.

Tenya groans as he feels the contact of icy water against his skin.

"It's cold!"

"Oh, really?" She shrugs, as if the matter was insignificant to her. "During the winter it's even worse. Come, sit down, the food is already served."

"What's that," Tenya asks as he sits in front of her.

"That's goat cheese."

"Why does it have blue spots on it?"

"What else would it have?"

"The cheeses don't have blue spots."

"Not when they're freshly made, but if you leave them macerated in the warehouse, the mold gives them that color."

"This cheese has fungi?!"

"I don't understand why you're screaming. It's just cheese. Try it."

She spreads a cheese on a biscuit and offers it to him, but Tenya has to turn his face away from the strong aroma that emanates from it.

"Thank you very much, but no."

Kyouka shrugs his shoulders and eats the cookie in one bite.

Tenya tries not to squirm, to distract himself he examines the table in search of other absurdities. The
tea seems normal. The jelly too. The bread doesn't seem to have anything different. There is a brightly toasted cake and a soup that smells of spices.

"And this?" He dunks the spoon into a reddish surface and is stunned by the irregular piece that emerges from there.

"That's pork belly. The broth also contains chickpea."

Tenya returns the broth to his plate and sighs. Barbarian cooking is one of the things he will never understand.

"If you don't mind, I'm going to serve myself a slice of cake."

"We don't have any cake... if you're referring to that, it's a hunting pie."

"Sweet pie?"

"No. It's stuffed with pigeon meat and mushroom sauce."

("Watch your manners, Tenya.")

The voice of his teacher anchors him in his place and manages to drown out his impulse to express his displeasure; in the end it is hunger that manages to overcome his reticence. Tenya finishes the soup but leaves more than half of the intestine on the plate, drinks the tea that has no sugar, and eats a slice of pie that does not taste bad.

The only thing he doesn't dare touch is the cheese.

[...]

The audience hall is small compared to the one in the palace. Since it is carved out of rock, the room is dark despite the multiple torches that fill the walls. In the background there is a throne covered with skins and with antlers rising from the backrest.

With the exception of the two guards at the entrance—one of them is the boy named Kousei—there are only eight people in the room. Four old men glued to the entrance wall, and four others on the throne platform: A small old man, two kneeling young adults, a man and a woman, both with glossy black hair and of unparalleled beauty. On the throne, arms languidly resting on the chair's armrests, is an alpha. He recognizes him by the brilliant yellow sunflower that shines just above his heart. He is the only one who is uncovered and the only one who smiles at his presence.

The current leader of the barbarian tribes, Mirio Togata.

Tenya stops three steps away from Kyouka who leads the march. The girl bows to greet and retreats to one side with her spear in a firm position. Standing alone in front of the dais, Tenya straightens his back and stretches to his full height, remembering with precision all the advice and suggestions of his teacher.
He bows with cordiality and with the view on the floor he says:

"I am infinitely grateful that you agreed to receive me, sir. It's an honor to be your guest."

"Welcome, Iida. I have read your teacher's letter, but it makes no mention of the nature of your sight. It only exhorts us to listen to you and, if possible, to help you."

Tenya straightens out slowly.

"The letter was addressed to Toshinori Yagi."

"He won't mind, why does your master send for him?"

"My master is discreet by nature. My mission is to speak to Toshinori Yagi."

"I'm afraid I cannot grant you your request."

"Why?"

"I would prefer you to tell me why it is so important to speak with our former leader."

Tenya's stubborn nature wants to insist on the subject, he wants to fulfill his mission as entrusted to him, but his teacher's voice keeps rattling within him.

("Shouto needs you.")

Tenya's eyes wander from Chief Togata to an old man, from there to the kneeling barbarians, they turn to Kyouka who remains motionless, and back to the throne. None of them blink as they meet their eyes. None of them offers him anything more than an empty expression.

("I need you to speak to Toshinori to intercede with the young Togata.")

Tenya has no choice but to improvise.

"Toshinori Yagi made an alliance with Yuuei when he ascended to the throne."

"An alliance that your king broke when he was crowned."

"It's not the king who sends me, but his son. Todoroki-ouji, the heir to the crown. He wishes to recover the alliance and recover the old covenants."

"Does he send you behind the king's back?"

"He sends me with the intention of paying homage to the covenant we once shared."

"Why now?"

Tenya inhales, there's no going back.

"We are at war," he says in a loud and clear voice, "for the last ten years our land and our people have been kidnapped and enslaved. Todoroki-ou has tried everything in his power to prevent incursions into our territory. The slaveowners responded by extending their hunting ground. The Southern Islands were also affected. The children are torn from their homes without remorse."

"A few years ago an offensive was launched against the coasts of Hosu in an attempt to regain a fortress. The intention had been to liberate one of the prisons that holds our own. The victory was
bitter because we lost all the prisoners. Due to the losses and the risk other incursions have been forbidden and a defensive line was established with the intention of preventing the slaveowners from approaching the coast. It was all in vain."

"In the last raid last year the king gave the order to gather troops, supplies, weapons and ships. His intention is to destroy the ports and shippers to stop the kidnappings. At the same time the prince decided to investigate the failure in the assault on the fortress. At the end of the winter a group of spies was sent to investigate the prisons that are near the border with the Noumu desert."

"But as we prepared to go and meet them, the slave traders also attacked and we were forced to leave sooner than planned. Our ships managed to recover the abducted children, but during that trip we got information from a new source. We discovered that they use drugs against us and there is talk of an alliance between Hosu and Overhaul.

"If this is true, Yuuei may be walking into a trap. If Yuuei falls, neither the islands nor the barbarian tribes will have the power to face the combined power of our enemies. The prince's desire is to guarantee freedom for our people. Only with joint strength will we be able to face the evil that lies ahead. So please allow your warriors to travel to Hosu to face the General."

Silence.

Tenya waits with his heart beating hard and fast. Strangely enough, none of those present seems surprised by the statement.

"So he sends you to ask us for help," one of the elders behind him murmurs.

Tenya turns to look at him, each of the faces of the four men at the entrance radiate the same antipathy and mistrust. All of them have harsh expressions, vast traits of those who have lived for many years in harsh conditions.

"Yes, but—"

"Otherwise there's no reason for you to decide to re-establish the alliance."

"The prince wishes—"

"I'm sure there's an infinite number of things your prince wants, I wonder where his ambition ends."

A lash of anger runs through Tenya, but he merely moves his head from the old man to the throne and back, unable to express his disagreement.

"He's not—"

Togata raises his hand, imposing silence, then turns to the old man on his right with whom he talks quietly. Tenya swallows dry with clenched fists.

"If your prince is interested in regaining our alliance, why isn't he here?" Togata asks as he turns his eyes to him. "Why isn't there anybody else?"

"Nine days ago Todoroki-ouji disembarked at Hosu with the intention of finding out the whereabouts of the group of spies sent to the prisons. Aizawa-sensei is on his way to Yuuei with the intention of meeting with the king and warning him of the alliance. Another messenger was also sent to the islands, his mission is to request an audience with the council, as I requested here."

"That makes five people," Togata says calmly, "Five of a kingdom five times larger than ours."
Tenya opens his mouth, not a word comes out of him.

"I'm sorry," Togata adds, standing up, "we can't talk about restoring an alliance when you don't have the authority to do so. And none of us will send our warriors to die in a war for the sake of a king who does not appreciate us."

Without another word Togata turns his back and walks down the corridor on the left wall. Tenya's stupefaction lasts until the kneeling soldiers rise, only then does he find his voice.

"Wait!"

Immediately he has Kyouka in front of him and when he steps back to move away he collides with Kousei who smiles behind him.

"The audience is over," says Kousei with a smile on his face and waves at him to get out.

Escorted by the two sentries, Tenya returns in his footsteps. The elders look at him with a frown as he passes by. As soon as he is under the open sky, Tenya understands reality.

I have failed

When he tries to ask Kyouka for another meeting, she shakes her head.

"I've been ordered to take you to the border."

That night he can't sleep, heartbroken and nervous he spends the night stirring in his cot. At some point he manages to close his eyes, only to dream of the disappointed face of his teacher.

Five days after his arrival, Tenya leaves the village, being guided by Kyouka who takes him away from the inhabited areas. Depressed, Tenya doesn't realize the direction he is going in until he sees the desert in front of him.

"What're we doing here," he asks with surprise, but the girl ignores him as she descends the steep slopes with feline agility.

Tenya follows her with less grace, but in the end they reach what looks like a small shelter hidden by high rocks. Inside he finds Mirio Togata.

"Hello, Iida."

"Sir!"

"Sit down."

Tenya obeys and appropriates the leftover chair on the other side of the table.
"There are six main tribes in the region, when it comes the time to choose a leader, each one of them provides a contender to fight in a tournament that will decide the next Chief. They are struggles to death, where the survivors prove to have the strength to overcome the difficult task of governing a warrior village."

"It's not an easy process and it's not without danger. A candidate can be killed by treason, the victor can be killed by revenge. In ancient times war between tribes was common, there were men who challenged the Chief in the hope of appropriating the title. These were not easy times... until Nana Shimura came to power."

"Shimura wiped out all the skirmishes and forced all the tribes to work together. When the time came she chose Toshinori Yagi as her successor. Yagi participated in the tournament, but unlike all previous leaders he spared the lives of all his opponents, three of them swore him allegiance and one exiled himself by taking his family with him. Yagi earned the respect and loyalty of the six tribes. Thanks to him, we established an alliance with Yuuei that opened the borders of your kingdom, established trade routes and allowed us to grow."

"You may not know it, but here in the mountains omega births are scarce. Our children are born of Beta women, so the alliance represented an opportunity for growth for us, we could expand our bloodline and grow our people, but then Enji Todoroki assumed the throne and when the time came to reaffirm the alliance he canceled it. He denied us the right of passage to his lands and closed the borders."

"So we have no sympathy for your king. The four elders you saw in the audience room refuse to help you, they'll be angry if they know I have met you here."

"Why...?"

"We have lived in peace for two whole governments, both of which have been prosperous and full of fortune. My desire is to maintain that legacy. I wont gather an army for your king, but if your prince is determined to restore the alliance, if his request is not only out of necessity, then I want to know him."

"Then, would you accompany me?"

"My men and I will travel to Hosu with you."

Chapter End Notes

Merry (early) Christmas!!  Angelo(^

°)ノ℃
Preparations

Chapter Summary

I am free to walk under the sky, free to laugh and smile again.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone, it's been such a long time!! ;_; I've truly missed translating this and answering all your funny and wonderful comments... I'm so sorry for leaving each and everyone of you hanging there, i had real hard times going on irl and I had to focus entirely on that... Sadly, that affected my process translating Roquel's awesome story.

And so, for those of you whom are also going through dificult times, I hope with all my heart that everything goes well in the end and that, at least, this chapter will help you enjoy your day a little more :')

Also, some eventos from last chapter to help juggle the memory:

–Katsuki's group has been found out by the enemy.
–Kiri and Denki managed to convince Katsuki to let the group rest one day from traveling too much.
–Kiri, Hiryu and Katsuki went to search if there were any more prisoners at a nearby prison.
–Mina and Ojirou were traveling back to their village but while traveling back they were attacked.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The dividing line between Hosu and the Noumu desert is an immense wall of rock that grows from the beach and extends throughout the continent until it reaches the rocky formation that marks the beginning of the mountain range that runs through Hosu.

The wall can be seen from miles away and is the main reason why the Noumu beasts do not spread beyond the red desert. There are some, especially those with high jumping abilities, that sometimes cross only to be later killed by the sentinels of the Colonel who rules the region.

As Kyouka points to the wall, Tenya pulls the reins of his mount and stops in ecstasy at the sight.

"Are you excited about stepping into enemy land?" the girl asks with a broad smile as she clicks her tongue to force her mount to move.

Tenya imitates the sound and soon both beasts advance side by side.

"You don't understand," says Tenya, wiping the sweat from his forehead. "It's been more than three
weeks since I left the prince unprotected. Almost a month! If everything went according to plan, Todoroki-ouji will remain with the contact awaiting our arrival and Aizawa-sensei will have warned the king of the alliance."

"What's the problem, then?"

"The prince is alone!"

"You said he was with a partner."

"And I also told you he was not trained in combat."

Kyouka shrugs her shoulders—it is apparently her favorite gesture—and urges her mount until she retakes the light trot that the rest of the pack follows.

Tenya jogs behind her, shifting his eyes from one rider to another, still surprised that they are there. It is not the army that was supposed to be assembled, nor is it a large group: Sixteen warriors including Chief Togata himself. Their mission, more than to fight, is to parley with the prince and determine the conditions of the alliance.

Nothing else.

In spite of everything, Tenya likes their company. Without them, he would have never been able to cross the desert alive. Their abilities to find water, hunt, and to defend themselves from the noumu beasts that emerge from the earth, are the reason why he is about to fulfill his mission.

Tenya makes his tongue crack and the sound causes his mount to slow down. They advance quickly under the tireless afternoon sun until slowly the bright blue sky becomes a screen of intermingled colors as the day ends. Before the light disappears completely the group stops to start the camp.

"But we are so close!" Tenya murmurs, still on his saddle looking with longing at the stone wall that can be seen in the distance.

"It looks close," Kyouka says condescendingly. "But even if we leave early tomorrow, we'll reach the base at nightfall. Then we'll have to go up and find the waterfall where the prince is staying."

"Aizawa-sensei said it was the meeting point"

"Well, we still have several days of travel ahead of us."

Without an appropriate answer, Tenya helps by removing the reins and stirrups of the saddles. The animals, once free, are grouped around the food that the girl has brought for them. Tenya stays to watch them eat until his stomach roars out loud. There are four fires burning, each with a small group of warriors who exchange food packages and water bottles.

Tenya drops himself next to Chief Togata's group. He politely refuses the lizard meat that one of them offers while he toasts at the campfire, and instead accepts the cookies that Yayorozu invites him. From them he accepts bread and dried meat, but he has no appreciation for their hobby of eating visors, skins, bugs, moldy cheeses and semi-raw meats.

"Don't make that face!" Laughs Kousei when he sees him wrinkling his nose at his lizard. "It's food."

"I'll trade half of your lizard," Kyouka steps in as she rummages through her bag, "for a third of my cheese."
Tenya turns a deaf ear to their discussion, and instead distracts himself by studying his companions. Since they entered the desert, the group left the heavy layers of furs to wear white trousers and long-sleeved shirts that protect them from the sun. They wear hats made of cloth with veils that cover face and neck. His outfit is made of a lightweight fabric that allows his skin to breathe.

Only at night do they remove their hats, leaving their faces exposed. Next to Tenya sits Yaoyorozu, a clear sign of the barbaric beauty with her refined cheekbones, her height above average, her strong contours and her hair as black as spilled ink, but she is in itself a delicacy full of timid smiles and nervousness. And as if that were not enough, she also has a beautiful orchid just behind her right ear with leaves that grow towards her throat. When she turns to talk to Kyouka, Tenya can see the delicate patterns in lilac colors that delineate the petals. The absolute flower of seduction and beauty.

Then comes Kyouka, slightly undersized among her people, but she has decided to make up for that adversity by becoming a fierce, fast warrior with ropes and spears, Tenya has seen her jump on a beast Noumo using only her spear. She has no qualms about eating anything and has managed to make a place among the men of Togata's personal guard. The Anthurium flower on her cheek is bright red and sharp, like the blood that flows through her veins.

At her side is Kousei Tsuburaba, tall and fierce, full of sarcastic smiles and incisive responses. His interest in Kyouka is obvious, though not as obvious as the disinterest she shows him when he decides to be funny. Tenya has not seen any flowers on him and supposes it is because he is always covered from head to toe.

Next to him is Mirio Togata, the leader of the barbarian tribes, tall, strong..., and fierce. From what he has heard many men refer to him as the sun, because of his imposing character and his ability to illuminate the place where he is. During his audience, Tenya saw the sunflower he carries right above her heart, he still remembers the yellow tones, the delicacy of the petals, the complex detail of the pipes in the center. It is the flower of resistance, the one that looks at the sun and drinks from it.

By his side is Amajiki, his consort in spite of being beta. He also possesses the classic beauty of the barbarian tribes, his hair is a lustrous black, short and elegant. He has the same delicate nature that exists in Yaoyorozu, the same gestures. On his left wrist the Moonflower grows, the only one Tenya has ever seen in his life. It shines with its bright and refined whiteness, with a small light yellow center. It has an infinity of long and wide petals that grow in irregular sizes. Legend has it that the flower only grows in the mountains and only blooms during the full moon. Beautiful, unattainable, and unique.

Tenya knows that if the tribes were ruled by a hereditary monarchical government, the leader would be forced to marry an omega or a beta woman with the intention of preserving the bloodline, but in this case they are free to choose their spouse freely.

Finally, closing the circle and just to his left is Togata's right hand, his bodyguard and the most loyal of his warriors. Inasa Yoarashi. Gigantic among his own, loud and noisy. There is no visible flower on him either, and he is another alpha capable to tearing the head off the noumu beasts.

The rest of the entourage has the same ferocity that characterizes the barbarians, but Tenya is grateful that those six traveling with him. With them, Todoroki-ouji will be safe.
"Yuuei's heir is here?"

"That's what our contact reports, General."

"Where?"

"The note did not specify, his priority was to inform us of the king's death. We've requested more details."

"Well, I'm waiting for an answer. How's the plan going?"

"To perfection, sir. Half of Yuuei's fleet composed of beta warriors is under the control of our contact. There's still the second half, which at this moment are taking positions in front of the second port. We've already organized a counterattack to neutralize their alpha force."

The General nods.

"And Chisaki?"

"Overhaul's army left port on the date indicated. Their arrival to Yuuei is scheduled for a few days from now. By then, there will not be a single warrior of the royal fleet left."

"It's time to test the beta incense in the open field."

"Very well, sir."

"How many prisoners do we have?"

"Ten. Nine adults and a young man."

"They'll do."

"One more thing, sir."

"What?"

"The captain of prison B on the border hasn't reported for duty. The officers who left there with the new recruits confirmed their position a few days ago, but we have no news from the rest of the team nor do we know anything about the latest transfers from that prison. His last contact was almost a week ago."

"Order the officers to return."

"They are too far away, sir."

"Who's left in the region?"

"Shuichi's men."

"Send them to investigate."

"As you command, sir."
With his eyes closed, Denki concentrates, the cabin smells like sandalwood, heavy, dense, invasive. To counteract this, Denki thickens the aroma around him until the sweet fragrance of the oranges covers every corner of the wagon. The voice of the alpha is a soft, rhythmic cadence:

"You smell delicious."

He hears him suck in deeply. Feels that the atmosphere relaxes.

"Start counting," Denki says in a low voice.

The boy obeys, he does it slowly, pronounces each syllable firmly, emphasizing the accents.

Denki wrinkles his nose when he detects the scent that begins to spread through the wagon. It does not smell bad. It smells like milk sweetened with honey, delicious and sticky, but there is something about it, in its density, in its intensity, that causes a headache.

He feels nauseous.

Instead of relaxing, he straightens his back, shake his head and looks for a more comfortable posture. He listens to the alpha count up to two hundred and eighty when his voice loses firmness. At three hundred and fifteen he begins to slur the words. At three hundred and thirty-five he stops, repeats the amount slowly, stops again and no longer continues. Sitting on the floor, with his back to the door, Denki opens his eyes and sees the alpha sitting in front of him, with an expression of sweet abandon.

"Hey."

Silence. Denki takes a deep breath-he notices the milky taste on his palate, the sticky honey sensation on his gums-and concentrates on an emotion. Happiness. His aroma intensifies, grows until covering them both.

"Hey."

Silence. Denki reaches out one hand and touches him. A brief rub on the palm resting on the bent knee. When he does not get an answer, Denki changes his emotion. Sadness. His aroma loses its intensity and becomes sweet.

"Hey."

Nothing.


Denki does not alter his expression, he inhales the aroma of milk that he feels settling at the base of his stomach and tries again. The alpha does not react or move to contact. Denki breathes in again, yearning for a breath of fresh air, but he only sucks in the sweet honey that he feels coming down his throat.
His headache grows into the only thing he can think of.

He gets up and knocks on the wagon door three times, pauses, and knocks again, as established by protocol. Immediately the door opens and Denki jumps out as far away as possible. One of his companions approaches him with a water skin from which he drinks until he empties it. Out of the corner of his eye he sees two alphas with handkerchiefs on their faces, pulling his immobile companion out of the wagon.

Yosetsu comes to meet him. In his hands he carris a chart with names and registers.

"Two hundred and eighty," Denki says as soon as he's in front of him, "at three hundred and thirty-five he went blank."

Yosetsu makes the notation on his paper and sighs.

"It remains within normal parameters."

Denki nods. The tests with the vials were partially successful, the alpha equipped with them could count up to five hundred and something, the only one that has reached up to almost a thousand is Bakugou, who ordered to start practicing in pairs.

So far they have not been very successful.

"Are we going to?" Asks Denki, massaging his head.

"No... it's been enough for today. Even if we ventilate that thing, the scent doesn't vanish immediately and it's dangerous if we let it concentrate. Maybe we'll do another round before nightfall, that's all for now."

Denki nods, his attention drifts towards the omega group sitting a few steps away from him, they all have the same exhausted expression and they all reek of honey with milk. He just needed to see them to make a decision.

"Do you need anything else?"

"No, why?"

"I want to take my people for a bath."

"Well, what do you need?"

"Water and privacy. I would like to move our wagons so that my companions can also bathe."

"You can't go far away."

"We won't go far, is there a pond that we can use? Something nearby."

"One of the exploration patrols reported a river about five hundred meters ahead. The road is clear."

"That'll do the trick."

"It's too far, maybe it's better to wait..."

"If Bakugou comes back and we tell him we'll stop ahead so we can bathe, he'll yell at us until he loses his voice."
Yosetsu wrinkles his nose and Denki laughs.

"You've imagined it, didn't you? Well, we'll go and we'll be back without any problems."

"I'll send an escort."

"We want to bathe in peace, no escorts."

He say goodbye to him before he hears him make any reply. His companions follow him animated with the prospect of bathing. As soon as they arrive with the rest, the news spreads like wildfire among them. The entire omega group gets down to work. From those who clean the captured prey to those who care for the sick, each of them rushes to finish their work to help mobilize the wagons.

They hear the roar of the water before they see it. Its sound is shocking, deafening. There is no doubt that the rains have made the riverbed grow into an untameable beast.

They guide the cargo beasts, place the two wagons blocking the way and release the animals that they let graze with their leashes securely attached to a tree. They divide themselves into three groups, one helps the omegas in heat getting out, another carries water, and the last one cleans the interior of the carriages. Soon everyone is undressing, splashing water while they laugh.

It is cold, the sun is a bright spot that appears and disappears in the cloudy sky, but that cold is completely different from the one that existed in the prison. The water has the freshness of the mountains and not the harrowing edge of the icy current that comes from the subsoil.

Denki screams when the cold water touches his back, but it is an excited sound, like a child who receives a pleasant surprise. In revenge, he turns to Ochako and throws a bucket of water at her. She dodges it easily and laughs, pointing her finger at him, but that's until Yui manages to soak her from head to toe. They chase each other like unsupervised children. The rest of their group disperses, enjoying their free afternoon away from glances and judgments. They wash thoroughly, removing all traces of mud and sweat.

Denki does not stop laughing, free and open.

"I like seeing you laugh," says Ochako with a smile. "I like to laugh."

There is something in the way she speaks, a sadness rooted deep within her, perhaps it is the same that Denki feels inside when he is struck by the memory of the dark cells.

"Then laugh," says Denki with simplicity.

[...]

"If we wash the uniforms, will they dry before we have to leave?" Yui asks, smelling hers.

"We have some spare," says Denki doing a quick count. "We can change and wash these."

Ochako and Denki entertain themselves by washing, shaking and beating their clothes against the flat
rocks they gather.

"He has noticed," she says suddenly, without stopping what she is doing.

"Who?"

"You know who I'm talking about."

Denki stops to look at her. His expression is of absolute dismay.

"What?"

Ochako turns to him and when she speaks she emphasizes each syllable while keeping her eyes on him.

"He has realized that you are ignoring him."

Instead of pretending he does not understand the topic of their conversation, Denki blushes. His skin dyes red, from his forehead to his shoulders. Shame overflowing every pore.

"Why are you talking to him about me?"

"Because you are his favorite subject."

Denki blushes even more.

"Ochako!"

"What? It's true. He has been depressed today because he thinks you hate him."

"I do not—…! AAGG! Ochako!"

"I'm just repeating a fact."

"What else…? What did...?" Denki swallows, looks angrily at the wet clothes he has in his hands, growls and finally spits out. "What did you tell him?"

"That you don't hate him. That you don't know how to treat him. That you want space."

"You told him..." To fight the heat on his face, Denki sinks his face into the wet uniform "Why did you have to talk to him?"

"Because he's my friend."

"That's not—"

"It's okay if you like him. He's a good alpha."

Denki straightens up, unable to continue the conversation. He breathes hard, forcing his blush to disappear. He kneels by the edge to wash his face and when he gets up he sees him: An huge man on the other side of the river riding on a beast more than a meter high.

Denki is frightened to his feet with his heart beating wildly. Before he can scream, before he can give the alarm signal, the man surprises him with his reaction. He stops in his tracks and from where Denki is, he can see his face turn into atonishment and panic.
'Traveling without the wagons is a thousand times better', Eijirou thinks as they move at a rapid pace following Bakugou. They do not have to worry about choosing firm roads, guiding foolish animals or fighting with stuck tires. Their small group of three moves fast, crossing brush and bushes in a straight line.

They get to the prison in the middle of the afternoon. The immense building rises on the edge of the cliff, with its tall towers and flags that are shaken by the icy wind. Instead of advancing directly towards it, the group stays on the edge of the forest, looking for guards on the walls or signs of life.

When they do not find any, Hiryu offers to investigate. The risk is high because if they find guards they will have to flee and lose them before returning to the group.

Sitting next to Bakugou, Eijirou clenches his fists while Hiryu furtively goes to the prison. Both remain alert to the surroundings in case of an ambush, and knowing that they will have to flee if the alarm goes off.

Hiryu approaches cautiously, without losing sight of the top of the walls. They watch him go around the entrance until he disappears behind it. Those are the longest twenty minutes of Eijirou's life as they wait with their heart beating in their hands. Suddenly, Hiryu appears by the door and waves his arm up.

The prison is empty, there are no pack animals in the stables, no guards in the barracks. Eijirou and Hiryu descend to the cells while Bakugo sniffs away. Underground the corridors smell of confinement and death. It takes time to find the way to the dark cells, the only light that accompanies them comes from the torches they carry with them. Down the darkness is total and absolute silence. Inside the cells they find bodies, none with a breath of life.

The smell of putrefaction escapes through the door as soon as they open it. Eijirou's nausea becomes uncontrollable after the fifth cell. Hiryu throws up in the first elevator, as they climb back up.

Not all the cells are full, apparently the transfer was completed successfully. Those left behind were left to starve. Eijirou feels anger and bitterness, but does not give in to the disgust that bubbles inside him; He takes his time to check each face, as he did before, to make sure that neither Hanta, Tetsutetsu or Rikidou have stayed there.

They check all the cells, each of them feeds the grievance he feels on behalf of his people. If he could he would give them all a dignified burial, but he knows that they do not have the necessary resources to fulfill their mission.

'We will amend this'

They return to the outside, impregnated with the aroma of rottenness. Hiryu washes his hands and face as soon as he has a chance. Eijirou does not do it, he does not dare.

"Nothing's left," says Bakugou as soon as he meets them. "It'll be better to return."
"Was there anything new we should know?"

"A letter from a certain Dabi to Mustard requesting to find Toga. No more details. The rest is correspondence similar to the one in the captain's office."

Eijirou nods and follows him as he moves towards the outside. They advance fast, the stomach of Eijirou roars in soft tones, to calm him he chews borage leaves. The vision of dead bodies abandoned in the cells can not be shaken.

Stay still.

The warning comes in the form of a black aroma, bitter in its density and completely paralyzing. Eijirou looks at Bakugou who has bent in a defensive position scrutinizing his surroundings with attention.

Everything happens too fast. The aroma explodes in red tones, sharp and fierce, screaming loudly, danger. Eijirou moves without stopping to think like Hiryu. Both traverse the bushes falling on their enemies. They do not recognize familiar scents or warning signs.

One of them has a sturdy tail, covered in a blond fluff and topped with a lock of the same color. The thing seems to have a life of its own because when Hiryu tries to attack from behind, the thing defends itself as an individual entity.

They are forced to coordinate their attacks to defeat him, between them they beat and defend, guided only by the aroma they emit. They manage to knock down their opponent, Eijirou holds the demon against the ground, his knee exerting pressure on the column while Hiryu applies all his strength against the tail that does not stop shaking with superhuman strength.

"You?"

The voice makes the head turn, but when the demon is distracted it shakes under him. Eijirou uses all his strength to keep him on the ground.

"The lunaria flowers do not grow in this region!"

As soon as he hears it Eijirou raises his head in a fast movement and without pauses. He can see Bakugou exerting pressure on the devil who kicks without success.

"I've seen them grow up in the village of the first men! Of them not—!"

Their voice breaks. Eijirou moves before he can process what he is doing. He holds the alpha by the armpits and raise him, then he folds when the other manages to hit him with a header and a blow to the sternum.

"No!" His cry lacks force, but at least he has managed to keep everyone quiet.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Bakugou asks as the demon on the ground sucks in puffs of air without stopping.

Eijirou straightens up slowly and looks at the devil.

"Kamui?"
It was not Kamui.

When Eijirou removed the mask they found a female face with pink skin, amber eyes with golden pupils. She has light, pinkish blond hair with two small horns of the same color protruding from her skull.

"You're not him," says Eijirou in a surprised voice. "How do you know the password?"

"Kamui told me," the girl answers once she manages to recover her voice. "Many years ago. He wanted to make sure there was a replacement in case they discovered him."

Her tone was not dyed by fear or possessed any characteristic higher tones that are accompanied by panic; her voice has a velvety sound. When Bakugo heard it, he stared at her.

"It's you."

"So now you recognize me," she says placing her hands on her face. "Damn!"

"I never saw your face."

"That's why I shouted Kamui’s code!"

"I didn't know it."

"Wait a moment," Eijirou intervenes, massaging his diaphragm. He points at her as he focuses on the alpha. "Who is she?"

The other responds with a frown. "She carried the vials."

"What?!" He turns to the girl. "You did it?"

"I also carried the messages," the girl straightens slowly with a brief glance at her friend. "Well?"

She asked with her back tense, "Would you let us go?"

Eijirou turns his attention to Bakugou, who growls.

"Only if you close your mouth and forget you've seen us," he responds by crossing his arms.

"What he means," says Eijirou directing his disapproving gaze towards Bakugou and then returning to the girl, "is that we owe you a favor for your help back when we were locked up. And you'd help us even more if you don't mention to anyone that you saw us here."

"Alright... yes, yes, I will, now knock off that face of pure death, would you? Good grief!"

Bakugou rolls his eyes although he obeys, he contented himself with looking furious at the guy with the tail.

"He's so bitter," the girl murmurs when looking at the alpha.

"Do you know where Kamui is?" Eijirou asks, drawing her attention.
"You don't know?"

"We had orders to meet him at the waterfall, but—"

"Without details!" Bakugou shouts without looking at them.

"...I don't know if he'll still be here."

"I saw him for the last time when I picked up the vials. Kamui had planned to leave his friends near the coast and then hide in the mountains."

"Hide?"

"He told me that Kurogiri's spies had tracked him and his friends."

"Yes, the package with the vials contained a letter saying the same thing."

"Kamui was worried about it taking them three more days to leave. If it was his decision he would have left immediately, but your friends insisted on staying."

"What direction did they take?"

The girl shakes her head, "I don't know."

Eijirou nods, he is ready to leave when he remembers to ask.

"How many people were with Kamui?"

"Just two."

"Was any of them was a man with black hair, black eyes and an azalea flower on his face? Maybe the tallest of the group."

"No, I didn't see that one. The tallest didn't have any flowers on his face, but he had large burn."

"Did he have his hair in two different colors?"

"Yes and eyes of different colors too, one blue and one brown."

"But he couldn't have been the tallest, wasn't there a blond man with him? Or someone that looked like my age, with blue hair and blue eyes?"

"No... The one with the scarred face was the tallest one. With him came a slender boy. His hair and eyes were green... and his entire face was filled with small dark spots. They were outlined along his nose and faded around the eyes."

She was not even finished speaking when suddenly Bakugou held her by the front of her shirt.

"What did you say?!"
“Hey, Roquel, what will happen when Katsuki finds out that Izuku is currently lost in Hosu.
Well, there could be two choices,
One. Our boy runs like headless chicken following each clue he finds or
Two. He forms an Alpha/Omega army and obliterate everything to find him.
Hmmm… I know which one I like, what do you think?”

In another point, we have three different cultures, each of them with their own characteristics that Roquel has been trying to show little by little. In regards to their treatment to the Omegas, it’s kind of like this:

**In Yuuei**
Omega: I want to have a business or acquire a job.
Alpha: No, of course not. Your duty is to your children. Find a husband and make a home.

**In the Kohei Islands**
Omega: I want to learn archery.
Alpha: Really? That’s not very common… but that’s okay, here’s your bow so you can practice.

**In the Barbarian tribes**
Omega: *exists*
Alpha: *blushes*

Next chapter on December 15th.
"Without a Trace"
Without a Trace

Chapter Summary

I look for you in the sky and in the water, your memory accompanies me. Where are you?

Chapter Notes

Thank you sooo much for your reviews and i'm still SO sorry about my hiatus! I plan to catch up to Roquel's story as fast as I can because all of you deserve it! ;v; Seriously, thank you soo much and im sorry for dissapointing you and letting you all down.

There's a wonderful map that LiYun made for Roquel's story!! You can find it here >> https://roquelg.wordpress.com/2018/04/24/mapa-bf/
Seriosly!!! Check it ouut!! It's amazing <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The guards at the end of the corridor have banal faces, Shino does not remember ever having seen them, but knowing that her group does not live in the palace and that when they visit it their stay is usually short it is impossible for her to determine if any of them belong to the group of warriors loyal to Jin or if she can coerce them out of their way.

Undecided, Shino looks at them for the last time and continues her way to her group's cabin. Inside she finds Yawara sitting next to a feverish Ryouko who twists in her bed without making a sound. After a day of total paralysis, followed by fever and convulsions, the doctor has told them that their friend suffers the symptoms of someone who goes through a long and terrible detoxification.

"How's she doing?"

"She woke up with a fever, the doctor prescribed cold compresses. She also insists for her to drink liquids and has ordered that we call her as soon as she regains consciousness... is the plan still in place?"

"I have the supplies, I hid them upstairs in case we have to make a quick exit."

"And Aizawa?"

"There are two monkeys guarding the cabin where he is kept."

"And what should we do with them?"

"Tear them down."

"Hmm... when do we leave?"
"Jin is organizing a group to go down to Hosu to look for the prince. I insisted on going, but he left me out. They'll leave before it gets dark, then we'll wait until the guard relaxes. After that, we'll move."

Yawara nods.

The ship rocks slowly with the gentle movement of the waves. Sometimes muffled voices and hurried footsteps are heard through the wooden corridors. Shino and Yawara stack next to the bed trying to offer some kind of comfort to their friend. Their scent of support and affection floods the cabin, but Ryouko does not react to them.

When the silence is almost absolute, Shino moves carefully to the door. She opens it slowly, avoiding the cracking of the wood. It doesn't surprise her to see the guard at the back, stuck to the wall, and she recognizes her as Kenji Hikiishi. Alpha warrior faithful to Jin.

Shino beckons to Yawara. Her companion nods and they both get moving.

Yawara wraps a sleeping Ryouko with the blankets of her bed and with Shino's help she is placed on Yawara's back, like a very big baby. Once the safety tapes are in place, Shino takes her bucket of water and empties it into a corner of the bed, then gets out leaving the door in the hands of Yawara who stays behind, waiting for the signal.

Shino walks down the corridor, her face is an inexpressive mask with a nose still swollen and two eyes framed with wide black circles that slowly begin to fade. Her gaze never deviates from the face of Kenji, who remains at her post, observing, watching.

Shino passes by and deviates towards the cellars where they store the water to drink, goes down and fills her bucket in a hurry. When she returns she keeps her face expressionless, but this time she advances slowly so as not to spill water. The ship rocked and Shino took advantage to stumble on purpose and stop under the excuse of not spilling more water.

She straightens up, advances two steps, and then moves. She has Kenji right in front of her when, without losing her calm or altering her scent, she turns at a brutal speed stamping the bucket against the alpha woman's side and then throws a direct punch at her cheek before she reacts.

Kenji defends herself, reacts with those damn alpha reflexes. She is strong, not as strong as Masukyura, who was an exceptional alpha, but strong enough for Shino to find herself in difficulty. Luckily, Yawara started moving as soon as she started the fight and immediately joins her.

Between them, they manage to knock her unconscious.

"Let's tie her up," Shino orders, parting her hair away from her face, then bows and drags the woman by her legs. "One less."

"Two are missing." Yawara completes, closing the cabin door with the alpha woman inside.

Climbing up to the upper hallway where all the main cabins are located, Jin has made sure to keep the prisoner as close to his bedroom as possible.

As they climb they are pleasantly surprised because instead of the two guards they find only one, which they get rid of without any problems. They tie him up and drag him to the cabin that serves as a cell.

Aizawa is on the floor, bound with heavy ropes, immobile hands and legs, and a gag in his mouth. Without wasting time Shino and Yawara join together to cut their ties.
"Is he gone?" Is the first thing Shota says after loosening his jaw muscles.

"I have questions," replies Shino in a bad mood.

"And I'll answer you, but first you'll tell me if he's gone."

"I don't trust you."

"You wouldn't be here if that were true, Shino. You are the most intelligent and observant person I know. I'm sure you've figured out the truth by putting together every piece of information you have."

Shino grinds her teeth, takes a breath and faces him.

"The attack on Hosu was a trap."

"It was."

"The king's death was planned."

"As well as Sir Nighteye's death."

"The drug neutralizes the alphas."

"Yes."

"We've been betrayed."

Aizawa's response is to nod slowly; the gesture causes Shino to close her eyes and wobble in her place.

"Jin?" She asks quietly, unable to believe it.

"That will depend... is he gone?"

She looks at him, "Where do you want him to go?"

"That doesn't matter, the important thing is that he's gone."

"Why does that make him a traitor?"

"Oh, please tell me, did he meet with the rest of the captains to mobilize a rescue group? Did he send a warning to the council to inform them of the king's death? Has he gathered all of Masukyura's comrades to interrogate them and determine if he doesn't have allies? Has he begun to warn the troops about drugs?" As Shino stays silent, Aizawa continues. "Instead of assuming command he keeps the fleet blind. I've noticed that the ship hasn't moved in the last two days, has he ordered a full stop?"

"The orders are to wait for the rest of our navy."

"And do you believe him?"

Shino inhales fast and hard.

"If I believed him, I wouldn't be here. Jin hasn't bothered to question you, Sir Nighteye would have if he had believed you were the traitor. What he did was interrogate the captain and crew who traveled with you. He's left us here, with orders to wait, while he descends to land, "to seek the
prince," but it makes no sense... Jin is one of the king's soldiers and yet he has left his post. The Ou left him in command of the fleet and he left our men with vague orders and the firm belief that they must wait. The Ou trusted him."

"And he paid with his life. Jin has betrayed us, and no doubt has left to finish the job. We have to move before it's too late."

"Damn it, Aizawa, it's too late! We've lost our king. We've lost Sir Nighteye. We don't know if the rest of the fleet is still safe. The prince, our prince, is in enemy land. He's been sent by you to gather information from the capital, and it's probably that he's being hunted right now. Jin will go looking for him and we have no way to warn him of the danger he's in!"

"Shouto will be fine."

"How can you say that?! How could you have sent him on a reconnaissance mission? Even though Hizashi and Iida are with him, I don't understand how you could have committed such a lack of judgment!"

"I made a mistake, yes, but it wasn't sending the prince to the capital of Hosu."

"What?!"

"The captain lied. He, and all the crew."

"The prince isn't in Hosu?"

"He is, but not in the capital. Everything they have told Jin is a lie."

Shino is speechless from the surprise, when she finally recovers her question lacks the previous anger.

"How long have you been suspecting of him?"

"Since I heard about the drugs and the beta ships abductions. Jin chose and authorized every spy who ended up disappearing. He convinced the king to mobilize all the troops. He tried to get the prince to participate in this assault, but instead of joining his father, Shouto took the opportunity to start his own investigation... However, I kept hoping I was wrong, I hoped it was all a mistake. And then I spoke to him. His face at hearing about the Hosu-Overhaul alliance was all I needed to convince myself. Now I have no doubt."

"What will happen when he doesn't find the prince?"

"I don't think he's going to look for him. I believe he's left the fleet at the mercy of an attack. I believe his intention is to step aside while the General and his men destroy us, so that no one can reproach him when he meets the council, or when he returns home."

"Damn it, what are we going to do? What's the plan?"

"I want you to take control of the fleet, the men know you, they respect you, I need you to convince them to mobilize the ships. Meet with the rest of our army, talk to the men of the council and then take them as close as possible to the border with Nouma."

"And you?"

"I'll look for Shouto."
"Where is he?"
"In Hosu, near the border with the desert. He's with Kamui, the only spy who never had any contact with Jin."

"And the others?"
"I sent Iida with the barbarian tribes, his mission is to ask Togata for help to cross the desert and meet Shouto."

"And Hizashi?"
"I've sent him to the islands. He'll meet with the council of thirteen and ask them for help to fight."

"They are on the other side of the sea, what can they do now?"
"All our strength is here, Jin has made sure of it. I fear that while they force us to fight the General's men, Overhaul's army will attack Yuuei."

"Do you truly believe that Hizashi will manage to convince all the matriarchs, to bring warriors to defend Yuuei?"

"I trust that he will succeed."

[...]

He has heard wrong. He must have heard wrong.

"What did you say?!"

He needs to hear it again. He needs to have it repeated, although he is not sure he can understand words at the moment with the sound of blood roaring in his ears.

"Hey!" She says, clutching her hands, "Let me go!"

The redhead steps forward, but Katsuki pushes him without remorse.

"What did you say?! Repeat what you said! Tell me his name!"

"I don't know his name," she shouts, struggling to get out of the way, without success, "They never told me their name!"

"What did he smell like?"

"Smell? Damn it, I don't know! What do people smell like? Sweat, earth."

"Describe him!"

"I told you! He had green hair!.... It was dark green, spongy and with many curls. Green eyes, the
color of moss. And the spots... he had little dark spots under his eyes. They didn't have a definite pattern, they piled up in dark colors on the bridge of the nose and blurred on the cheeks. He had scars on his right hand, on the back of his hand and on his fingers... he also had the habit of scratching his nose when speaking."

He feels like he is drowning. A memory comes back to him immediately, the complete image, full of color and brightness.

Izuku is sitting down on the floor, legs crossed, taking inventory of his plants, leaning over his pile of loose leaves as he writes down in his tiny handwriting all the details of the plant he studies.

There is something extremely fascinating about the way he writes with a frown between his eyebrows, his hands stained with blue ink, and his toes moving as he painstakingly works. He wears a bare torso with thousands of freckles covering his shoulders, back and chest. He sees when he straightens up, he sees him read attentively what he has just written... and as he does so he scratches his nose, a delicacy covered with freckles that darken when he spends too much time in the sun.

Upon catching his gaze, Izuku lifts his eyes and looks at him. His smile is vibrant and delicious.

"Kacchan!"

An ineffable heat rises up his throat, expands through his lungs, it grows and leaves him without breath.

No

"Drop her."

The redhead's voice rips him out of his stupefaction. He obeys, but his immediate reaction is to turn and hit him.

"But what—" the redhead retreats with his hand on his cheek and a wounded expression.

"You said you didn't know him!"

"Woou!.... What are you talking about?"
He stiffens in his place, clenches his fists and roars:

"Where is he?!!"

"Hey!.... I don't know what you're talking about!"

"He's here!" The scent that emanates from him is bitter and terrible. "What's he doing here?!!"

"Wait a moment!" He raises his hands, tilts his neck and lightens his scent. A clear gesture of submission. "I really have no idea what you're talking about!"

"Who's traveling with your prince?!"

"I don't know! I don't know anyone with that description! Really!.... The prince has no friends outside his guard. There were six of us: Hitoshi was kidnapped a few years ago. Hanta, Tetsutetsu, Rikidou and I are here. Only Iida remains, but he's the tallest of us all and has dark blue hair, not green. I have no idea who's traveling with Todoroki-ouji."

He looks at him head on, eyes clear and with no trace of decit. He continues to hold his hands high, palms toward him maintaining a calm demeanor. Katsuki just needs to see him that way for him to let his anger deflate and instead feel the anxiety cover every inch of his body.

Inside him grows a hole, immense and unfathomable. He feels that he is suffocating, he feels the heat extending through his arms and up to his neck. He cannot breathe.

He turns to the girl looking at him with a frown and a guarded pose.

"Where did you see him? When was that? Where were they going?"

"I told you—"

"I don't want excuses! I want you to tell me exactly what happened the day you met them. Word by word."

The girl looks at the redhead, then at her friend standing next to the other alpha, finally takes a slow breath and responds, looking straight into his eyes.

"As far as I know, the spies met with Kamui almost three weeks ago. There were two of them, I don't know their names."

"They had to introduce themselves somehow!"

"Well, I don't remember!"

"Keep trying!"

The girl looks at him in anger, but Katsuki does not give in, his stormy expression remains fixed on her until he succeeds in defeating her. She closes her eyes and concentrates.

"Kamui came to pick me up in my village, I wanted to send another message, but this time I was going to bring a package. We talked all the way. Kamui was worried about staying there too long."

"Why?"

The golden eyes look at him again and Katsuki has the impulse to shout at her to hurry.
"Apparently they were discovered by one of Kurogiri's spies, the man most loyal to the General. Kamui wanted to leave, but the spies wanted to send one more message before they left. They postponed their withdrawal and Kamui wouldn't stop yapping about it."

"Where did you see them?"

"At the waterfall, near the border."

"I know the place," the redhead intervenes, "that's where we first met Kamui. It was our meeting point."

"Both of them were there?"

"Yes, both of them. The tall boy with different colored eyes and the small one, with green eyes."

"Did they tell you their names?"

"I don't remember."

"Think! They had to introduce themselves somehow."

The girl closes her eyes tightly.

"They didn't tell me their names," she says, striving to evoke the remembrance, "but Kamui did. It was. Shu... Sho..."

"Shouto?" Suggests the redhead and immediately the girl looks at him and nods.

"Yes! Shouto! Only Shouto."

"And the other one?"

"Zzz... zzzk... izz... I don't know."

"Izuku."

Katsuki doesn't realize he has pronounced the name out loud until she reacts and sees the expression of curiosity on everyone's face.

"What did they talk about?"

"About you," she points at the redhead, "the tall boy, Shouto, wanted to send the package to you. It contained some jars and a knife, but I removed the latter because I didn't intend to risk my captain discovering it. They asked me when I could give it to you, I told them two days if they didn't send you to the cells on the lower floors. That was when they proposed to give it to Red. I didn't know who this Red was until they explained that he was person in the next cell."

"Why Red?" asks Katsuki.

"Because of the flower on your chest," says the redhead with a thoughtful expression, "I named you that way in the answer I sent to the prince, at that time I didn't know your name."

"Did you tell them what flower it was?"

"No, just Red."
'He doesn't know I'm here,' he concludes. Katsuki's interior twists, they compres to painful extremes. *He wasn't supposed to be here.*

"Did they plan to stay longer?"

"No, I heard they were leaving for the coast that same day. Kamui accompanied me part of the way and then returned for them."

"Which way did they go?"

"I don't know. Kamui didn't tell me."

"If he's with the prince," intervenes the redhead "it's most likely they've traveled to the coast to meet the king's troops. They're probably there right now. If you wish to see your friend we must return to the others."

Katsuki nods rigidly.

"Let's go," turns, stops, and then looks at her again, "I abhor all of your race, but you and I are at peace. Hopefully we'll never meet again."

He walks away while the redhead bids farewell in a low voice. Without waiting, Katsuki runs back, imposing a maddening rhythm that the other two equal without complaint.

Within him, impatience resurfaces louder and louder than ever. He moves decisively, with a goal in mind, unable to set aside the idea: *Izuku is here. Here.*

[...]

As soon as they disappear, Mina breathes a tired sigh.

"That was exhausting."

"Despite his age, he's really terrifying," says Ojiro, approaching her.

"I know..., it's fortunate that he feels indebted to us."

"Do you truly think so?" Mina responds by shrugging her shoulders. "They said *others*, how many of them do you think managed to escape?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's those who were left behind."

"Don't you think we should have asked?"

"For what? The less we know the better, besides you've heard him. Hopefully this will be the last time we'll run into him."
"Shall we go?"

"Yes, we've wasted too much time."

[...]

Eijirou matches Bakugou's rhythm without complaint; he advances on autopilot with his mind evoking the aroma of mint. The subtle aroma that came from the bottle the blond wears around his neck. He remembers his expression while he kept it in the bag that Denki gave him.

*Mint.* The memory is diffuse, he doesn't manage to evoke with precision the nuances of the aroma, but he remembers the stroke of freshness that flooded him when he inhaled it the first time. It was an exquisite aroma, lighter and richer than the leaves that the blonde used to rub between his fingers.

*Mint.* The wrath of the alpha. His reluctance to mate. His interrogation. His impatience. Eijirou's mind begins to fit pieces, there are many gaps, but the overall picture is slightly clearer.

*Izuku.* The name evokes no memory. He knows that he does not know the person and is certain that the prince does not either, how come they both ended up in Hosu?

[...]

Bakugou's rhythm does not slow down at any time, the energy that comes from him is impressive and Eijirou does not make the mistake of trying to start a conversation. Instead, he concentrates on everything they will do once they return to the camp and have to get going.

But their plans crumble because as soon as they reach the boundaries of the camp one of the sentries materializes in front of them with an expression of compelling panic. From their incongruous summary, Eijirou comes to understand that they have met another alpha group, a group beyond the desert.

"How many are there?" is Bakugou's question, who seems to have understood the fragmented discourse.

"Sixteen. Half alphas, half betas. All warriors greater than ours."

"And the leader?"

"Tall, blond, immense."
"Where are they?"

"They've settled near the omega."

"Why?"

"They've offered to patrol their wagons."

Eijirou is not surprised when he hears Bakugou growling orders, without wasting time he beckons Hiryu to look for Yosetsu as they make their way to the omega campfire. Though it is early in the morning they find Denki awake, sitting by the fire, chatting with a huge mass that smiles with a childish gesture.

The stranger loses his smile as soon as he detects them, he straightens himself at full height and looks at them, challenging them to move forward. Unlike him, Bakugou does not hesitate as he advances towards them.

"Do you want anything?" The stranger asks with his powerful voice and intense vanilla aroma that makes his displeasure clear. His question is polite but firm, full of invisible warnings.

"Who the hell are you?"

Bakugou is not polite, the scent of burning wood thickens around him. It smells of smoke and oak, it smells of anger.

The stranger does not look intimidated, "I may ask you the same thing."

"And you'd be wasting your time, I don't owe you an answer, but you owe me one. Who the hell are you?"

"How da—?"

"His name is Inasa," says Denki advancing towards Bakugou; his presence is fresh and light, a breath of clean air that paralyzes the invisible battle. "He's Togata's right hand, the leader of the barbarian tribes." As soon as he is near the blonde he turns to Inasa to introduce him, "Inasa, this is Bakugou, I told you about him. He's the one who took us out of prison and brought us here. He is our alpha."

His statement is simple, devoid of emotional nuances, but there is no greater compliment from an omega. Eijirou knows that. What Denki has done is to recognize the blonde as the ultimate authority, as the leader, while making clear his respect and loyalty.

Eijirou is unable to describe the emotion that roars within him.

"Where's your leader?" Bakugou asks, oblivious to the dilemma Eijirou faces.

The man named Inasa, tall and immense, with his short hair and ferocious eyes, twists his face, clearly offended by the tone and brazenness, but with simply looking at Denki his expression become serene once again, almost complacent.

Eijirou is paralyzed in his place, he straightens himself without realizing it.

"I'll take you with him," says Inasa before turning around and walking away.

Bakugou follows with Denki behind him, Eijirou hastens to reach them, trying to match his pace with Denki. The boy gives him a brief sidelong glance, nods to say hello and returns his gaze to the
"Good morning," Eijirou greeted quietly, staring at him and liking the shape of his face and the color of his hair. He can't look at him without thinking of the sound of his voice laughing. "You're up early, Denki."

For a fraction of a second the orange aroma intensifies, it's a fruity breath full of acidity and delicious freshness. Eijirou eagerly sucks it up before the blond controls himself and greets him back.

"Good morning," sounds formal, distant, but Eijirou takes the rigidity away and concentrates on the reaction.

His first impulse is to open his mouth and vomit all the greetings known as long as he can get the aroma to repeat itself, but then he remembers Ochako and bites his tongue so as not to make the mistake of pressing too hard.

He is about to speak to him when he realises the tension that comes from Bakugou. He directs his eyes to the front and immediately notices the tense shoulders, the straight back and the way his scent grows around him until it becomes a sharp warning.

The reason behind his behavior stands, waiting for them with a relaxed smile and a lance in his hand.

Togata—he assumes it is him by the submissive gesture that Inasa dedicates to him—is smaller than his subordinate, but compensates his height with the majesty of his presence. The first thing Eijirou thinks of when he sees him is: I am standing before the sun. There is something in him, in his posture, in his smile, in his scent that he cannot identify, that makes him shine with a warm, revitalizing and overwhelming energy.

He is a silent threat despite his relaxed posture and open smile.

Bakugou responds to him by growing to his full height, thickening the scent around him, sharpening his gaze and twisting his mouth to become the opposite gesture to Togata's. If Togata is the sun, Bakugou is fire, smoke, and sparkles.

"Your name?" There is no kindness in his voice or warmth in his eyes.

"Mirio Togata," answers the other without losing his smile, completely unaffected by the abruptness he receives. "I assume that you are the leader of the group, Bakugou?"

"Why did you come here and how did you get here?"

"We crossed the desert, climbed the rock wall and crossed the border with the intention to negotiate with the prince of Yuuei, Todoroki Shouto."

"What business do you have with him?" Eijirou intervenes without being able to prevent it.

Togata deviates his eyes towards him, his black eyes possess absolute security.

"Your name?"

"Eijirou Kirishima, I am one of the warriors who is part of the prince's royal guard."

"Well, I happen to know one of yours."

"Eijirou!"
The cry comes from the approaching group. They are three in total, two of them have shiny black hair and an indisputable beauty, the third is higher than the others and with a more robust constitution, he is the one who walks the fastest towards them.

"Tenya!" Eijirou answers back when he recognizes him.

They greet each other effusively and exchange unavoidable questions: "Are you okay? What are you doing here? What happened? How did you get here? Where's the prince?"

The last question they ask each other at the same time and causes them both to shut up immediately.

"Perhaps we should sit down and talk calmly," intercedes Togata, attracting the attention of all present.

They gather around one of the stranger's bonfires. Once there, Tenya begins with the introductions and when he has finished naming everyone present, he turns to Eijirou.

"Where are the others? What happened?"

Eijirou takes a breath and begins his story from the moment his group arrives at Hosu. He tells them about Kamui, his stay at the prison, the matings, the drugs, and finally their escape. The silence around the fire is absolute, the face of horror shared by the barbarians perfectly exemplifies their emotions.

"The man left in charge in your absence told us that you had all gone to inspect another prison nearby, did you find any more prisoners?" Togata asks.

When Bakugou does not answer, Eijirou intervenes.

"Everyone who stayed behind died of hunger, the building was empty."

"How many prisons like those are in total?"

To Eijirou's surprise, Bakugou turns his attention to Denki, who winces at the sight.

"How many," Bakugou repeats.

"Only eight."

"How can you be sure," asks the black-haired woman, whom Tenya has introduced under the name of Momo.

"Every now and then, transfers were carried out with the intention of promoting pairings. We were sent to other locations for a period of a few months. The omega always sleep together so we had the possibility of exchanging news and stories. That's how we managed to reduce the number of fortresses, although I couldn't tell you were each one is."

"What do they do with those who mate?"

"They take them away, and we don't know where. We never see them again."

"Where are Hanta and the rest?" Tenya repeats, looking at Eijirou.

"I don't know... Tetsutetsu was in the same prison as me, but I didn't see him among the wounded, the dead or those who escaped. Maybe he was transferred somewhere else... or maybe..." Eijirou shrugs, unable to formulate the idea aloud. "I don't know what happened to Hanta or Rikidou..."
either."

"And the prince? You were supposed to meet with him once outside."

Eijirou shakes his head, then proceeds to summarize the contents of the last letter, the vials he sent, the tests they have done and the theories they have. Finally, when he realizes the impatience that emanates from Bakugou, Eijirou asks:

"Who's traveling with the prince? I thought it was Aizawa-sensei, Hizashi or you."

"Aizawa-sensei returned to Yuuei to speak to the king. Hizashi went to the Kohei islands to speak to the council of thirteen and ask for help."

"How does he hope to convince them?"

"I don't know."

Before Eijirou can ask another question, Tenya proceeds to tell him of his journey. He does so in short, without too many details, focusing especially on repeating how difficult it was for him to abandon Todoroki-ouji.

"Why is there an omega traveling with your prince?!"

Eijirou's insides shrink at the sound of the explosion, looking towards Bakugou who observes Tenya with a frown between his eyebrows.

"W-what—?!" Tenya stutters at the sound of it. "How—?!"

"Answer me!"

Tenya turns to Eijirou, but he just shakes his head and encourages him to respond.

"I don't know what you've been told, but you're wrong," Tenya says, "there's no omega—"

"You're lying!"

He gets up and points it out, the strength of his presence is enough to freeze the rest of Tenya's excuses. Eijirou, who has risen almost at the same time, stretches his hand in an attempt to avoid a confrontation.

"Tenya, please tell me who is traveling with the prince and how you know him."

His anxious expression is enough for his companion's rigidity to be mitigated. "Very well."

His answer gets Bakugou back to his seat.

"His name is Izuku Midoriya. He had been living on the islands of Kohei when he was captured by the slave traders, his ship sank and he survived in Overhaul's lands, hiding from the soldiers until he managed to built a boat. In his own words he planned to cross the Inland Sea to Yuuei and then border it's shore to his home, but on the way he was captured. We had been chasing that same ship for many days until we managed to board it. Midoriya saved Hizashi's life, he also treated all our wounded, pretended to be a beta, but when our teacher discovered him he was forced to tell the truth. The boy was not a simple doctor, he knew the routes of Hosu's ships, the position of their fortresses and many other things... he himself offered to come to help with the drug, and although Aizawa-sensei was not convinced, the situation that presented itself forced him to make the decision to allow it. The plan was to ask Kamui for help in releasing you, then go to the border where you would meet..."
us, but if what you have said is true, Eijirou, if the prince's group was discovered, then it's likely that they would go to the ships in search of immediate reinforcements. All we can do is approach the coast and wait for Aizawa-sensei to join us. I'm certain the prince will come with him."

Suddenly and without a word, Bakugou stands up and walks away. His posture, his scent, his face, everything in him screams misfortune. None of those present move, Eijirou does not dare to follow, but Denki does. He rises and goes behind, not looking back.

Before he can get up to follow him, the woman called Momo speaks to him:

"Describe the incense to me, please tell me exactly what it does."

With a hole in his heart, Eijirou remains in place and answers the barbarians' questions.

[...]

Denki moves on without hesitation, following the aroma of wood until he finds Bakugou standing, in the middle of a pile of bushes, looking at the grey sky that begins to lighten. He stands beside him without looking at him, his arms behind him.

"So, his name's Izuku?" He asks with his eyes up to the sky.

"Why don't you just shut up?!"

"I like his name... is he the one who smells like mint?"

"If you don't shut your mouth—!"

"We'll find him."

Denki articulates his statement with the most serene voice he has, more than a suggestion it is a certainty. He has so much security that he gets the blond to look at him.

"Yeah?" The question is filled to the brim with sarcasm, of badly disguised anger. "And now you'll tell me that you know where he is."

"No, but I know you'll find him."

"You don't know anything."

"I know you didn't give up. I know you fought them. I know you set us free... and I know you'll find him."

After a long pause Bakugou snorts.

"You're an idiot," he murmurs pullings himself back to a good posture.

His presence becomes inflamed, grows and concentrates. Denki smells it and gets excited.
Katsuki gathers his group and barks orders non-stop, they have breakfast without pauses, and get going as soon as they finish picking up camp. It's a bright day with the sun high in a cloudless sky, the roads have dried up enough for the wagons to move smoothly.

Everyone travels with their heads uncovered, many without the top of their breastplate and allowing themselves to be caressed by the warm rays of the sun. The barbarians take up positions in the rear, watching out the wagons of the omegas, chatting with them and bathing in the mixture of soft and intense aromas they give off.

Togata travels with three of his men near the front, he insists that Katsuki should sleep, his response is a grunt and a fierce expression; at no time does he make a gesture to take control, he makes pertinent suggestions that Katsuki hears because they are sensible and demonstrate the practical sense of someone who is accustomed to moving in difficult conditions.

The barbarians adhere to their routines without complaint, they accept their food and in return offer to clean the meat. Unlike the omega—who have learned by trial and error in prison—they are experts at separating meat and making the most of each piece, they cook the viscera in eye-catching, odorous dishes that end up being edible. They are kind and noisy. They train with alphas who find themselves free of tasks because most of them do not know how to fight properly and chat with the omegas as well, who they dazzle with stories filled with details.

When Togata insists on knowing the incense, Katsuki shrugs his shoulders and shows him the cart full of powder that smells of milk and honey when burned. One of his men offers to taste it and ends up dead, between convulsions and the horrified expression of the rest. Katsuki and his men clean the area, for them the tests have become routine, their tolerance is higher, but Togata and his men move away from there, unable to bear the fragrance.

They travel relentlessly, taking advantage of the clear sky and warm weather. They following the riverbed, with their guards up in case of any ambush, but the region seems uninhabited.

By day Katsuki patrols, organizes and decrees. He also trains. One of the barbarians, the giant called Inasa, challenges him to fight. He loses the first few times, the other one is taller, better fed and has lived his whole life in freedom, but Katsuki does not give up and is not ashamed. He has many things to learn and others to remember.

It takes him four sessions, but in the end he gets to beat him. And once he does, he clings to his victory every time, although he does not always get it. Defeat does not inhibit him and instead inflames his hunger. He trains and sweats until his whole body protests his moves. He roars and jumps until his body remembers the flexibility of years before. With practice he can go back to his times of intuitive fighting, only this time he doesn't pretend to trust his innate dexterity, this time he is willing to polish every stroke and movement until there is no one who can defeat him again.

At night Katsuki patrols, watches, and sleeps. He dreams of Izuku and his immense smile of round cheeks and bright eyes.
He looks at him with palpable adoration; it is so intense that the insides of Katsuki wants to curl up and hide.

"Kacchan!"

His childish voice, full of sharp tones, is a melody that shakes him from head to toe.

"Kacchan!" The pride in his voice, the happiness in his eyes. "I've finished it!"

"Don't do it, Kacchan," the fear that makes his shoulders tremble when he sees the fall of several meters that opens a few steps away from him. "Don't jump from here."

Memories come back to him more easily. His yearning grows with them, he shoots himself out of control and forces himself to train with greater incentive, to move with greater urgency. In prison, memories were a source of bitterness, a constant reminder of his mistake and the trigger of his guilt. In the outside world memories are the spark that exalts his world, they sprout without order, like a dam that has been broken and from which ideas flow without rhythm. Before, he used to clung to
them with anger and violence, now he bathes in every memory without getting fed up.

_He is here. Here._

All his craving explodes when one of the sentinels returns with the news that the waterfall is nearby.

"There's someone there," says the boy and Katsuki immediately stops the caravan.

The group they send to the front is made up of four people. Eijirou, Tenya, Inasa and Katsuki. The rest stay behind assuming a defensive posture.

The four surround the stranger's camp, approaching carefully communicating through changes in their aroma. They discover that the man is one of them because he straightens up as soon as he perceives their presence and immediately turns in the direction in which they approach.

"Kirishima?"

The response he receives is thunderous and vibrant.

"Sensei!"

Two silhouettes run to meet him, the man embraces his disciples with evident relief and the three take a moment to enjoy their meeting. Inasa remains on the sidelines, studying the newcomer. Katsuki doesn't even look at him, his impatience bubbles inside him as he keeps looking around, searching.

This is, until three voices ask the same question.

"Where's the prince?"

---

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading the new chapter!! I named this chapter "Where's the prince??!!" while I was translating because I thought it was ridiculous how Kiri, Tenya, and later Aizawa find themselves in the same situation twice hahahah

Next chapter on December 29th.

"A Fake Orchid"
A Fake Orchid

Chapter Summary

I do not need a blue flower to remember you. Your presence accompanies me wherever I go. I am still waiting for you. Are you still there?

Chapter Notes

Not all omega's heat are homogeneous, most present their cycle during the seven days that the moon is full and not all are monthly. They vary inversely proportional in duration and period, this means that there are omegas with short cycles that present it every month or every two months. There are other extreme cases that can last up to seven days, but only occur once or twice a year.

Izuku in particular has a heat that lasts about two days and is presented by every third full moon, that means that he has his heats one full moon, on the next one he doesn't, on the following one he does and so on. If someone is counting Izuku left just after his heat, the next full moon (when there was no heat) Izuku and Shouto landed at Hosu... and the next one approaches.

And finally most have likely have realized that in certain cases it tends to go back in time when the scenarios change. It's because not everything happens simultaneously. Rain is a detail that can help locate which events happen at the same time, but if someone is confused, don't worry. If asked, it can be explained :)

Thank you so much for every comment, every kudo, every view E V E R Y T H I N G! Roquel and I deeply appreciate your support and we hope that you enjoy every chapter <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Could you be dead?

You always were two steps ahead, of everyone

We'd walk behind while you would run

I look up at your house

And I can almost hear you shout down to me

Where I always used to be

And I miss you
As he runs through the forest, in the dark, chased by menacing shadows, Izuku's mind does not enter a state of paralysis or doubt. His mind does not get clouded like that of a prey when confronted with its predator. Izuku is afraid, fear lives inside him, beats to the beat of his heart and is part of his nature, but instead of shrinking, paralyzing, Izuku's mind sharpens.

If he had time he would remember his father, what he used to say to him when he was a child.

"You've got the mind of a healer, Izuku, when faced with an emergency you don't allow fear to dominate you."

"But I don't want to feel fear. Kacchan is never afraid."

"Because Katsuki's nature is different from yours. Alphas never feel fear, it's not in their heart to shrink from terror."

"I want to be brave, Dad, I want to be like Kacchan."

"Being brave doesn't mean you're not afraid, it means you have the strength to stand up to it."

At that moment Izuku did not understand. At the age of six his greatest desire was to be like Katsuki, who was brilliant and intelligent and could do whatever he wanted. Katsuki, who laughed when he swam in the sea or climbed immense trees.

But those memories are far away, buried under layers of fear and quick decisions that Izuku is forced to make as he runs through the forest, trying not to crash into a tree.

He has lost sight of Shouto, who, blind to the situation, has obeyed the order to escape. The alpha,
with his long legs, his impressive agility, and his magnificent condition, has left him behind without stopping once. Izuku follows him, guided by the faint pine scent, avoiding fallen branches and unevenness, guided more by instinct than by sight.

Although he is persecuted, although he can't expect help from anyone, although Shouto is beyond all contact, Izuku doesn't allow panic to dominate him. He runs, dodges and thinks. He thinks about what he will do next, the situation and the alternatives.

Izuku's astute mind comes to two logical conclusions.

The first is that his pursuers are in no hurry to reach them. He hears them behind him, sometimes far away, sometimes close, as if they stopped to give them space before once again hurrying their stride.

"For them it's a game,' Izuku thinks as he adapts his speed, he still runs but without the frantic pace he had at the start chase.

The second conclusion Izuku reaches is that they are going to capture them. It's inevitable. They know the terrain and Izuku does not. They have weapons and Izuku does not. They go in a group and Izuku does not; he can't count on Shouto, who runs ahead of him, blind and deaf to the world, unable to offer resistance or propose an alternative.

If Izuku were a dreamer, he would think he could defeat his persecutors. If he were a blind optimist, he would believe that he could lose them in the forest. If he were an idealist he would wait for the incense effect to dissipate; but Izuku is practical, intelligent and shrewd... and understands that it is up to him to find a way out. That certainty immediately activates contingency plans, he begins to shuffle scenarios in which one of them could flee.

Izuku's mistake is to balance lives. To him, all lives are precious, invaluable, except his own. Shouto is the prince, and compared to that, his own life is sacrificial. With that idea in mind, Izuku moves. The first thing he does is extract the bottles of lotion he still carries in the bag with him. Without slowing down, Izuku crashes two bottles together and holds them up while the liquid from both of them spills over his clothes and legs until it finally falls to the ground. He throws the jar pieces as far away as he can as he hurries his way slightly off the path Shouto follows.

After a while he repeats the operation, making sure to deviate again. From time to time he retraces his steps and creates another trail. He meanders ceaselessly, dodging roots and rocks.

Sweat covers him from head to toe, his lungs burn without pause, and every breath of air has become a fight against itself. The voices of his pursuers grow as they approach, Izuku supposes the game is over.

"Don't be a wimp."

Katsuki's voice makes him clench his teeth, he hastens his step as he climbs the hill. As soon as he reaches the top he stops because there is no slope that descends to the other side of the hill. The world ends in what appears to be a clean fall. There is no escape.

"Don't be a wimp."

Izuku straightens and turns to greet his enemies. There are four of them, three covered from head to toe in a black uniform, invisible in the darkness of the night, the fourth one dresses the same but does not wear the hood. Izuku closely evaluates the delicate golden color of her hair and the bright gold of her feline eyes. Her manic smile gives a glimpse of two carnivorous tusks, small but lethal.

The girl leans forward in an unmistakable attacking posture, her hands flicker as they move away
from her body, revealing in the dim nightlight two short, crescent-shaped blades. Izuku breathes slowly—the fear within him agitates, grows and floods, covering him completely—but he does not step back.

At that moment he thinks of Katsuki, memories that flicker in a hurry, in just a second.

When Katsuki trains he always gives the same expression of absolute concentration: frowning eyebrows, crooked mouth, eyes fixed on whatever is in front of him. Izuku looks at him and delights. He is amazed at the fluidity, the simplicity with which he performs each exercise regardless of the difficulty.

Katsuki is in a bad mood while waiting for his mother to arrive to start the lessons. He moves and grunts, overflowing with energy even when he stays still. Izuku drinks from him silently.

Katsuki's wavy smile after beating him in a race. He does not even sweat, unlike Izuku who does not stop panting. At that moment he seems taller, more unattainable than ever.
Kacchan is swimming to the coral line while Izuku sits on the beach enjoying the sun. As he moves away, the only thing that stands out is his blond hair protruding from the white foam. Then, he suddenly disappears and he is no longer seen.

Izuku's interior contracts, without realizing he is standing close to the shore. His fear, the fear of swimming in a rough sea, beats inside him and clutches at his heart, but even that does not stop him from diving.

Kacchan emerges from the sea, holding in his hands something—a seashell?—, but when he sees him his expression hardens.

"Deku, what are you doing here?!"

The answer that Izuku could not formulate that day, because of an unforeseen wave that sank him without warning, was a simple phrase, full of the conviction that children possess: "I came looking for you."

That day, Izuku was fully aware of the certainty that vibrated in his heart and settled forever within it.

'I would cross the sea to look for you, Kacchan.'

That last memory fills him with melancholy. The nostalgia that hits him is not new, but it still possesses the devastating force that leaves him breathless. No matter where he goes, Katsuki will not be there.

"Don't be a wimp."

His body reacts, he moves away from the knife that ascends towards him and immediately throws a punch at his opponent, an attack that he saw Katsuki do repeated day by day while training... but his strike lacks the precision, strength and technique that a fighter strives to polish day by day. In other circumstances, faced with lesser level enemies, Izuku could offer a dignified combat, but there, in front of that woman soldier, trained to kill, Izuku is defeated without glory.

He ends up on the ground, with the weight of the woman on top of him, and the curved knife pressed against his neck.

"And your friend?" Asks the woman as Izuku purses his lips and shakes, unsuccessfully. She laughs and lifts her face to look at her companions. "Search for him."

Izuku struggles hard, but she keeps her knees planted against the ground without losing her smile.

"So, the trick with the jars was to hide that you took separate paths, huh? A waste of time. I'll find him. Just like I found them before. You've been very elusive... but I think I'm glad the incense didn't work with both of you, you've made my hunt even more interesting."

"What incense?" Izuku inquires in a tense voice waiting for her to give him specific details, but
instead of answering the woman laughs out loud.

"Did you come here without knowing about it? Well, it doesn't matter now."

The woman holds his face and forces him to look first to the left and then to the right, when finished she takes her time to look at his hands and arms. As soon as he understands what she is looking for, Izuku rattles even harder, making sure to shake both legs vigorously. His trick works because the woman's attention immediately rests on the bandage.

"Just like I thought," the woman says, offering him a pointy smile. "You're lucky, you'll be able to meet the General."

Before Izuku can ask her what she meant, the woman strikes the handle of her knife against his head. Izuku's world becomes a black mantle.

He wakes up with a headache and nausea. His entire body swings from side to side in a constant rhythm. As he straightens up, he notices the rope that ties his hands and legs, the tenseness in his shoulders and hips, and the smell of sweat emanating from the body beneath him.

Izuku discovers that he travels like a sack of vegetables on the back of a beast he has never seen before. It is immense, with six legs ending in sharp claws and a massive constitution of large bones. When he tries to straighten up he realizes that he has been tied to the saddle while the rider baits his mount without pause, they advance so quickly that the landscape is a stain of indistinguishable colors.

His vision sharpens his dizziness so Izuku drops his body against the beast's back and twists his neck slightly so that his nose is not directly above the short brown hair. The position, scent, and pain do not help soothe his stomach.

When he notices the taste of bile in his throat Izuku clenches his teeth and strives to remember the aroma of the sea. With difficulty, he manages to evoke the sensation of the mid-afternoon breeze when the sun is high in the sultry and asphyxiating summer evenings. He remembers the heavy, humid heat of long days, the rarefied wind of the sea forcing them into ponds away from the sun, hidden in caves all along the mountainous area.

He remembers the sticky skin, the sweat running down his back as if he had just bathed. He remembers Katsuki, sitting on the floor eating melon as sweat accumulates on his collarbones and at the back of his neck.

The memory returns to him effortlessly and Izuku clings to the image. He closes his eyes tightly and tries to bring clarity to the memory.
He has just turned eleven, the sky lacks clouds to buffer the scorching sun and the hot air makes it impossible to cool down, so the two of them have fled to the caves on the other side of the beach. There, the wind is fresh and the water is cold.

Kacchan eats seated with his feet in the water, indifferent, silent. Sitting by his side, Izuku looks at him with the desire to extend his hand and place it on the back of his friend's neck. He has done it before, he has never restrained himself when it comes to touching him... but now it is different. Now, he is fully aware of the discharge his body receives when it touches Kacchan. And every time he feels it, he remembers his leaves without flowers.

Izuku squeezes his fists as he concentrates on his food. From that day on, he will be careful to keep his hands still.

With his eyes closed Izuku squeezes his fists and tries to find a more comfortable posture, but the effort is in vain; in the end he is content with relaxing his body while he thinks.

'It happened on the last summer before Kacchan had to start his training at sea... it happened on the last summer we both spent on the islands before we were captured.'

His memories of the attack are fragments full of fear and uncertainty, in fact, he has almost no memories of the days before the kidnapping. He fails to remember things he and Katsuki did in those days.

'I remember eating with Mitsuki..., but I don't remember Kacchan being there.'

Izuku makes an effort, but no memory comes to him. In the end tiredness invades him and he ends up falling into a state of between sleeping and awareness, yet he is shaken from it when the beast finally stops. The soldier who travels with him lets him fall to the ground carelessly. Izuku bends in pain, hands and legs numb from lack of circulation.

The purpose of the stop is for the rider and the beast to rest, eat and take a little nap. In all that time Izuku stays tied to a tree, without water or food.

Tiredness and hunger cause Izuku to sleep without dreams, too exhausted for his brain to conjure tortuous images. He sleeps at regular intervals and each time he wakes up startled, disoriented and aching. At some point it starts to rain, drops of cold water soaking him from head to toe. Izuku wakes up to a voracious thirst, so he lifts his face and drinks until his throat hurts.

When they stop for the second night Izuku's stomach roars relentlessly, he has an incessant headache
and every time he closes his eyes he sees spots of bright light flickering behind his eyelids in indefinite shapes, each of them adapting to the rhythm of his heart. His clothes are so drenched that it sticks to his body like a second skin. His peeled wrists pulse without stopping bleeding. The worst of all is the cold, sharp and cutting that covers his body, makes him believe that he will never feel the warmth of the world again. When he is tied to the tree that night, at the mercy of the rain, Izuku is sure he will not wake up again.

[...]

But he does.

"...ey...hey... boy, do you hear me? Hey..."

He wakes up on the floor of a poorly lit black cell. He has to blink several times until the walls are no longer hazy. The voice that does not stop speaking to him sounds distant, muffled by cottons. The heat emanating from his body makes hearing difficult, the world is stifling and silent. Izuku closes his eyes, licking his lips, which he finds dry and slightly swollen. The specks of light have disappeared, they have been replaced by absolute blackness.

Izuku's consciousness fails to cling to the world.

[...]

The next time he wakes up, he is shaking. It is so cold that his teeth chatter, he notices his frozen fingers and stiff legs. When he turns, in an instinctive movement to conserve heat, he realizes that he has legs and hands free of restraints.

He looses the thought when a frozen sensation shakes his entire body.

"Boy."

He straightens his neck to see the person speaking as he presses his arms against his body.

"Are you okay?"

Izuku answers with a yes.

"Boy, can you hear me, are you cold?"

Izuku answers with a yes once again.
"Can't you talk?"

Izuku thinks the conversation is absurd, and so he says out loud. Only then does he realize that he can't say anything. He tries, and he can't. The cold prevents him.

"Are you thirsty?" Asks the man, spreading a piece of something unknown in his direction.

Izuku looks at him without ceasing to tremble; he cannot answer him, much less extend an arm to take what he has to offer. In an attempt to recover Izuku closes his eyes and concentrates on fighting the cold.

*Cold, cold, cold.*

He wakes up when he feels a tug to his clothes, the sensation of the stone scraping his back and the movement of the ceiling sweep away all rational thought. Panic bursts in him like bubbles of boiling water, swirling inside and choking him. That is until a sudden freshness touches his forehead and cheeks. When Izuku manages to focus his eyes he finds himself in front of a kind smile and incredibly gentle thin hands.

"By all gods, boy, you're burning with fever."

The voice is endowed with such calm and kindness that Izuku relaxes. He lies on his back with his head touching the bars separating the two cells. With his panic under control, Izuku takes a moment to study the blue-eyed skeletal face, the most compassionate blue eyes he has ever seen.

"It's fortunate that you've moved while dreaming, otherwise I would never have been able to reach you."

Izuku's answer is to look, blunted by the heaviness of his body.

"Do you understand what I'm saying, boy?"

Izuku says yes.

"Mmm, lets see. Open your mouth."

Izuku obeys, he is vaguely aware of the splintered bowl that is pressed against his lower lip, what wakes him up is the cool liquid that slides into his mouth. Izuku drinks so eagerly that if it were up to him he would have emptied it of a single sip, but the man takes his time and does it with such care that few drops slip down his cheek.

"There we go, better?" He wipes the drops of water with his thumb and presses his forehead against the bars. "Can you talk now? What's your name?"
Izuku tries again.

"...zzzku..."

"Suku, is your name Suku?... Well, Suku, you've been unconscious since you were brought here. That was this morning. I see you're soaking wet, is it raining?" Izuku moans. "Good. No, don't move. You're too weak, when was the last time you ate, don't you remember? It's all right. Don't worry. Well, looking at you closely, I realize how young you are, who was the fool who sent you here?... All right, we'll talk about that when you recover. For now you need to drink a lot of water. You also have to eat."

He offers him a soft, tasteless paste, which Izuku swallows with a lot of effort.

"We have to get you out of these wet clothes. I'll wrap you in my blanket to keep you warm."

As he feels his hands on his camisole, Izuku gathers what is left of his strength to reach out and hold his hand, but his effort is useless as the man pulls himself out without a problem and lifts the bottom of his shirt.

"...oh."

Izuku's fear soars, he squeezes his mouth and prepares for the worst, but instead of drawing attention, the man rests his face against the bars and whispers in a low voice.

"Everything's fine... it's okay. I'll bring my blanket, you'll wrap yourself in it while we take your clothes off. As soon as it's dry, you'll be able to use it again. Don't be afraid. I will take care of you."

In an attempt to calm him down, the prisoner strokes his hair with a great deal of tenderness until Izuku finally nods in agreement; before the man leaves, Izuku gathers the strength to ask a question.

"...who...?"

The blue-eyed man whispers: "My name is Yagi."

[...]

Without the clothes, wrapped in a rough cotton blanket, Izuku is aware of his icy body; the feeling is inexpressible as his interior is melted by the heat that pearls his sweat-drenched forehead. For hours, days, years—his perception of time is damaged—Izuku enters and leaves his conscious state.

Sometimes he finds Yagi massaging his muscles, warming his skin with friction and movement, other times he wakes up on the island with his mother, who puts a hand on his forehead and smiles at him with her inexhaustible love.

The fever causes Izuku to plunge into a sea of black memories. Nightmares, memories, hallucinations, all intermingle in his mind until it is impossible to distinguish truth from lie.
Katsuki in the middle of a black sea.

Izuku runs towards him, but as the dark water approaches, it rises to cover him completely.

"Kacchan!"

"Stay back, Deku."

"Kacchan!"

The gladioli on Kacchan's chest are an unmistakable scarlet red. Izuku dreams of touching them, but when he extends his hand his fingers are stained with blood. As he lifts his eyes, the purple-skinned man smiles at him as his knife pierces the alabastrine skinned chest.

"Kacchan!"

"What's your problem?!" Katsuki approaches and extends his hand to the knot on his waist. "Do you have such an ugly flower that you don't want anyone to see it?"

Izuku reacts with anger. He slaps the approaching hand and retreats; the tears burn in his eyes.
When he reaches out to touch Kacchan's back, he melts between his fingers like sand that has lost its firmness. Izuku is lost, in the middle of darkness.

"Run!"

Kacchan turns and pushes him. Izuku manages to take three steps before stumbling. He falls with his hands in front of him and turns around in time to see Kacchan jump over the man with the bow, but immediately falls to the ground, unconscious.

"Kacchan!"

He is squatting beside Kacchan, leg against leg, shoulder against shoulder, in front of a field of blue flowers with yellow center. He sees him move his lips, but he doesn't understand what he's saying.

"What?" He asks aloud.

The answer he receives is an outstretched arm pointing to the flowers. Kacchan's mouth moves, but there is no sound from it.

"I can't hear you!"

When he tries to touch him, a ferocious whirlpool blinds him.

He opens his eyes and sees Kacchan sitting in a dark cell. His scarlet eyes glow like incandescent embers.
"Kacchan?"

The expression of ferocious aberration on his friend's face darkens.

"You abandoned me."

"No!"

"You surrendered!"

"No!"

When Izuku tries to advance, he falls into an unfathomable abyss.

He wakes up with shortness of breath, cold hands, and sore body. He takes short breaths until he calms down, and yet he feels at the edge of the abyss, full of bitterness, disappointment and mourning. He shrinks his body, taking note of each aching muscle and each point of pain. He calmly orders his memories of the last days, most are fragments that combine nightmares and reality without a specific order, the rest are images of Yagi watching over his dreams, offering him fresh water and food or simply taking care of him.

"You survived."

Izuku moves carefully, he has to fight against the grief that palpitates within him. He turns his head until his eyes rest on the man, sitting with his shoulder resting on the bars separating the two cells.

"What day?" His voice is a short gasp, almost inaudible.

"I don't know the exact date, but it's been four days since they brought you here. Your fever worsened that night and it keep going up. I was afraid you wouldn't make it, but here you are."

"Where—," he does he pause, swallows, clears his throat, and tries again. "ar... arr... agg?"

"We're in the underground cells of the Capital, Suku."

"Suku?"

"Isn't that your name?"

"No, my name is Izuku."

With great care Izuku lifts himself up; as he rests his hands on the floor his wrists almost give up. Someone—supposedly Yagi—has washed and cleaned them, but the discomfort continues. As Izuku sits, he has to close his eyes to withstand the sudden dizziness that shakes him. He moans in pain and exhales slowly until he is sure he will not faint.
'Concentrate on breathing,' he says firmly to himself, determined to erase the nightmares from his mind.

He opens his eyes and sees that the cell has a stone wall in the back, on the sides metal bars separate one cell from another—the cell on the left is empty—and the door is a grey monstrosity with a simple slit three feet from the ground through which the light of the torches enters. There is also a bunch of smelly straw in the corner and a dirty bucket next to the door.

"Four days?" Asks Izuku as he accepts the bowl of water Yagi gives him.

"Yes, today counts as the night of the fourth day."

"Have they brought anyone else?"

"Only you, were you traveling with someone? With Kacchan, perhaps?"

Izuku's head spins so fast that his neck crackles. Inside him grows an indefinable emotion, a suffocating emotion. It is overwhelming and dense and unleashes the sense of melancholy associated with that name. Its barriers, still fragile from the fever, wobble.

"What did you say? You abandoned me!

"Kacchan," repeats Yagi and somehow the name sounds terrible on his lips, like an indiscretion said out loud. Izuku wants to correct it, but he can't. "It's the name you kept repeating while you were delirious with fever."

The bubble inside him explodes, leaving him empty and hollow, reminiscent of scarlet eyes like incandescent embers. You abandoned me!

"Nightmares," says Izuku, drinking the water in one go, he chokes and the cough gives him an excuse to recover.

"Was it his idea to draw an orchid on your leg?"

Izuku closes his eyes, feels weak, emotionally drained and unable to concentrate on anything other than the image of Kacchan being devoured by a black sea.

"Was it his idea?"

'No', he wants to tell him, 'it wasn't his idea, he no longer exists,' but he cannot verbalize it. Instead he pronounces a broken, weak phrase, which sounds more like lament than order.

"Please, stop talking about him."

He returns the empty bowl and lies down slowly. Fatigue falls on him like an iron mallet; he feels sick again, but without fever. He pushes his legs against his chest and closes his eyes. This time, he sleeps free of nightmares and hallucinations, instead he dreams of bright blue meadows.

[...]
He open his eyes and blinks.

*Katsuki?*

He is certain that he has never said his name out loud, but the sound of his own voice uttering that word is an echo that whistles in his ears with amazing clarity. For some reason, he thinks of blue flowers with tiny petals and no matter how hard he tries he cannot remember their name. He tries hard, but it's useless, the dream is diffuse and melts between his fingers when he tries to recreate it. The only thing that stays with him is that phrase.

Yet now he feels better, less vulnerable than the previous time, less fragile. He is still convalescing, but his mind is clear, his ideas are more complex, and the situation takes shape in front of his eyes. The feeling of melancholy is still there, it's a bitter taste, a weight within him, but it's not paralyzing.

The memory of Kacchan's expression while saying "You surrendered" drives rather than destroys him.

When his portion tray appears through the crack in the door, Izuku extends his hands and withdraws the food before it disappears. On the plate he finds the same porridge Yagi gave him, a bowl of water, and two pieces of moldy bread.

His hunger makes no concessions, he scrapes the mouldy parts of the bread and makes sure the inside stays good, then cuts it into slices that he smears with the porridge. He eats two slices slowly, chewing calmly despite the urgency he feels. He drinks some water and waits. To pass the time, he washes the wounds on his wrists with a little of his precious drinking water, undoes the bandage on his leg to study the damage caused by the humidity and bandages it again, making sure that the cloth remains fixed.

After making sure his stomach doesn't rebel, Izuku eats two more slices and waits again. His shoes have been removed so he entertains himself by warming his toes with his gnawed blanket, as he does that his eyes turn to the right, he can see that there are three other prisoners in cells adjoining Yagi's cell. To his left the cell is empty, there is a prisoner in the next cell and then another empty cage.

After two lunch breaks, and as he chews on his last slice of bread, Izuku rises to spy through the crack in his door. In front there is another row of identical doors, the roof is made of moldy stone and for the first time he detects the touch of humidity that permeates the environment.

"Are there rivers or lakes nearby?" He asks aloud and turns to look at Yagi.

"There's a river."
"Is it born or does it flow into the Hosu Dam?"

"It's born from it."

"Then it flows into the sea."

"Do you know the region?"

"Only on maps. I memorized the exact position of fortresses, villages and prisons when I set out on my journey. If you say that there's a river nearby that springs from the dam, then we are in the channel they use to transport the ships they build to the sea."

"Why's that important?"

"Because I know someone who works here."

[...]

"Stay away from the shores, Midoriya... don't come near unless you have no other choice. If they catch you, they'll send you to the Capital. I have a friend there who can help you, he works in the underground cells. I'll ask him to keep an eye on the prisoners who arrive, but you must understand that there's no guarantee that he can come and see you."

[...]

When the guard returns for the evening meal, Izuku is ready.

"What a mad banquet of darkness."

The guard tells him to keep quiet and goes away cursing between his teeth. Izuku moves away from the door and sits again with his back against the bars.

"And now?"

"We wait."

Hunger returns stronger than ever, his stomach twists impatiently and Izuku cannot calm him down. To distract himself he counts the two hundred and sixteen lines on the ceiling of his cell, massages his injured wrists and tries to stretch carefully. Then he lets his eyes wander around the cell until they pose on Yagi.
"Thank you for helping me."

He says it with sincerity, maybe even with affection, and Yagi shakes his head, making it seem unimportant.

"You're too young to be here."

"They don't care how old you are."

Yagi nods silently and the conversation dies there. Izuku continues to look at him, studying his thin features, his marked cheekbones and his sharp teeth. He looks like someone who has lost weight continuously, without pause. Although the filthy air in the cell makes it seem that everyone smells the same—a mixture of sweat, dirt, rottenness and anguish—it is impossible to hide the scent that belongs to each one of them, it floats among them tenuously and Izuku allows himself to study them in silence.

"Why are you here," asks Yagi suddenly.

"Why are you here?"

"I'm not an omega posing as a beta."

"No, you're an alpha posing as a beta. At first I thought I was wrong because you don't have a brand, but no. You're an alpha. Do they know?"

"You're very observant, boy. Yes, they know, I'm here because he got bored of me."

"The General?"

"He visits me from time to time, but the rest of the time he leaves me alone."

"And your mark?"

"It used to be here," his bony finger points to his bare torso where a terrible scar covers almost his entire left side. "It was an olive flower and extended from my shoulder to my side. It had small white flowers with a touch of gold in the center of its petals. There were dozens of white clusters... my people considered it the flower of peace. Now it's gone."

"What happened?"

"I lost it."

"How?"

"They took it from me. Now it's displayed as a trophy on Tomura Shigaraki's wall."

"Who?"

"...for your sake, I hope you never get to know him. Now, tell me, how did you get here?"

Izuku sighs, he calmly massages his fingers and tells him, without hurry and with all the details he has. And as it cannot be otherwise, he starts with Kacchan.
"I'd remember you even though I didn't have a single blue flower, Katsuki."

Izuku’s retelling is interrupted almost at the end. He frowns and tries to remember when and where he heard that phrase.

"...and you decided to sacrifice yourself in his place."

Izuku looks at him, blinks. "Huh?... yes... no, I mean. It wasn't a sacrifice. I don't know if my plan was successful or not." Izuku sighs without failing to examine the wounds on his wrists, pushing away the memory of the blue flowers. "I'm sure I covered his tracks and gave him enough time to get away. I want to believe he's safe."

Yagi nods, thinking.

That night Izuku sleeps little, his stomach empty, his mind full of ideas and the firm decision to get out of there.

The routine in the cells is very boring, the heavy atmosphere numbs him for most of the day, when he is awake he talks with Yagi, who is interested in his desire to be a healer and shows interest in his stay in the land of Overhaul. Twice a day a guard comes to feed them, every time Izuku repeats the password, without any change.

On the fifth visit Izuku finally meets Tokoyami's friend.

"What a mad banquet of darkness," Izuku repeats by inertia without raising his eyes.

"Our friend is a nightly being."

Kneeling in front of his door, Izuku bows to see his caretaker. He is a tall, stocky man with six muscular arms on which he carries food trays, his hair is of a shiny platinum color and a bandana covers much of his face.

"Tentakoru?"

The man leans to spy through the slit, his eyebrows framed as he sees Yagi glued to the bars.

"He's a friend," Midoriya explains urgently and quietly. "I trust him, Tentakoru."

"I told Fumikage not to call me that. It's Shoji."
His voice has a high, almost playful rhythm, and curiously it does not come from his mouth but from one of the appendages that approaches the crack to whisper; although the blue scarf covers half his face it is easy to identify when he laughs because the edges of his black eyes wrinkle.

Without being able to avoid it, Izuku smiles.

"Hello, Shoji. Thank you for coming."

"I had begun to believe that I would never have a chance to meet you, Midoriya. Fumikage wrote many letters about you. And he was very insistent in asking me to keep track of the new prisoners."

"How's he?"

"His last letter came several weeks ago. In it he told me the date of your departure, he also warned me of his recruitment. Now it's impossible to know where he is."

Midoriya shakes the sudden nostalgia and concentrates. "Can you help me, Shoji? I need to get out of here."

"Fumikage must have told you that I cannot get you out of here... but I promised him that I will do everything in my power to help you. Now, listen well because I have no time left: In two days they will test all the prisoners here. The test will be done outdoors, at which point you will have to flee. You must move away to the Overhaul border, or if you prefer, go into the mountains, there's no way to go to the sea, there are troops everywhere and although your people have their ships cordoning off the area there are rumors that most of theirs are dead. Your best option is to return to Overhaul—"

"But—"

"That's it. Now take your food, I've put double ration for you. I'll be back in two days."

Izuku sees him leave and stays by the door until everything is silent. For a moment he stands still, then arranges his food on the floor, kneels down with a piece of loose rock and begins to outline an improvised version of Tokoyami's maps. When he finishes marking the ground, he arranges the moldy pieces he has removed from the bread to delimit the fortifications he remembers.

"Here's the river," he mumbles while his brain runs frenetic, analyzing possibilities and scenarios. "I can't cross it, even if I swim I risk being dragged by the current. I could go upstream, reach the dam and look for an area where the riverbed is less rough, but... do I really want to go back to Overhaul? I spent years trying to get out of there. To return now would be to go back, with the exception that Tsuyu is not there. Nor Fumikage. I can't go down, not without a ship, and if I do it on foot I risk being discovered. There are many villages around this river. I can't pass through Hosu without aid, especially if the General's troops are deployed, there's no way I can reach the coast safely. All that remains for me to do is climb the mountains, once there I can cross them and attempt to reach the desert. Kamui said he would go up into the mountains to hide. He also said he had a friend there. What was his name? Espie... Esnie... come on, brain, remember..... Snipe... Yes. Snipe. If I can find Snipe he can guide me with Kamui. With him I can send a message to Aizawa to inform him of my position. It's the most logical option."

Almost without thinking Izuku reaches out his hand, takes one of his pieces of bread, dips it in his porridge and begins to chew without his eyes stopping, shifting to different points in the map.

"You are exceptional."

Yagi's voice pulls him out of his little bubble and he turns to look at him.
"You'll be an excellent healer."

"Thank you."

"No, thank you for reminding me that there are still things to fight for. Thank you for reminding me of who I am and what I'm doing here."

"What?"

"I didn't tell you the whole truth, young man... I thought I was protecting you. Where I come from, the omega are cared for, pampered, because life in my land is difficult and our people take responsibility for keeping them safe. Not many of them are born in every generation, not many survive, those who do marry young and let themselves be entertained because it's the only thing they know."

"Where are you from, Yagi?"

"My name's Toshinori Yagi."

For a moment Izuku stands still, reviewing the name, trying to make sense of the syllables in his head. That is until he remembers Aizawa and the mission he gave Tenya.

"You're the former leader of the Barbarian Tribes."

"I am. When I heard your story I wanted to tell you the truth, but that would only put you in danger."

"Why?"

"I'll tell you the whole story, but first you have to promise to send a message to my home. You will tell the young Togata exactly what I am going to tell you. Only him and no one else."

"Why?"

"Because they'll kill you if you repeat what you've heard here."

"Repeat what?"

"I want you to listen carefully. I'm going to tell you who the General is and what his purpose is."

"Do you know him?"

"Unfortunately I once spared his life."

[...]
Izuku is transported from the individual cells to the back of a wagon. Eight other adults travel with him, all of them looking at him with horror at his age and inhaling the delicate mint aroma that emanates from him.

After a relatively short journey the door opens and several adults position themselves in front of Izuku in an instinctive gesture. When nothing happens everyone moves slowly towards the exit.

As soon as he is outside Izuku realizes three things in quick succession. The first is that there is too much light. The second, when his eyes get used to the blaze, is that Shoji is not in the line of guards, and the last is that his body is still shaky from the fever. Either that or he has not eaten enough.

"The General is magnanimous," shouts one of the officers who looks at them at a prudent distance. In the group there are about fifteen, all of them towering and ferocious. "He's given you the opportunity to regain your freedom. If you manage to escape you'll be free... and well, what are you waiting for? GO!"

His cry puts all the beta adults on the move. Izuku follows them, in the same direction, because he's determined to lose the sight guards before separating.

The group of guards is left behind, next to the wagon, in front there is a dirt road that begins to twist to the left until a sharp curve, to the right there is a fall of several meters and the other a steep slope covered with trees.

Izuku and his group turn to the left and begin to climb. In just fifteen meters Izuku begins to notice clear signs of wear and tear after a prolonged fasting.

They don't get very far.

At first Izuku is sure that it is fog, faint and a very light grey that can only be distinguished by the shade of the trees, but then he smells it and stops, because it has a sour aroma. Wild. He is trying to identify it when the first Beta falls. It happens in front of him and Izuku moves before he can process what he does. He bows next to the man and moves away when he begins to convulse. It doesn't take long before a white foam begins to sprout from his mouth and then stays still.

Izuku takes his pulse and does not find it.

Others start screaming, holding their heads with their hands and when Izuku looks at them he notices the blood flowing through their eyes and nose. When doing a quick check Izuku detects three more with convulsions while the rest screams.

The incense. Shoji said they would do a test with us. This is the test. It's a drug for beta. It's an incense to kill a beta.

Izuku's instinct makes him want to kneel next to his companions to help, he looks around horrified.

"Don't be a wimp."

Izuku runs, continues to ascend with difficulty without stopping. He finds Shoji at the top, with a travel bag.

"I packed provisions and other things you'll need. You have an hour, maybe two, before the guards realize one is missing. Even then they'll be looking around so run and don't stop."

"Thank you, Shoji."
"Run!"

In a hurry, with images of beta men convulsing on the ground still fresh in his mind, Izuku forgets to tell Shoji his plan to reach the mountainous area.

Had he told Shoji, he would have warned him of what he will find there.

Chapter End Notes

Roquel says it took her great effort to put both popular quotes on this chapter that you must have noticed: "Stay back, Deku" and "What a Mad Banquet of Darkness." It trully is easier in english, the quote is all done and easy to use it, but in her case she had to translate it to spanish so it must have been hard to find the right words.

Tentakoru is Shoji's hero name, so we've got more code names! Oh and, Izuku is once again the one with the most information out of everybody. Maybe one day we'll know what Toshinori told Izuku?

This is the last chapter of 2018! I hope this year didn't kick too many guts and everyone enjoys an awesome new year! For a happy 2019 :D

Next chapter on January 5th.

"Funeral Pyre"
Funeral Pyre

Chapter Summary

With just flapping its wings, a butterfly can change the world. Every time you get up, every time you go out, every time you talk... You will never know the lives that cross your path and the changes you make in them. You are not alone and you will never be insignificant.

Chapter Notes

"Those with sensitive souls, I remind you that this story has delicate content. In war, lives are lost, injustices are committed and the innocent suffer. It cannot be avoided. So prepare the handkerchiefs." - Roquel.

Thank you so much for all the comments, kudos and views, I'm so glad everyone is enjoying the bittersweet journey! I've had some issues with my internet network the past week, but it's finally back to life so here we go :P

Ken Ishiyama - Cementoss

Shinji Nishiya - Kamui

Update: I just noticed this chapter has exactly 5k words xD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kouji Kouda cannot speak, but he does not consider himself miserable nor unfortunate. He has been lucky enough to live because there are countless cases of mothers and families disregarding children considered 'abnormal'. It is true that he never met his parents, but he has a father whom he loves very much, the same one who found him in the forest, gave him a home and raised him with the rest of his children.

If he could, Kouji would call Ken Ishiyama "father", but he cannot, so he satisfies himself with obeying him. In return Ken entrusts him with things he doesn't share with the others.

"Are you ready, Kouji?" Asks Ken as he crosses the curtain that separates his bedroom from his living room.

Kouji nods and answers. He can't speak, but his vocal cords are capable of producing sounds that are out of tune, sounds that he has perfected over time. In the village his friends are able to identify the breath of air that is associated with the delight of the one who expresses surprise.

The sound he emits in front of his father is an unquestionable yes.
"Good," answers Ken, giving him a food package and a bigger backpack. "According to the message that Kamui sent with Mina, he and the spies left yesterday. Kamui will be waiting for you at the warehouse you use for your pets. He should have arrived yesterday, so give him the backpack and let him go."

A guttural sound, this time a question, at the same time Kouji raises his hand and imitates the shape of a snake with it.

Ken shakes his head.

"Don't worry about Shuichi, he comes to see me so you have to go in my place. Shigaraki's group plans to leave in a couple of days and until then I must remain here."

Kouji wrinkles his nose and shifts his eyes away.

"I know they make you nervous, have they bothered you again?"

Denial, a trembling sound.

"If you'd prefer, you can stay at the warehouse for a few days. You won't be able to say goodbye to your friends, but you'll still see them when you go to the Capital to study."

Uncertainty, drooping eyebrows and nervous hands.

"Don't worry, just go... make the most of your time and take care of your rabbits, okay?"

Assent. Happiness.

[...]

Kamui wakes up when he hears the crunching of the leaves around the niche. In a matter of seconds he is standing, with his dagger in his hand, a defensive posture he takes when completely alert; as soon as he identifies the rhythm of the steps he straightens up. He lowers the knife and goes out to greet his guest.

"Good morning, Kouji. You came early, and your father?" The boy raises his left fist and places it on his back. "I understand. And Mina?" The boy waves his hand away from his body. "Right, I forgot about it, they're leaving today. Are you going to miss them?"

A hand on the face, silence.

"Time goes by in a hurry... Soon your friends will be back."

A pout.

"Now, let's have breakfast, I want to leave before the sun comes up."

Kouji raises a hand, points at him, then wags his fingers and finally makes a guttural sound.
Kamui sighs.

"I don't know how long I'll be gone. I'll be back as soon as things calm down, a couple of months maybe, or if the cold comes and things don't get better I'll go down to the border and spend the winter in the vicinity of the desert, but don't worry I'll be back by the time spring arrives." Kouji's answer is to nod as he extends the big backpack.

They eat in silence, wrapped in the small light of the dining room lamp. Outside, the wind blows against the branches of the trees.

"You hear that?" Kamui asks, setting aside his plate while Kouji looks at him; before he reacts, Kamui gets up and opens the door through which a cool night breeze enters. "It's rain! The rains have begun!"

Kamui relaxes leaning against the door frame, Kouji chews slowly, mentally enumerating his pending tasks, when he finishes eating he puts his plate aside and stays there listening to the beating of the drops against the leaves.

Just then the roof of the house collapses on top of them.

[...]

"Damn it!" Exclaims Toga as soon as she smells the rain; her nightmare materializes fifteen minutes later when the first drops fall from the dark sky. In the distance a series of rays illuminate the clouds intermittently. "Son of a bitch!"

She runs in a straight line, without stopping.

'I just found the trail and it starts raining, damn it!'

She hopes to catch him, but the little drizzle turns into a storm in a matter of seconds. With her hair soaked and thin rivers of water running down her temples, Toga keeps her eyes fixed on the ground where the heavy tracks begin to fade.

As she loses her trail, Toga slows down, crouching forward, bending down regularly to analyse the ground and look for a sign. She walks in semicircles waiting to find the trail again.

She knows she has lost it when she reaches the cliff.

"Shit!"

She pushes her hair away from her face and looks around her, as if waiting to see the savage crouching, watching her. Then she approaches the cliff, and immediately discards it as a possible hiding place. There is a tilted slope of several meters that ends with a fall into the void, not even she could descend with the rain falling.

She remains still for a long time listening attentively, careful to not let even the slightest sign not go unnoticed, but except for the thunder that roars in the sky the forest is silent. When Toga surrenders
she cuts off a branch that she immediately clears of leaves and splinters. She places a piece of red cloth at one end while sharpening the other which she proceeds to bury in the ground in the clearest area she finds that it is visible from afar.

She searches in her small closed quiver that she carries crossed to her back and draws an arrow with a red ball in its tip. Squeezed against the tree, preventing the rain from wetting its flint, Toga lights the ball that immediately hiss and begins to expel smoke of an intense red color.

With the ball smoking, Toga arms her bow and shoots the arrow high into the sky, leaving behind a red trail. The color of failure.

With a click Toga turns her back on the sky, returns on her footsteps and starts again.

[...]

Kouji coughs, he is too stunned to understand. His chair has succumbed under his weight and around him he sees only palm leaves and broken wooden rods. He sits up slowly and looks up at the ceiling. There is a huge hole on his right, the main beam stays in place, but the rest of the secondary beams hang in parts that are scattered around him.

The rain that passes through the hole begins to form puddles on the ground.

Kouji crawls slowly to inspect what is under the hole. The first thing he sees when he stretches his neck is... a leg?

"Kouji!"

He looks at Kamui, who seems unscathed, although the expression in his eyes rebounds with consternation. Kouji merely points to the pile of leaves and wood that lies beneath the hole.

As Kamui approaches to inspect it his expression becomes a gesture of absolute panic. He stretches to look through the hole in the ceiling in spite of the rain, but the sky is painted in an absolute darkness and nothing but dark clouds are seen.

Kamui turns his back to him and slowly begins to remove the leaves and sidebars that lie on a leg wrapped in thick dark cloth trousers with soft-skin boots fastened with thin ribbons.

"Go away, Kouji," says Kamui, terrifyingly still, contemplating what lies under the hole in the roof. "Go home and thank your father."

Years will pass and Kouji will still wish he'd obeyed, but it's seeing the bloody face, the bad leg position, and the panicky expression in Kamui to know he has to help.

And he does.
A sunless dawn, the sky of a dark grey is an exact reflection of her humour. Hungry and exhausted after having spent the whole night searching, Toga returns to her improvised flag at the top of the cliff. There, the second of her companions awaits her.

"Did you find him," asks the tall man with green skin.

"Yes," says Toga, snatching from him the piece of dried meat he eats sitting next to a tree, "I have it hidden in my boot.

"That's mine!"

"Oh, shut up!"

She chews noisily while still contemplating the forest, in her mind the paths are clearly drawn, where each one leads, the possible hiding places and the villages to avoid if she were an enemy fugitive; but the savage has vanished without a trace and for the first time in her life she has no trace to follow.

Damn it.

When she finishes eating she turns around and stops, assaulted by a sudden idea. She studies the cliff again, gets close until she starts the slope and studies the area with a critical eye. When she tries to advance the earth under her feet slips and threatens to make her fall. Toga goes back to the beginning of the slope.

"On your feet, we're leaving!"

"Where are we going?"

"Just move!"

Toga jumps over her saddle and baits it until the animal runs at full speed, gliding with agility through the wet slopes. The air whistles in her ears and the world is a blur, but Toga knows the way back.

Three hours later they meet Shuichi Iguchi. She sits by the fire stripping off her wet clothes.

"Well?" Asks Shuichi, sitting across the table devouring his breakfast.

"One of the spies has a flower on his leg, we sent him to the Capital as ordered by the General. Maki
travels with him."

"And the other?"

"He disappeared."

"Did you lose him?"

"I didn't lose him, he was taken from me."

"By whom?"

"His friend ruined his trail. And the rain made everything worse. Now I'll have to start from scratch."

"Will you stay until the rain stops?"

"That could take weeks. No. I'll sleep, I'll eat, I'll gather provisions and I'll go back to the forest. I plan to cover a radius of ten kilometers around the point where I lost him, I need to move fast before the trail fades. I plan to leave my escort here, this time I will travel alone."

"Dabi won't agree."

"Dabi's not here."

"You'll be in trouble."

"They'll be mine and not yours, so shut up."

"Anyways," Iguchi puts his plate aside and gets up. "Since you're here, do you want to stay for the show?"

Toga shrugs her shoulders, turns her back while she finishes changing, hears him coming out, and only then does she fall into the bed where she sleeps for the rest of the day.

She wakes up hours later, relaxed and full of energy. It is raining, but it is just a light drizzle with wind and no thunder. As soon as she comes out, she can detect the unmistakable aroma of burnt wood. Indifferent to the hubbub and the screams, Toga moves away in the direction of the bonfire where food is served. She finds the remains of a cooked deer and a pile of soft potatoes, gathers them around her and sits down to eat while she contemplates the flames that devour the house in front of her. She likes fire, its colour, its fierceness, its warmth; she likes it as much as she likes blood, almost. That night both are combined in a symphony so wonderful that her insides purrs, the food tastes a thousand times better as she hears the screams and breathes in the aroma of the fire feeding on the meat.

The red and orange flames rise towards the sky illuminating the night, the wind makes them grow and the rain does not have the strength to extinguish them. Toga allows herself to be lulled by the crackling of the wood.

She opens her eyes as she feels the warmth of the flames and realizes that the fire has reached the house on her right, in the distance the silhouettes of Iguchi’s soldiers are glimpsed getting rid of the treacherous garbage. For a moment Toga feels the urge to assist the group in the hope of tasting the blood of the traitors, but in the end laziness overcomes her and she stares.

To entertain herself, she approaches the luggage she confiscated from the spies and begins to rummage through the backpacks. From the first bag she puts away two knives and sends the rest to
the garbage pile. The provisions end up in her own bag and the papers are thrown into the fire without hesitation. From the second bag she discards all the smelly pastes, seeds and dried leaves, and finally she looks through the notebook.

It is not a notebook itself, it is actually a pile of sheets tightened with a rubber band. When she releases the band the pages inflate in her hands. The first pages have a lot of plant drawings, Toga knows most of them, although she is surprised to find such a detailed description of each one. She even finds properties that were unknown to her.

The plants run out and what follows are drawings of the same flower. Some are in black and white, others are painted in a vibrant red, the paint has gone through some pages and in others it has caused the paper to wrinkle with the excess of water. The flower is the same everywhere, big and small, they all have the same shape and the same color.

When she gets bored of seeing the same drawing, Toga takes a handful of them and throws them into the fire. The paper folds into itself and slowly changes color. The red flower takes on a brown tone, then black until it finally disappears. Toga repeats the operation, burning page by page, without any remorse.

It is almost at the end when she stops. This time the flower occupies the whole page, the contours are thick, the details amazing, and the color is hypnotic. Toga studies the long stem of a dark green, the small leaves piled around it, and finally realizes that the flower has the shape of a sword. A long sword dyed with the color of blood.

Toga smiles.

She throws the rest of the leaves into the fire while still contemplating the only surviving flower. She folds it into four parts and keeps it in her bag. Then she stretches, takes her things, moves away from the burning house and goes back into the forest.

Let Iguchi and his men take care of the traitors. She has a spy to find.

The rain falls in a thin cold curtain that crashes against her black tabard; the garments cover her from head to toe and is made in such a way that it does not allow the passage of the water. Thanks to it Toga searches the forest without pause.

It takes days, but she finally finds it. The clue she has been looking for.

At the foot of the cliff is a shattered hut, Toga studies the contours of the structure and when she is sure she will not fall she enters carefully. Inside she finds palm leaves, broken books and loose leaves soaked with the water that falls through the hole in the roof.

Toga takes her time, rummages through the remains, in the niche of leaves and pieces of wood, she searches carefully and without haste. Finally, her search succeeds when she finds a piece of bloody cloth hidden under a pile of loose leaves. Very carefully, Toga smells it.
The smell of blood brings out a smile; many say that the sense of smell of the savages is unmatched, that they can distinguish between them with simple aromas that theirs cannot differentiate, but Toga does not envy their skill, hers is even better.

She only needs a drop of blood to trace a prey no matter where it hides. With the handkerchief in her hand it is a matter of time until the wind shows her the way to her target. It will be a long journey, but certainly fun.

Izuku runs at a steady pace, attentive to any scream or sound, he has the map fresh in his head so he enters the forest trying to make sure the mountains are always in front of him; he climbs the hills full of leafy trees and wet moss that makes the ground slippery. He notices his legs are still weak from the fever, so he tries not to force his body too much.

Without stopping, Izuku searches through Shouji's provisions. He finds a bottle of water from which he drinks to rinse off the flavor that weighs on his tongue—the dense and heavy aroma of the incense they used against the Beta—, inside the bag he also finds a gigantic piece of meat wrapped in ribbon and paper, a pile of small apples, a bar of fresh bread, and a bag of seeds and sweets.

When he gets tired of running, he slowly changes his speed while eating the seeds in the bag. He stops to fill his water bottle in the first stream he finds and when he realizes that he can't go any further he looks for a hiding place where he can rest.

He falls asleep without being able to avoid it, too exhausted to stay alert. He wakes up hours later, shrunk inside the trunk he chose as his refuge, startled, unable to remember his dream, but filled with fear to the brim and with the sensation that someone is watching him.

When he crawls out of his hiding place he is greeted by rain. A heavy rain that immediately soaks him from head to toe. The backpack is placed on his back and he advances, fearful and full of panic. He does not stop hearing screams in the distance, although when he stops to listen carefully, what he hears is simply the whistle of the wind.

The forest ends at the foot of the mountainous area and Izuku ascends, following the paths marked by the animals that inhabit the area. He eats the apples as he advances and when he is well above the line of trees he stops to contemplate the valley. In the dark and grey sky it is impossible to find the Capital, but Izuku only needs to locate the river that comes down in the distance to get an idea of his position.

He finds a small space covered between rocks and eats a ration of bread and meat. He rubs his frozen arms and shakes his hair tightly until it stops dripping. He gets sleepy again, but instead of sleeping he eats a sweet to stay alert and goes on his way.

Another day ends and luckily the rain stops before nightfall.

Izuku does not stop, he goes forward brimming with determination and thanks to that he does not realize it is night. When he does, he stops and looks around him, the world has an amazing clarity,
everything is a pale grey color. The rocks shine with a thin layer of moisture that flashes in silvery colors.

Izuku raises his eyes towards the sky and as he sees the moon just above him his heart shrinks within his chest.

'A full moon.'

Izuku immediately does the math. The last full moon occurred when they arrived at Hosu, that was the white moon, as he calls it, this is the moon of his heat.

'How many days has it been like that? Two, three? How many days until I have to hide?'

He closes his eyes and starts counting, he remembers seeing the crescent moon when he was captured, if he spent a week locked up, then there are still a couple of days until the moon is completely full. One at least, three at most.

'I have to move, I have to keep going.'

The certainty that at any moment he will find himself in the most vulnerable situation he can imagine gives him the strength to move faster. At dawn he stops to eat, he repeats his meal from the previous time—a ration of bread and meat—and his stomach grunts with dissatisfaction. He becomes aware again of the situation in which he finds himself.

He needs a place to hide, he needs water and food to support his heat, he needs a blanket.

The heats are already difficult, but now he does not even have at hand the leaves that help him sleep and alleviate the need. He remembers his first heat, the most difficult of them all, when Katsuki’s loss was too recent and he had no one.

'Don’t think of that. Concentrate. You need food. What can you eat? Mushrooms, they surely survive at these heights. I’ve seen birds. If I find their nests I can steal their eggs. Good. Water. If it rains I can collect water. If not, maybe I should start looking for a stream. Maybe a pond. There are many rivers in the area, some of them must be born nearby.'

Determined, Izuku stops his trek and begins to look for a hiding place. He finds mushrooms and moss that he carefully scrapes until he fills his bag with seeds. He is chasing a bird when he smells it.

He is immediately paralyzed.

With extreme caution Izuku breathes. The scent is faint, but it is unmistakable; he cannot help but blush, the blood descends through his stomach to become a thick broth that rocks at the height of his womb.

'Is there an omega here?'

The aroma has the richness and exuberant contrasts that omegas emit during their heats—an alpha would find the aroma irresistible—but it is too impersonal, too ordinary.

At that moment he remembers the incense they used against Shouto. That incense was sweet, had a strong scent of honey and milk, was indisputably omega, it incapacitated Shouto and turned him into an unwilling doll even though Izuku found the aroma incredibly mild.

'That’s how they control the alpha.'
And the incense they used yesterday had a potent, abhorrent aroma. That thing incapacitated and killed the beta men in a matter of seconds. He couldn't even identify it.

'That's how they plan to fight the Beta.'

But the essence he just found is different from those two. Izuku takes a moment to appreciate the notes that reverberate in the subtle fragrance: It is an aroma of such intensity that he can even detect it even though it is not near the point of origin and its similarity to the pheromones that come from the omegas in heat are indisputable.

'But what is its objective.'

It is an aroma that would exalt an alpha instead of holding them back, it is an aroma reserved to stimulate, although not exclusively, the omegas also use it to delimit territories.

'Whose territory is this one?'

The question dies in his mind when he straightens up and his periphery captures the gentle movement of the earth. Only it is not earth, it is an immense beast with light hair, empty red eyes and six limbs with sharp claws.

The animal grunts—roars, shriekes—and it is the signal Izuku needs to turn around and run.

He tries to return the same way he came, but the beast jumps in front of him and Izuku has to turn left to avoid it. Every time he tries to deviate the animal gets in the way, until Izuku begins to feel like a sheep being taken back to the pen.

[...]

After their encounter with the savages, Mina and Mashirao hasten to return home. If they do not stop, they will reach the village before dawn. Luckily, it no longer rains and the night brings a cool breeze that dries the sweat from their foreheads.

As soon as she sees the hill, Mina smiles because she only needs to cross it to see the pile of houses that make up her home.

But when she gets to the top she stops. There are no lights, no bonfires, there is no movement. It takes Mina a second to identify what is wrong with the image: Several roofs have disappeared and
the entire image is deep black, like coal.

Mina and Mashirao move at the same time, without saying anything they descend the slope at a rapid pace and separate as soon as they reach the bottom.

Mina runs straight home shouting. "Mom!"

Her house—what used to be her house—is now a black structure without a roof that smells of smoke and ash. The beds are black piles and from the kitchen only a couple of bowls survived which the fire was not able to consume.

"Ika!" She goes into her room but her closet, in which her sister usually hides, has been reduced to ashes. "Mom!"

She goes out without stopping screaming. Always the same words, wishing, longing, to hear her mother's voice as she answers. The silence in the village is as oppressive as the knot that begins to form inside her chest.

She runs to Cementos' house, but the place is empty and in the same conditions as her house.

_There's no one left, they're all gone. They escaped._

As she runs through each structure she sees in the distance the figure of Mashirao, who remains standing, motionless.

"There's no one left," says Mina as she approaches him.

Mashirao does not answer, his face stiff, his eyes ponds of unmoving tears, and his tail, which usually sways on his back, lies on the ground, flaccid.

Mina turns her head and sees them. A pile of charred bodies, discarded clothes, black torsos and unrecognizable faces. There are so many that it is impossible to count them. There are immense bodies and tiny figures, all sharing the same destiny. Above them all, impaled in an iron spear, the head of their leader flutters.

Mina's knees hit the ground with a dry sound. She holds the chest of her shirt, just at the height of her heart, where she feels such great pain that she cannot articulate. She tries to say something but her mouth only manages to formulate a broken sound, which immediately turns into an open cry. Tears flow uncontrollably and Mina embraces herself as her sobs rise to the sky.

_I'm sorry, I'm sorry._
"Do you have the test results, Kurogiri?"

"It was successful, General. Almost all of the prisoners succumbed to the incense immediately."

"Almost all?"

"A handful of them survived the first administration, dispersed through the forest until the side effects ended with them: vomiting, fever, nosebleeds. The recovery of the bodies is still in process, so far three are missing, but it is a matter of time before finding them."

"Very well. With the success of beta incense you have permission to start production and distribution. We must exterminate the Yuuei forces that are still patrolling our coasts, and begin preparations to move the incense across the sea."

"As you command, General... but sir, there's also a drawback."

"Speak."

"We've lost contact with one of the prisons near the Noumu border before the last transfers. I sent orders to investigate. I've just received a message from the leader informing me that the prison has been looted. The guards are dead, the supplies, cars and the prisoners are gone."

"Yuuei?"

"No, everything seems to indicate that there was a confrontation and the prisoners escaped. My spies have tracked the group, they are heading for the desert, perhaps their intention is to meet Yuuei's army."

"How many are they?"

"It's a big group, I don't have an exact number, but they were enough to kill the whole guard without help."

"Who do we have in the region?"

"Iguchi's group is in the area. And I can send reinforcements from one of the nearest barracks."

"Do it. Send some incense too."

"Very well, General."

"And tell Iguchi to identify their leader. The savages always fight with one, if it falls, the rest will spread like headless ants."
The crow arrives a week later, when Iguchi and his men have finished cleaning and camp near the coast, awaiting orders. Dabi has joined them and everyone is preparing for what will be an assault on Yuuei's boats.

Dabi's note results to be a surprise.

"What's wrong?" Asks Iguchi when his partner laughs after reading the letter.

"The pups have gone for a walk."

"What?"

Dabi continues to laugh and takes a moment to recover, and when he does, he explains the situation with laughter and unbelieving murmurs.

"They've escaped?" Says Iguchi as he reaches out to get the note. "How did they get out?"

"I don't know," says Dabi retrieving the sheet of paper, "it's likely that the guards trusted each other too much."

"You were in that prison, what was the captain like?"

"Old, but doing his job."

"Not well if now we have a leak. The first one in all history."

"Anyways, the guy paid with his life for his mistake, now we have to clean up his mess. Gather your people, we have to reach them before they reach the desert. I'll send a patrol ahead to inform us of their number, their position, and their supplies."

"Capture operation?"

"No. Thorough cleansing."

Iguchi nods and gets up, fortunately for them, it does not rain that day.

Chapter End Notes

On the next one we go back to Katsuki! (Gosh, since Toga now loves Katsuki's flower, I hope she never does actually see him... But I'm sure it will happen specially because of that...)

Next chapter on January 12th.
"A Full Moon Night"
It is hard to ignore. The feeling of dizziness, the cramps, the anxiety. Each muscle contracting, beating with their own life. The energy that throbs within me, waiting, longing for the moment when I can get out and sink into heat and need.

Izuku runs and the beast follows him closely, without attacking. The panic he had at the start of the encounter subsides and in doing so allows him to realize the unusualness of the situation. He soon understands that the beast is directing him instead of chasing him. To prove his theory he abruptly changes the direction he is following and immediately the beast jumps in front of him to obstruct his path. Izuku slips when he suddenly stops his trek.

Up close the animal is even more terrifying, it has no hair on its head, which leaves a hard skull with eyes of an opaque red, almost brown. Rows of sharp teeth protrude from its snout, oozing transparent slime. And his hair, a dry yellow, is long and velvety, from it emanates an unmistakable stale aroma.

Izuku is sure that he has never seen or heard of such an animal.

The animal grunts—tearing him away from his contemplation—lowers its head and shows signs of wanting to move forward.

Izuku exhales slowly and takes risks. With astonishing slowness he stretches his foot to the right, and immediately the animal emits a violet growl showing its two rows of sharp teeth. Izuku withdraws his foot. Then he repeats the action to the left and the animal stands still, waiting. Izuku withdraws his foot once again and tries the steps repeatedly with the same results.

'Well... it's guiding me, but where are we going?'

Moving extremely cautiously, Izuku tries to retreat. He manages to take three steps before the animal emits a threatening grunt, so alarming that Izuku is paralyzed in his place.

'Well, I can't flee. I could follow it... and then what? I still have enough meat left, maybe I can distract him with it. Not here, the area has no place to hide... All right, Izuku, follow him, and as soon as you get a chance you escape.'

Izuku nods to himself, swallows the rest of his murmurs and moves to the left. He walks slowly, looking out for his surroundings, hoping to find some area that will allow him to elude his pursuer; but his plan vanishes from his mind upon detecting the unmistakable scent of an omega group.

'What...?'

He moves without hesitation. That is not the aroma of an incense, it is not a prefabricated essence, that is the natural aroma of a living omega.

The scent intensifies as he advances. In the end he reaches a hollow in the middle of the mountains.
The only way to get there is by a steep road and the beast chasing him is coming from behind him. As Izuku begins to descend the slope of the ravine he discovers a lot of holes in the side walls. Most of them have a peacefully seated beast resting.

Izuku stops at the sight, wherever he looks there are finger-sized teeth and claws that sharpen against the rocks. At the base of the hollow is a pond in which a handful of young omega fish while another group takes care of the vegetable field under a badly improvised wooden roof.

Izuku does not know what is more surprising, if the fact that none of them seem intimidated by the beasts that surround them or that they seem relatively safe.

The beast behind him roars and Izuku is startled; when he returns his attention to the pond everyone looks at him.

It is as if everyone had suddenly held their breath, the silence is such that Izuku fears that he has become deaf, and suddenly the omega closest to him beckons him down. Izuku obeys, for lack of options. He descends, or rather slides, down the rocky slope and when he finally reaches the bottom they drag him to the farthest section of the vegetable field.

Before Izuku says anything, everyone hovers over him, throwing one question after another, without pause.

"Where did you get those clothes?"

"What were you doing there?"

"How did you get out?"

"How did you get past the guards?"

"What were you thinking?!"

"Enough!" The person shouting is a thin, tall girl with short orange hair who makes her way to Izuku and moves the people away. "The guards will come if they hear a disturbance. We don't have time, everyone get back to work. Hurry!"

"But—"

"Now! If the guards find him, they'll punish us all."

The threat takes effect because the entire group disperses leaving Izuku with the green-eyed girl.

"Come on, take off your clothes."

"What?"

"Hurry, you're lucky none of the guards saw you. What section are you from?"

"Section?"

"What floor are you staying on?"

"I don't—"

"I know you're new," she tries pulling his clothes at the same time she question him. "When did you get here?"
"No, wait."

"...how did you get up there?"

"Stop it. No!"

"...how long has it been since they let you out?"

"WAIT!" Izuku raises his hands between them wishing for space to think. "I don't know what you're talking about, what are you doing here?"

But she is speechless; her expression is a misplaced grimace. Her face, already pale, has taken on the colour of ash and her green eyes remain wide open.

"You wear bandages."

The whisper is incredulous and terrified. Izuku looks at his hip where the tugs have left part of the bandages covering his middle in plain sight. Strangely, Izuku raises his eyes and studies the people around him. Only then does he realize that, although they all wear long pants, none wear bandages, leaving in plain sight their personal marks.

"Who are you?"

Izuku ignores the question, concentrating on how he is absorbing the details around him. He immediately realizes three important things: They all wear leather necklaces and wristbands with rings. Their clothes consist only of trousers, the women also wear a sarashi, which leaves the extreme thinness and scars on their body visible. Finally, the aroma they emit has a subtle hint of alpha.

All of them have been mated.

"Who are you," she repeats firmly, scrutinizing her face with suspicion. "Where do you come from?"

"My name is Izuku, I'm a healer, I come—"

"Healer?!"

"What—? Yes..."

"Are you a doctor? Are you a medical omega?"

"I've never operated on anyone before, but yes, I am... Where are we?"

Although he suspects the answer, it is impossible for him to fight against the sensation of fatality that falls on him when he confirms his worst nightmare.

"Inside the Capital."
"Are you all right, Denki?"

He wakes when he hears his name and it takes him a moment to recognize the face of Ochako, who leans forward trying to scan his face.

"I'm fine, it's just—"

He suddenly straightens himself, anxiously, he rotates his neck in an attempt to relieve tension in his shoulders, and massages his belly in circular movements. He recognizes the symptoms, and knows that it is only a matter of time before he has to seclude himself in the wagons with his companions.

"Do you want to go back?" Ochako asks quietly without blinking.

"No, it's okay, it's... you know," Ochako nods, but keeps looking at him with apprehension. "I'm fine," Denki repeats, giving her a friendly smile. "Come on, keep going, I still don't want to leave."

Ochako sighs and after another quick scrutiny turns to Kyouka, the beta who sits next to her tells her about her village and the difficulties they endure day by day.

It is the first time Denki sees her smile, so he does not want to interrupt the moment. He prefers to sit next to the log that supports him, stretch his legs towards the bonfire that lights up the night and give his friend time to chat. That and that he is secretly waiting the return of Bakugou's group.

He does not stop scanning the shadows that move, the bushes that are shaken by the wind. Maybe it is the fault of his approaching heat, but he wants to see Eijirou's smile. To hear him say his name.

Out of the corner of his eye he sees a bird, a raven, black as night, stationed on one of the trees surrounding the bonfire. Denki looks over him and lets himself be cooed by the night.

[...]

"No, we can't be in the Capital," he cannot stop his voice from rising out of panic. "The Capital is on the other side. I saw it. It's near the river. I come from there."

"That's the entrance, the prison is there as well as the wharf, but the Capital is underground. In the center of the mountain.

Izuku runs one hand through his hair, pulling his locks tightly.

"We have to leave, we have to leave before the guards come."

"No!"

"Yes, we have to move. If we can get away—"

"Stop it, stop it! We can't leave."

"What are you talking about? We have to run!"
"No one has managed to get out of here." She raises her arm and points at the beasts. "These things are trained to bring us back. They'll never let you go away. They let us out without a guard because they know no one can escape... how come you have bandages? Where did you get them?"

"We can't go?"

"You don't smell like alpha, have you mated?"

A sudden cramp makes Izuku remember urgently what's coming.

"Listen, I'll answer all your questions, I'll tell you everything I know, but you have to help me. This is the moon of my heat, I need a hiding place... I need a blanket and water. It has to be a place where the guards can't find me."

The green eyes of the omega look at it with unusual scrutiny.

"How did you get here, how did you dodge the guards, why don't you smell like alpha?"

"I need—"

"No, if you really want my help, you'll tell me the truth now. I can't trust you. You could be a spy."

"A spy?"

Seeing her stubborn expression, Izuku takes a breath and tells her. Not the whole truth and neither the entire story, for he would need more than a few minutes to bring her up to date. He summarizes how he was captured and how he escaped from them. At the end he adds:

"My intention was to hide in the mountains and continue to the border. I didn't know those things were here."

"The Capital has tunnels with hidden entrances all over the mountain range. They use them to move easily... to go unnoticed. It's impossible to move through the mountains without the beasts detecting you."

"I'll think of something, now I have to hide, can you help me?"

The girl keeps looking at him, as if she were making a decision.

"Are you really a doctor?"

"In the Islands they call them Healers."

She nods, mortally serious.

"I'll help you, but in return I'll ask you a favor. And you won't be able to refuse."

"What favor?"

"I'll tell you later. Now, if you want my help, you'll take off your clothes. And the bandages. You can leave your pants on, we're going to cut your shirt to make you wristbands like ours, they won't be the same, but at least they'll prevent the guards from noticing you when we enter."

"To enter where?"

"There's the tunnel that takes us back to the Capital. We go out to work at dawn, before the sun rises,
and in a little while we will have to return. We have to go through two guard posts to get in. At the last one they'll count us, but the change of shift takes place at dawn and they won't want to prolong it to see why there's too many of us. It'd be different if one of us were missing, but in this case they will let us pass, I'm sure, in the same way that I know that they'll notice you if you don't wear the wristbands."

"I don't want to go in there. I'm trying to get away from there."

"If you want my help you'll have to go in, it's the only alternative."

Izuku squeezes his fists, his stomach twists on itself and when he starts to notice the cramps in his belly. He has no choice but to nod.

'One step at a time, first this, and then I'll see.'

Denki wakes up and it is still night, he has not even been aware of having fallen asleep; but at some point he has let himself be dragged into a slumber because the sky is no longer light grey and now it's a vivid black colour. The bonfire still crackles and is surrounded by a large group composed entirely of young omega, who listen with reverent attention to Kyouka's story.

"...it had been my favorite spear, I had it from the first time I went out into the desert, and that beast had dared to break it. I got angry, very, extremly angry. I was fed up. That thing had besieged me for days. I didn't care if I was starving, at that moment, I was furious. I wanted revenge. I had at my disposal a pile of rocks, they didn't serve as a weapon, but I used them to sharpen the two pieces of my spear, I tied them to my forearms, so that the tip stood out. I had to wait until dawn, I knew I had no chance of winning at night, so I waited, with an empty stomach, with a bad leg and a dry mouth. I was going to try, get out of there and make sure it didn't."

"When morning came I set my plan in motion. I gathered all the rocks nearby and impregnated them with blood, put the bandage back in place, looked out the edge of my hiding place and saw it. It was down there, waiting. The pillar I was on was far from everything else, and although it couldn't climb it didn't plan to leave, so I took courage and threw the first rock, the largest, in the opposite direction. As soon as it heard the noise it straightened up, I saw its nostrils shake as it detected the scent. Then I threw the second rock, in the same direction, but further away, then a third and a fourth; it moved, ran towards the rocks, at that moment I fell down and fell on all fours on the sand. By then ot was already turning around."

"The bastard moved fast, it covered the distance that separated us in seconds, but instead of moving away I pressed myself to the ground. I jumped as soon as I had it close, had it been flat ground I would have reached higher, but the sand ate away part of my impulse so I ended up perched on its chest instead of reaching its head. It didn't expect my moves, and before it had a chance to sink its claws I sank the spear into its heart. The damn thing broke before I could penetrate to the bottom, but I used it for support and sank the other one under its chin. This time it went through all the soft
"All this just for its teeth?" Asks Ochako, with a strange expression as the rest of the group awakens from their astonishment.

Kyouka recoils and she is slightly confused by the question.

"Yeah, well, their meat isn't exactly a delicacy so we don't hunt them for food. I had thought to let it go after taking away its teeth, but I couldn't afford it anymore. It had been in that damn pillar and gadin't let me go for three days!"

"Can we see the tusk?" Asks Yui, sitting on the other side of the bonfire.

Her request echoes in the rest of his companions who redouble their murmurs leaving Denki with the feeling that he lost half the story.

"It's the fourth tooth hanging from the bracelet that the Togata chief wears on his wrist."

His audience exchanges glances, without understanding.

"I've seen that bracelet," says Denki without thinking, "It's hand-woven and has five teeth hanging from it. They are thick and long things."

"They are, aren't they? Imagine dozens of them closing on your leg. They'd tear it out at once."

"Why does he have it?" Asks Ochako.

"Anyone who wants to be part of our leader's personal guard offers him a Balenka tusk. It's tradition. Many, many years ago all the villagers offered him a Sukabenja tooth as a symbol of loyalty, but eventually the leader stopped accepting them. Now he carries only those that are given to him by his personal guards. One from Tamaki. One from Inasa. One from Kousei. One of mine."

"And the last one?"

"It was given to him by the previous leader, Yagi, just before he disappeared."

"Did he die?"

"It's what many think, he went into the desert and never came back. It pains us to think that a great leader like him could find his end in the sea of sand, but that reminds us how dangerous it is when we enter it."

"But it's absurd to be forced to take that risk," says Ochako with a frown.

"Nobody forces us, it's a challenge we take with pleasure. It's an offering that we decide to accept. Only the best have the privilege of joining the leader's personal guard. If you can't survive a Balenka, then you don't have what it takes to take care of the leader."

"Well, it's still absurd. There were no rituals in my village. If an alpha wanted to join the army he only had to enlist with the captains, didn't he, Denki?"

"That's right... the only rituals we know are the bonding ones."

"How are the weddings in your village, Kyouka?"

"When a couple decides to live together, they ask for a place to settle. The day they both move in,
we all bring something to share at the banquet. The couple starts the party by lighting the chimney and roasting a piece of meat that one of them has managed to hunt. The bigger, the more fortune is expected."

"Is there no courtship?" Asks someone somewhere around the campfire. "No mating ceremony?"

"Courtship?"

"Yes," says the voice. "In the southern islands when alpha is about to begin training at sea, they usually gives a seashell to their suitor to make clear their intention to mate."

There are murmurs that inquire about other traditions and the stories begin to flow. They all evoke memories of a distant past, sweet memories that despite the time are still able to make them smile.

Denki picks up his legs and gets distracted. The moon is a perfect circle of a bright silver colour, which gives the forest a silvery clarity. This will be the first heat he has in freedom, and all he can think about is what he would feel if Eijirou gave him a seashell.

'Would I say yes?'

Of course he would say yes, but first things first, someone like Eijirou would never settle for an omega like him.

'He likes you.'

Yeah, well, him and almost every alpha who slept with him.

The wind rocks the branches of the trees creating an unmistakable whistle, a sound that manages to distract him from his thoughts. When he lifts his eyes, he realizes that the crow is still there, motionless. With its red eyes. Watching, listening.

There is something unusual in the way it stands on the branch, still, motionless, as if he were a statue and not a living being.

'I thought crows weren't nocturnal beings.'

He remembers the times he used to go out to the yard to sunbathe, when he saw the crows crossing the unpolluted sky. Entering and leaving the prison carrying...

Denki straightens up, forgets his discomfort and the feeling of heaviness in his body. He knows that crow, not that one in particular, but he is sure that he has seen others like it.

"Denki?"

Ochako's voice tears him away from his contemplation, when he turns to her he realizes that all the omegas are looking at him in dismay. Only then does he realize that his aroma has spread throughout the clearing carrying his discomfort, panic and the brief glimpses of his upcoming heat to the rest of the group.

"What happened?" Asks an alpha appearing in the clearing suddenly and alerting the majority.

Denki shrinks because at that moment the aroma of the alpha is exquisite to him. He does not even identify him, but the contrast and intensity make his mouth water. Luckily, Ochako kneels next to him and the rest of the group stick around him, no doubt alerted by his aroma. Combined, their essence manages to drown out the subtle alpha fragrance that comes from the boy who keeps...
stretching to look over the sea of heads.

"What's the matter?" Asks Kyouka, who, despite having an expression of sudden interest, keeps her distance, observing.

Denki stretches his arm and points at the crow, feels foolish in doing so, fearful that his panic is unfounded, but the truth is that just when all the heads turn towards the animal, it takes flight without losing a moment. And he's not the only one, all over the forest you can hear the sudden fluttering of a group of birds disappearing into the treetops.

When Denki looks at Ochako he discovers in her eyes an exact copy of his fear.

[...]

Escorted by the omega group, Izuku passes through the guards' station without attracting attention. He carries his provisions in front of him, which go unnoticed among the bags of tools that some carry back.

Without his bandages he feels naked. His elbows are pressed against his body, touching the waistband of his trousers, and these tremble with the rest of his body. The knot in his stomach is hard and causes him discomfort.

They go through a long tunnel, with lamps on the sides pointing the way. Worse than walking on the rocky surface barefoot is the cold: icy and sharp that lacrates the skin when the air currents rise and bounce off the walls creating the sounds of hungry monsters.

The floor tilts and ends in front of a platform that descends, taking one omega group after another. As he hears the strident squeaking of the platform descending to a terrifying slowness, Izuku panics. He does not want to go down, he does not want to go in there, but there is no way out. Behind them one of the guards is waiting for everyone to come down.

The platform rattles as it climbs back up and down again. Izuku begins to feel anguish, his breathing speeds up, his heartbeat begins to drill into his ears. His hands sweat so much that the fabric of his backpack has begun to get wet. His throat compresses like someone is squeezing it.

With his stomach scrambled and hands frozen, Izuku takes his place in the last group and fixes his eyes on the box of light that can be seen from afar and that slowly disappears when the platform descends. None of his companions seem uncomfortable with the journey, though it is difficult to say for sure as there is not enough light to scan their faces.

As they lower Izuku's fear thickens until he finally escapes. The dense, bitter aroma floods the small platform and causes his companions to move on their feet. That is until the orange-haired girl approaches him, careful not to attract the guard's attention puts a hand on his forearm and stands firm by his side. Her fruity aroma is undoubtedly reassuring.
As soon as they reach the end, the guard returns to the surface, taking away the empty platform. The rest of his companions advance along another corridor exactly the same as the first. This time the tunnel ends in front of a gate guarded by another pair of guards.

This time they count them.

Izuku's stomach shakes violently when he hears the conversation.

"Twenty-one? Why's there twenty-one? It can't be twenty-one. You must have counted wrong."

"Shall I gather them for another count?"

"No! The first three groups have already entered, I'd have to go with Sei to ask for his list and go and get them directly from their cells."

"But there's one more."

"Better to have more than less."

"But—"

"Listen, it's going to be time for the shift change, you probably counted wrong and I don't want to stay extra hours to verify it. There are twenty-one of them, so what?"

"We should at least inform the General."

"And what will you tell him? That you don't know how to count? I'm sure he'll find it amusing."

"How do we know someone didn't sneak away?"

"You're not serious, are you? The beasts out there are trained to kill anyone but one of these. And these aren't spies, they're not warriors, okay? Just look at them. They're useless dogs. They only know how to have children. They are only good for that."

The conversation ends, the door opens and Izuku's group passes through the fence. From there they all disperse, those who carry fish or tools move away in the same direction.

Izuku stops to contemplate the room for a moment. It is immense. It has a circular shape with high pillars supporting the ceiling. Slowly and with great fear, Izuku approaches the centre, where a huge hole gives the impression that it is on top of a thread.

Because of the darkness, he can't see the bottom, but Izuku counts perfectly two floors down exactly the same as his. Upwards he can only see a dark roof.

"Come on, we mustn't attract attention."

Izuku turns to look at her with open eyes of pure horror.

"How will I get out of here?"

She shakes her head and pushes him without remorse.

"Come on, hurry up, your scent is starting to stand out and although each one of the alphas here is mated there are a few whose union is still recent and you might attract their attention."

Izuku follows the girl to the stairs, down to the second floor, down to the third floor, and finally
down to the fourth floor. From there they come out and cross the room—Izuku looks around noticing
the cells, all full. The worst thing is the aroma because it smells of confinement, of sadness, of
pain. The atmosphere is loaded with the heavy omega aroma that they emit when they are wounded,
sick or simply afraid. In contrast, the alpha aroma speaks of anger, violence, bitterness. The
combination overloads Izuku's nose, he is already feeling sensitive thanks to the moon, so the nausea
becomes stronger than ever and it becomes impossible to control his anxiety.

He follows the girl through another tunnel, to a room that looks like the kitchen. From there they
head to the back, to the pantry room. There she lights one of the lamps and uses it to show him an
old niche, hidden behind a false wall. The floor is covered with dirty cloth, partially covered with
blood, there is a small shelf glued to the wall containing trays, cloths and jars. The worst thing is the
smell, it stinks of death and confinement.

"What happened here?"

The girl ignores him, takes away the dirtiest blankets and shakes the rest.

"I can leave you the lamp, but only a small bottle of oil because it's one of the things they control.
Anyway, you don't need light. Do you have food?"

"A bit."

"Well, I'll bring you fruit, it won't be much, but you won't starve to death. I'll also bring a bucket of
water. Try not to throw it away. If you need to go to the bathroom, there's a potty in the corner. I
doubt you'll use it regularly, but I'll come to clean it once a day."

"Okay, yes, thank you."

"How long does your heat last?"

"Two days. Three at the most."

"All right. Twice a day a group comes to prepare the food. They won't bother you, but try not to go
out to look for them, unless some guard decides to roam the kitchen. If I get an extra blanket, I'll
bring it to you, but I can't guarantee anything."

"All right. Thank you for helping me."

The girl tightens up, squeezes her mouth and seems to argue with herself. Finally she takes a breath
and says:

"Remember, you owe me a favor."

"Now, would you tell me what it's all about?"

She breathes in. "Later. Now I have to go."

Izuku sees her leave after putting the fake wall in place. Carefully he lies between the old blankets
and makes sure to turn off the lamp to save oil, he leaves his supplies within reach. It is only when he
stretches his legs that he realizes how tired he is. He has spent the last few days walking with short
breaks, without a good night's sleep, or proper nutrition.

Tiredness, convalescence from his illness, and hunger, make Izuku suspect that this heat will be a
particularly difficult one. Especially since this one will be the first in which he will have to get used
to the idea that Katsuki is dead.
Izuku closes his eyes, buries his face in the dirty blanket and makes a great effort to control the emotions that his heat makes bloom.

[...]

Shuichi was awakened in the middle of the night when one of his men burst into his tent unannounced.

"What the fuck?! What's the problem?"

"I'm sorry, sir. The crows are back."

"What? Why?"

"I'm afraid they have been discovered, sir."

"Discovered?"

"It's their trainer's explanation, apparently the crows have orders to flee if they're discovered."

"Does that mean they found the savages?"

"Yes, sir, we have their exact location, also their number. We can start planning an offensive."

"Excellent, send a report to Kurogiri and gathers the troops. As soon as we have a plan we'll start moving, I want to know how long it will take us to get there and what is the situation we are going to find. I want to settle this matter as soon as possible."

[...]

"Where's the prince?"

With just hearing the question he can feel his blood thickening. The anger combines itself with disbelief to form a tight knot that sits above his sternum. He has become mute and paralyzed in his place.

'You've got to be kidding me.'

Next to them "The Mountain" remains on the sidelines, watching carefully and scanning the terrain for any threat. The alpha is very high, muscular and agile. Katsuki has fought with him in several test fights and it never ceases to surprise him that a man of that size can move so quickly; it is
fortunate that at least he is aware of the surroundings because Katsuki has all his attention focused on the conversation.

He notices that each muscle of his body is tense; such is his emotion that even his voices are muffled, the blame lies with the blood that roars in his ears.

"He's not here?" Asks the tall blue-haired boy.

"We thought he'd be with you," Kirishima adds with a frown.

"The plan was for the prince to meet you and then flee to the border."

Kirishima shows him the letter Katsuki received along with the vials, and then proceeds to explain the situation. The man's expression darkens as he hears the story.

"We think that when the prince was discovered he decided to meet with the army. We thought he was trying to tell the king about the incense."

"We have to inform the king," suggests the blue-haired boy. "The prince himself suggests this in his letter."

"The king is dead."

Silence.

"What?!"

"No!"

"I wasn't present at the fight, but the survivors told me. A few days ago, when the royal fleet reached the beaches, the king ordered an attack on one of the ports. It turned out to be a trap. They used incense to neutralize and massacre the entire alpha force. Few of them survived. The beta reinforcements had to retreat and return to the boats. The king was seriously wounded and died shortly thereafter."

"They—?"

"How—?"

"We've been betrayed. Jin Bubaigawara, royal guard, orchestrated the attack on the king. Now he commands the army; at least half the troops. The rest have gone west to launch another offensive. They don't know about the incense so we sent a messenger with them. Hopefully they'll catch up with them before it's too late."

After a moment of stupefied disbelief both boys begin to throw question after question, wanting to know every last detail of the situation. Bewildered, Katsuki explodes.

"Shut up!"

The three of them look at him, two expressions of horror and one of surprise.

"No more useless chatter!"

"Who are you?" Asks the man with black hair.

"You said your prince had orders to go to the border."
"You—"

"Listen! I don't have time! Your prince had orders to go to the border, but he didn't reach it. They found out, what would he have done?"

"I don't know."

"Aren't you his teacher? His instructor or whatever. You must know him."

"Who are you?"

Kirishima intervenes at that moment.

"His name is Bakugou, Aizawa-sensei, he is the alpha who led the assault on the prison. He set us free."

Aizawa studies him and Katsuki tries to ensure that the anger that vibrates within him is completely reflected in his eyes.

"Bakugou?" Asks Aizawa quietly, staring at him. "Are you a relative of Mitsuki?"

The question surprises him. "You know my mother?"

"Your mother?.... Yes, I see the resemblance. I know Mitsuki. I trained with her when we were young. She and her warriors have led the only successful assault against one of the prisons. Her story has become legend."

At that moment Kirishima turns to him with his mouth open.

"Your mother is the Red Fury?!!"

"What?"

"Mitsuki! The Red Fury! They call her that because of the cherry-colored flowers she carries on her back. When she fights, she's like a red blur. We've all heard about her! Now I understand! You're her son!"

"I thought Mitsuki's son died at sea. The slave ship carrying him fell prey to a storm, that's the story being told."

"Only one of the ships sank that night. And according to what that pole said," he points to the blue-haired boy, "you found the only surviving omega. The omega that's traveling with your prince right now, isn't that right?"

Silence and then. "Yes, it is."

"Good." Katsuki straightens himself, he grows and lets his scent thickens around him. "Let's be clear that I'm not interested in finding your prince; but he's got something that's mine. And I'm going to look for him. You said we can't count on outside help, it's just us, so let's try again: Your prince had orders to go to the border, but he didn't get there. They discovered him, what would he have done?"

"Get close to the coast and meet with the army to report the incense as soon as possible."

"What are the chances of his success?"

"If Shouto had contact with Yuuei's troops, Jin would have found out immediately, but he was also
looking for him. It's clear he didn't make it to the coast. If he was traveling with Kamui, he might have taken them into the mountains to hide."

"Where can we find him?"

"The only way to contact him is through a messenger bird. A bird specially trained for this task."

"Where is the bird?"

"In Yuuei."

Katsuki curses. "How else can you communicate with him?"

Silence. "There's no other way. We have to wait until the prince appears."

Before Katsuki starts cursing, Kirishima intervenes.

"She knows him."

"Who's she?" asks Aizawa.

"The girl who gave us the vials and the letters. The rose-skinned guard." He looks at Katsuki and he nods slowly. "Maybe she knows how to locate Kamui."

"Let's go back," Katsuki replies forcefully, the anxiety vibrating inside him at an unbridled and volatile pace. He urgently needs to go back, look for the guard and go after Kamui's trail.

'Damn it, Deku, stay out of trouble.'

Chapter End Notes

Thank you sooo much for all the wonderful comments, kudos, views, bookmarks, for all the love and interest you give this story!! We truly treasure them all <3

I hope you guys like hunting, because one has just started. And it is not the search for Izuku.

Next chapter on January 19th.

"Yearning"
Yearning

Chapter Summary

There are people so noble that they suffer when others do. There are horrors in our world that are hard to imagine, but there is no greater evil than that which we exert against our own.

Chapter Notes

About the Title: Chapter 6 is titled Wistfulness and this chapter is called Yearning, which even though they are synonyms, there's a slight difference. Wistfulness is a deep longing for something or someone you've lost and can't get back (you feel wistful when you remember your childhood). Yearning is having an intense desire of something that one has lost or has been separated from but that one can still get back (you yearn for your mother's food).

Now go on, have fun ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Though lovers be lost, love shall not." - Dylan Thomas
The world is a dark hole that throbs, it is hot and uncomfortable and seems to extend in all directions slowly, but steadily. It does not hurt, not like a deadly wound. It feels like discomfort, embarrassment, tension, anxiety and desire. It is like it does not fit inside his body, like there is an energy vibrating inside him looking for a way out, wanting to explode.

Between the dirty blankets Izuku moans, rubs himself, and moves. He turns face down, shrinks his legs, rests on his elbows, straightens his back until he finds himself on all fours breathing quickly, with his body covered in sweat and completely naked. The darkness surrounds him, the world is cold and complete and absolutely empty.

His crotch is wet, with his erection pressing against his belly. Another wave of heat rises through his body, his hands map hip body and Izuku rests his face against the blankets, inhaling, looking for a scent that answers to his.

He finds only earth and an indistinguishable stench of rottenness.

Izuku lowers his hips, squeezes them against his bent legs, his whole body contracts in a tight knot, waiting.

The feeling of embarrassment subsides and Izuku rolls on his side until he lies on his back. There is no visible roof, no world around him, only darkness. It is like floating on a raft over an infinite sea. Izuku's hands come to life and move lazily over his body. He touches himself, with his mind blank, trying to alleviate the need.

But he cannot, there is no satisfaction.

It is then that his mind betrays him. Kacchan. The name has enough power to shake him, to awaken each nerve termination, to loosen his muscles in the expectation of what he considers inevitable... but when that does not happen his mind only attempts to evoke memories one by one in the hope of alleviating the waiting; those memories blossom inside him like buds in the garden.

*Katsuki by his side, eating, with his feet in the water, has his gaze fixed on the front, thoughtful and unreachable. Izuku wants to touch him, he wants to extend his hand and slide his fingers over his shoulder, but he contains himself, because he remembers his leaves without flowers and feels ashamed.*
Katsuki smiling when he manages to defeat an alpha two years older than him for the first time. The gesture is broad, overflowing with pride and authority.

'Here we will plant a field,' he recalls his voice, with his childish voice brimming with determination.

"Kacchan," his name is an echo that rises and falls in the silence that surrounds him.

'Here we will plant a field,' he remembers those eyes of an intense scarlet that never leave him. His aroma is wood and smoke, intoxicating, familiar, scorching, like a bonfire on a cold night.

"Kacchan," the supplication is lost in the emptiness that surrounds him. It spins faster and faster until it vanishes.

'Here we will plant a field,' he remembers his hands and his mouth, he remembers his shoulders, the extension of his body pointing something. And he remembers his eyes, firm, determined and terrified. He allows himself to dream. 'And when you see them you will remember...'

'I'd remember you even if I didn't have a single blue flower, Katsuki', his name, curling at the tip of his tongue and shaking his world.

"Katsuki."

A discharge runs through him and almost immediately his entire body contracts. Everything is paused, but the sweet, warm unconsciousness does not last long. Within his chest the longing swirls with the force of a raging sea, grows and shakes, blowing guilt and remorse. In his condition, with his emotions at the surface of his skin, it is impossible for him to control himself. Grief and anguish overflow from him in ever-increasing waves. He cries again, with his right forearm over his eyes, his body shrunken, and his left hand covering his mouth to mitigate the sobs. The knot that forms in his throat is almost physical, preventing him from swallowing without harming himself.

The hours pass, the sobs calm down. Izuku wipes his hands against the blanket, then stretches it carefully and gropes until he finds his water jug which he drinks cautiously. He stretches and eats, or rather chews the remaining bread without force. At the end he submerges in a tumultuous sleep, full of memories, of fragmented scenes.

He remembers the phrase 'Here we will plant a field' although he cannot remember where he has
heard it before. Every time he thinks of it he feels like crying, shrinking in a corner and screaming until he runs out of air. It is like a knife buried in his bleeding heart.

After a while the need returns, Izuku wakes up dull, uncomfortable, anxious. And everything starts again.

Panax leaves are bitter and one of its side effects is excess saliva. Denki hates it, but it is much better to have to spit every fifteen minutes than to give in to the need that would make him an easy target.

The plant controls the flow of lubricant in his body, mitigates his desire, keeps him awake and gives him energy, but that is all, even with it the feeling of discomfort persists. He notices his tense shoulders, empty belly, and every muscle in his body begs for contact, every bone within him desires comfort.

Sitting next to the wheel of one of the wagons and stirring in place every five minutes in search of the most comfortable position, Denki spits out excess saliva and continues to chew. The taste of Panax is disgusting, though not enough to make him nauseous. Denki chews, stretches, spits and repeats.

Before, wagons only carried a handful of their own, those whose heat began early. Now almost half of the group is inside. If it were any other day they would help each other to calm down, to have some precious seconds of delicious laxity, although not satisfaction, but now they all chew Panax watching carefully their surroundings.

Another advantage of Panax is that the aroma is so bitter that it attenuates, only in part, the powerful aroma that an omega in heat emits. It is not enough, however, and the entire omega group has had to move away from the main camp. They have settled close to the river, while those who are free of the heat prepare the food and watch that no alpha approaches.

Helping with the surveillance are the beta barbarians who have some tolerance to the omega heat, among them are the two barbaric black-haired beauties—Denki hasn't even had a chance to ask their names—and Kyouka, who helps Ochako distribute the food rations.

Denki rubs his hands, closes his eyes and tries to relax. With a blank mind the first thing that he thinks about is Eijirou's uninhibited smile, so immense that the tip of his fangs peeks through his lips. Denki remembers the electrifying sensation that shook his body as he was bitten. It is remembering that day and feeling that the tension returns immediately, buzzing inside him like bubbles of boiling water. Denki stirs in place, suddenly overheated. He blames his heat, full of uncontrolled emotions and repressed desires. It is his most vulnerable time, when guilt clings tightly and memories emerge more easily.

'Denki.'

It is like a curse, the way he pronounces his name, delicate, marvelled, smitten. Denki abhors it, he abhors the way his body twists, the feeling of anxiety that spreads within him before remembrance.
But no, that is not really what he abhors. He abhors the sense of loss... because he misses it. He
misses it even though they only lived together for a month, a full month of absurd talk and absolute
truth. They did not exchange personal data and yet they talked about everything. They laughed and
cried—at least Denki did—and shared the kind of intimacy that is terrifying.

Because during that month he remembered who he had been before. The Denki who had a mother
and dreamed of recovering his parents' bakery. A simplistic dream for a simplistic boy. The Denki of
that time laughed with his mouth open, raising his neck, without fear. The Denki of that time was
happy, made jokes, and could flirt without feeling guilty. The Denki of that time loved to appropriate
the attention of any alpha of his age. That Denki would not have been overwhelmed by the innocent
attention, the open smile and the dazzling personality.

So he walked away, imposed silence between them. He had to get away, he had to put up the walls
and move forward; because that Denki was dead and it was absurd to think of him.

The Denki of today does not think much about the future, not beyond what they will eat tomorrow.
The Denki of now cannot laugh without fear. The Denki of today does not feel capable of seeking
comfort when he knows that this is a double-edged sword.

And he hates himself, because one part of him misses laughing and the other part—harder and
steeper—keeps counting the days until the dream ends and he has to go back to the dark cells. Most
of the time he can quell that fear, but now, when his emotions flutter inconsolably within him it
becomes extremely difficult to pretend normalcy. And he misses it. He misses it, not only because of
laughter, but because he held back from marking him when it would have been so easy, because he
is kind and honest and frank and Denki does not feel worthy of his attention.

'Denki'

Unable to bear it any longer, Denki opens his eyes, stretches his legs and spits again. He gets up with
effort and goes in search of Ochako who is handing out blankets. He stops next to her, spits out the
bitter pulp he carries in his mouth and says:

"What do I have to do?" Immediately afterwards he takes two more sheets of panax and begins to
chew. The penetrating bitter taste manages to alleviate his anxiety.

"Rest, Denki," answers Ochako looking at him with sympathy. "Sleep a little if you want."

"I can't sleep."

Every time he tries to sleep he dreams of Eijirou again and if it is not him it is the crows. The birds
with black wings and red eyes. He sees them in his sleep as they fly over him until there comes a
time when they descend sharply toward him and croak with a terrible sound. He wakes up terrified
with the ghostly sensation of his beaks tearing his flesh.

Three days and the scare from the birds is still there.

He is not the only one, he knows that the crows have also activated the alerts on the head of the
barbarian leader. The only reason the entire group has not packed to leave is because Togata does
not dare to move the omega group during the full moon. Instead he has deployed several groups of
sentries around the perimeter and has ordered the establishment of defense circles.

Denki knows this because Kyouka has been kind enough to explain it to Ochako.

"Go rest," Kyouka adds, looking at him with a condescending smile. She is always condescending to
him, to the whole omega group in reality, not to Ochako for whom she seems to have absolute
sympathy.

"I can't rest," she doesn't understand him and he can't explain it to her; he has no way of telling her that although the panax manages to control his need, the anxiety is still there. "And I can't sleep either."

In the end Ochako takes pity on him.

"Go and sit in the bonfire with Momo, she's taking care of the fire. As soon as I finish with the blankets I'll come and talk with you."

Denki nods and obeys. He drops by the bonfire, which is hot and suffocating, but it is far better than being alone surrounded by absurd ideas. Momo, the barbaric beauty who dazzles with her very long dark hair, smiles sweetly at him.

"Are you hungry?"

Denki shakes his head, everything he eats tastes like panax so he prefers to wait until the hunger becomes unbearable. She takes note of his tumultuous emotions and keeps silent, so it is him who has to start the conversation.

"Is it true that there are tournaments to choose an omega's companion?" He asks quietly while chewing and spitting.

"Who told you that?"

"Inasa. We talked before he left."

"Oh... well, yes, there are. Not many omega are born in each generation. And most of them die before they reach adolescence. Those who survive to reach their first heat receive proposals from a large group of candidates. If the family has already chosen a suitor, the matter doesn't go any further, but sometimes they organize combat tournaments to choose their consort."

"What happens to the rest?"

"If they want to have offspring, they join beta women. Most of them commit themselves young."

"Does Kyouka have a fiancé?"

Momo laughs. "Kyouka is a special case. She's small for the average barbarian so she doesn't stand out easily, but she's not that interested anyways. She doesn't want to join an alpha, or have children. As far as I know, she defied the will of her family and trained to be Chief Togata's personal guard. And in the end her effort paid off because everyone recognizes and respects her and her parents have stopped asking her about her prospects."

"And you?"

Momo's smile fades.

"Well, my parents intended to marry me to Chief Togata, but he and Tamaki formalized their relationship even though they will never be able to have offspring. So since my parents are still under the illusion that Chief Togata might consider making me the mother of his children, I have the opportunity to travel with his group."

"A child? Do you want a child?"
"Someday I would like to have children, for now I take advantage of the freedom I have to do what I like."

"What is—?"

"To travel, to know the world that exists beyond the mountains."

"Ooh."

"You know, you have beautiful eyes. They're shiny yellow orbs like melted gold. If you lived in the mountains, the list of your suitors would be very long."

Denki stands up, swallows hard instead of spitting, and the bitter taste of *panax* slides slowly down his trachea. He covers his eyes with his hands and luckily for him Ochako arrives and changes the subject.

"I think we have to go," she says, and from the way Kyouka frowns, Denki understands that this is not a new subject. "If your alpha thinks they will come looking for us—"

"Look for us?" Denki interrupts. "Who, the guards?"

Ochako leans towards him and whispers to him.

"Kyouka says it's a possibility."

"Actually," Kyouka explains to Denki's terrified gaze, "it's always been a possibility. It's just a matter of time before they find out what happened at the prison. Sooner or later they'll send a group after you. The most important thing now is to prepare to get away from here as soon as possible.

"We should leave now," Ochako says in anger, but Denki knows her well enough to know that her anger is only the mask that hides her fear.

"No," he answers softly. "We have to wait for Bakugou."

"Even if they were here," Momo adds, "Chief Togata wouldn't agree to move while the full moon is in the sky. He worries too much about exposing them to danger in their condition."

"We can take care of ourselves," says Denki.

"And we can fight," adds Ochako.

Both Kyouka and Momo are shocked.

"An omega doesn't fight," explains Momo calmly. "The Chief Togata would never dare allow an omega to go into combat. We'll take care of you."

Kyouka nods and lists each of the precautions her leader has taken.

Denki and Ochako listen to her attentively, but that does not calm their anxiety.

[...]
The end of a heat is like waking up after a long day of exercise: Exhausted, with aching joints, sticky and dirty skin, wet hair and a voracious hunger, but it is nothing that a good bath, a good meal and an infusion of astragalus cannot relieve. Unfortunately Izuku has none of these three things.

When he wakes up he feels empty, light, like someone who has cried himself to sleep. He touches his face and immediately notices the swelling around his cheeks and eyes. It is fortunate that there is no one with him because he does not want to see faces full of sorrow or want comfort of any kind.

He breathes slowly, there are no voices to encourage him not to give up, no energy to move. Inside him, deep in his mind, he knows that the sadness that invades him is an indisputable symptom of mourning, and that in certain cases it can lead to death; but in Izuku's nature there is no option to surrender. No matter how difficult, terrifying or complicated something may be, Izuku continues because he has never wanted to be a burden to anyone.

'Move, you have to move,' he slowly turns. He breathes in, struggling with the heaviness that invades him.

Someone has taken the trouble to light the lamp, they have also brought him food, a small bucket of water, a tacit bowl of raisins and a small piece of clean cloth. On the cloth there is a rectangle of paper that says: 'Don't go out, I'll be back at dawn.'

With methodical movements Izuku takes his water jug and fills it. He examines the niche and drags himself to the shelf; in it he finds dried mint leaves in one of the jars and also an old sponge.

'Take a bath, you have to take a bath.'

He undoes the mint leaves and puts some water in the jar, then uses the sponge and the rest of the water to remove the soil from his skin and hair. Thanks to the lack of soap, he has to rub hard until he feels his skin burning. When he finishes, he uses the water from the jar with mint to cover the aroma of the cycle that still lasts in his body. It is not a proper bath, but at least he has made his body as clean as possible.

'Eat, you have to eat.'

His food consists of a plate of boiled beetroots, when Izuku touches them he realizes that they are still warm. The water at the bottom of the plate is deep red.

Something inside Izuku contracts.

'Eat.'

Izuku approaches the raisin cup and begins to eat them slowly, while still seeing the red liquid at the bottom of the plate. When the raisins are finished Izuku reaches out and takes a beet. He eats it with small bites, with the juice draining through his hand, covering it with a red color and staining his fingers with a darker hue.

The beet runs out and Izuku looks at his fingers with empty eyes. Without thinking he extends his hand towards the note and takes it. He turns it over and places it on his knee. The paper stains on contact with his fingers, but Izuku does not care. Very carefully, without stopping to think, he begins to draw. He does so with precision born of custom, tracing the flower with his index finger giving it the shape it remembers, wetting his fingers in the red dye and using his fingernails for the edges.
As the space is reduced he cannot draw the whole sword-shaped image composed of many similar flowers, so he only draws one, but he is satisfied with it. He holds the piece of paper and looks at it.

Only someone who has seen the real version could recognize it.

'Here we will plant a field.'

He remembers the promise, he is ashamed to have forgotten it. It has taken him years to think about it and he almost wishes he had not because all he feels now is pain.

'Don't be a wimp.'

The memory fills him with nostalgia, Izuku takes a breath once again, with strength. He lifts his eyes to the sky and holds his breath until he is sure he will not cry again.

Once dry, he places the piece of paper with its flower under the empty cup, finishes the second beet and then proceeds to massage his muscles with care; while he works he keeps repeating the same words: 'I'm getting out of here, I'll look for Shouto, and when all this is over I'll go back home, I'll see my mother. I will visit Mitsuki. I will tell her...'

His eyes get wet and he has to pause to control himself.

Izuku dresses and in a burst of anxiety he starts cleaning the nest. He shakes the blankets, checks the shelf and reorders all the jars. When he has nothing left to do, he turns off the lamp to save oil, sits with his legs crossed and starts reciting his list of plants. When he finishes he starts again, again and again without allowing his mind to wander.

He is so concentrated that he does not listen to the approaching steps. He is startled when the false wall is removed and the omega from the previous time comes in carrying her own lamp. Between her arms she carries a package that she tends to him without saying a word.

When Izuku opens it he finds three boiled potatoes, takes one and extends the rest to the girl, but she shakes her head.

"They're for you, eat, you'll need strength." She soon stops and breathes in. "It smells like peppermint, is that you? I don't remember you smelling like that."

"Huh? Oh, no. I only used it to clean myself. Does it smell too much?"

"No, no, but it stands out here because it doesn't usually smell like that."

"I know... this room smells like death."

She gets stiff.

"Did you notice?"

Izuku shrugs.

"I haven't asked you before, I'm sorry, what's your name? I am Izuku."

"My name's Itsuka."

"How long have you been here?"

"Too long... I don't know."
"I'm sorry."

Itsuka lets it pass.

"You said you passed yourself off as a beta, why?"

"It's a long story, do you want to hear it, or have you come to talk to me about the favor?"

Itsuka nods slowly, keeps silent and when she starts talking she does it slowly, without stopping looking at him in the eyes.

"You said you were a healer, did you lie?"

"No."

"Good," she swallows saliva, her eyes deviate to the wall. She takes a breath and finally looks at him. "Because I need you to take him away from me." She places a hand on her belly and that is all the explanation Izuku needs.

"Why?"

Her green eyes fill with tears. "I can't have him, not again."

"I don't understand you."

She puts herself together, sighs, "Do you know what happens in prisons?"

"They force everyone to mate."

"Yes, when that happens they bring us here. In prison they always warned us about pairing, they said it led to a worse fate. And they were right." She breathes, Izuku sees her struggle with every word she utters. "When I got here they locked me and my alpha up for weeks. They wait for the bond to strengthen and then open the door. I was chained to my cell. My alpha was assigned a job at the pier, he leaves early, comes back late, and sleeps with me at night. Every morning he goes out to build boats. I know that not everyone works there, some are taken to the mountains to enlarge the tunnels or prepare other domes like the one you saw when you entered."

"How many domes are there?"

"I only know mine, but I know there are more," she sighs. "When you get here, you have to stay here, doing nothing. In prison they gave us work, they made us feel useful, but when we got here... The food is taken care of by the adult omega group, those who are too big to be sent to prison. They take care of the new ones."

Izuku nods, remembers the adult who traveled in the same boat as him.

"And they don't know how many domes there are?"

"No, none of them can speak. They cut off their tongues when they arrive. They can't tell us anything, neither warn us nor accuse them. They just take us out to eat."

Izuku tries to swallow the horror that shakes him.

"How long do they leave you there?"

"Until your condition begins to show."
She adds no more and Izuku swallows hard.

"Did you get pregnant?"

"Everyone here does, it can't be avoided. We don't have panax to weaken the symptoms of the heat, and sooner or later you get carried away. When that happens they let you out and you join the routine: Cooking, washing, sewing, cleaning... we take care of ourselves and others."

"The alpha—"

"They obey orders, they behave. They can't risk their omega's life or their pups. They won't run away while their omega is chained to the cell. Neither will they once they leave it."

Izuku breathes, when he does he notices the tremor in his hands; he squeezes his fists and chokes.

"You—"

She takes up her story again, her voice acquires a hasty rhythm, as if trying to spit out the evil that hurts her.

"Not many reach the end. The food is terrible, insufficient, but they don't care. If the omega loses the baby, they try again. They lock the couple again and the cycle repeats itself. But if the pup gets born they take it away, and then they let you out because they know you'll never go anywhere."

"Your baby—"

"He's going to be a year old, I think. He's still alive. But it won't be for long."

"What...?"

"Some say they take them to raise them, to give them a better life, but that's a lie. I know. I don't know what they do with them, but none of them survive."

"How do you know?"

"When mine was taken, I was left alone with the omega that cleaned my dome. Even though he couldn't speak, I asked him a lot of questions. Where are they taking him? What are they going to do with him? Will he be safe? And he started crying. I asked him: Will he be all right? And he shook his head. He said no. I asked him: Will he live? And his answer was to lift a finger."

"A finger?"

"A year. All children live until they are one year old."

"Are you sure?"

"I have seen the patterns. I don't know what they'll do with our children, I don't know what they want them for, but after a year they're no longer useful. Then they lock you up again and everything starts all over again. Most people believe that their children are safe, so they behave to avoid being harmed."

"Haven't you ever shared your suspicion with anyone?"

"For what? I have no proof."

"The omega—"
"He disappeared, I only saw him that one time. After that the rest were even more reluctant to share information. And even if one of them backs me up, what can we do?"

"Fight."

"We do."

A certainty forms in Izuku's head and he studies the nest with new eyes.

"Here—"

"We wanted to deceive them. Give birth here and pretend the baby was dead, but none of us is a doctor. And they're so young. So far we have lost those who have tried."

Izuku looks around and understands. A childbirth is difficult in itself. He cannot imagine how complicated it can be in a situation where the omega is malnourished, weak, and worse yet, as young as all those who have been kidnapped are.

"What happens to the alpha? When their omega dies."

"They goes mad. Then the guards take them away and we never hear from them again."

Izuku nods slowly, his fear stirs within him like a living being waiting for the moment to flee. Terror and disgust mix in equal parts, fighting each other to see who wins in the end; but he also feels anger, an unprecedented anger that roars within him and threatens to break him. When he learned that the slaveowners were forcing matings he said to himself that he had to help Shouto and the rest, that he would not leave until his people were free... and now... now the situation is a thousand times worse and this time he is alone.

"Please," she adds with pain, "you have to help me. I'd rather be chained again, I'd rather die locked up in a cell than put up with the idea of my pups being taken away from me and left to die later. If you do, I promise to do everything in my power to help you escape."

Aizawa's voice echoes again in his mind: 'Are you willing to take this risk because you think you can help or because you're in mourning and don't care what happens to you?'

That time he was certain. He could help, his intention had never been to go into combat, he knew the area and he was sure he could make a difference. Now that certainty is gone, he doesn't feel that he can change anything, but he also knows he cannot leave them. No matter what happens, Izuku does not imagine abandoning them.

*I'm sorry, Mom.*

"I'll help you," he says in a trembling voice, "but not just you."

"Do we have an answer from Dabi?" Asks Shuichi as soon as his right hand stops next to the table
that displays the map of the region.

"We received a crow from the Capital, Lieutenant. Dabi and Shigaraki wont come."

"I thought so, have the reinforcements arrived?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. They have settled in and are ready for combat."

"How are the preparations going?"

"Everything is in order, sir. We have deployed two groups of sentries, they remain at the edge of the camp of the savages, out of sight of their watchmen," as he speaks he places two blue studs on the map.

"How's the situation?"

"The group of savages have spread along the river, we suppose they use it to cover their rear. They have established two defense semicircles and have crowded their transports and supplies near the water," he places the red studs forming two curves with their base being the blue line that is marked as the Ha river. In the center of both, near the river, he places a single white tack.

"The river is a problem. If we start a tip formation it will be enough for them to divide their forces and fall on us. Surrounding them seems to be our only option."

"We don't have enough men, sir; even with the reinforcements our number still falls short."

"At least half of them are only for breeding, they don't fight. They've probably been left in the center, here," the white tack points out, "if we could get in here..."

"Sir?"

"How much incense do we have?"

"Ah... I don't have the exact number, Lieutenant."

"Well, investigate. And I want my squad leaders here. Go!" The man crosses the curtain that faces the outside when Shuichi adds, "and bring Uba!"

As soon as he is alone, Shuichi studies the map with a feverish concentration. For when his men make an act of presence, he has a plan ready to be executed.

"How much?" He asks.

"At least fifty cartridges that the reinforcements brought with them. They all have the prison mark."

"It doesn't matter, they're vulnerable to it. All right, we have orders to clean up this mess. No captures, just cleaning. They have the advantage of the land, we have the incense. Goro, your team is made up of frog men, isn't it?"

"Yes sir, most of them."

"Do you think they can move around this part of the river undetected?"

"The flow is strong in this section."

"I know, can they or can they not?"
"Even if they could, what would ten of them do to all those savages?"

"To create panic. I want a group of the best archers with them, they will cover them while your group destroys the provisions. We suspect they carry incense with them."

"For what?" Asks someone.

"I don't know and I don't care. The mission of your men, Goro, will be to set the incense wagon on fire. It'll be the perfect distraction. We use the incense in the outer circle and from the center the incense they carry will expand outward, so we can dismantle their defense."

"What if there's no incense left?"

"It doesn't matter, just set the wagons on fire. When they know that the enemy is coming from behind, the savages will disperse, it will be an easy hunt, do you have a target, Uba?"

"Yes, we have identified the leader. Tall, blond. He patrols the right section of the inner semicircle. From time to time he changes sections and twice a day he approaches the outer circle to receive reports."

"Well, I want to concentrate our forces there. Our priority is to bring down that savage. Once he's out and his ranks are broken we'll start with the cleanup. Prepare your men, I want everyone ready to attack tonight."

A potent "Yes" reverberates within the tent, immediately after everyone disperse. Shuichi beckons to the man named Uba.

"I hope you have a better description than tall and blond. I don't want confusion."

"I have him located, Lieutenant. When the attack begins my group will take care of him."

Shuichi nods and lets him go. We are ready

[...]

Itsuka blinks: "What?"

But instead of answering the omega bites his thumb with a thoughtful expression. Itsuka watches him fascinated. The boy has extraordinary green eyes, of a rich dark tone, behind which hide a perceptive mind, she knows because, although the fear emanates from him, at all times he was attentive and did not stop asking questions.

Although he has all the characteristics of an omega, there is in him an air of firmness that Itsuka never remembers having seen. Yes, there is in him the delicacy of his genre: The gentle curvature of the neck, the delicate chin, his fluffy lips, his shoulders full of freckles give him a childish air, and the freckles that extend over his nose and eyes give his gaze an electrifying intensity, but if one looks closely they would find proof that he is not just any omega. With just seeing his hands full of scars, his toned arms and his legs athletic, there is enough proof that he is not just anybody.
And there is the fact that he passed himself off as a beta. Among their people it would not have been possible, but there, where demons can only distinguish them by their flowers, it is credible. What surprises Itsuka is his determination.

"I will help you," Izuku says firmly, pulling her out of her thoughts, "but we cannot stay here forever."

"What are you talking about?"

"What if the rest find out what's going on with their children?"

"Ah? ...I don't know."

"Do you think we could convince them to fight?"

"I don't even know if what I told you is true."

"We can find out."

"How?"

"I don't know... yet, but we'll know."

Itsuka shakes her head in disbelief. "You want us to fight, alone, against a whole army?"

"Not alone. Yuuei's army is here."

Itsuka opens her mouth and closes it, without saying anything. Then the boy goes on to explain that Yuuei's king has decided to attack, that his intention is to destroy the ports and piers.

"We have little time," Izuku says at the end. "I saw them arrive when they captured me, I don't know how long it's been since then, a week at least, maybe two. I also don't know when they'll start the attack, I don't know how long they'll stay, but if we manage to send a message, they'll know that we are here."

"How are we going to send a message?"

"I know one of the guards who works in the beta prison. I have to get to him. If you say that this is the entrance to the Capital, there must be a tunnel that leads me there..."

Itsuka shakes her head, incredulous.

"I have to go," she says suddenly, overwhelmed by incomprehensible murmurs, by his sudden energy, by his decision. "It's time for me to go," she says aloud, but when the other ignores her, Itsuka simply begins picking up the tray with the food.

She is not sure what will come next, but at least she knows that he will keep his end of the bargain.

She is picking up the empty cup when she sees the paper underneath her. It is his note, but it is stained with red. When she turns it around she sees it: A red flower. It is not perfect as the edges fade because of the ink.

'Where did he find paint?' Itsuka thinks as she looks at the picture.

It does not look familiar, so she leaves it be, but she cannot stop looking at it because she is marveled that the boy could have drawn something like that out of nowhere. At the end she sighs, finishes
picking up the plate and the bucket, and out of the corner of her eye she looks at the piece of paper on the floor.

Then she sees it.

In reality, it is color that activates her memory, the color and the shape. She has seen that flower before, yes, but never alone. She has seen many of them lined up one after the other, uniting in the shape of a sword.

'I'm hallucinating,'

"Is it a gladiolus flower?"

She does not realize that she has asked the question aloud until she realizes the absolute silence. A dense, inconsolable silence. As she turns to look at Izuku she is surprised by the expression of misery and despair reflected in his eyes. And his aroma... his aroma is that of a suffering omega.

"I'm sorry," murmurs Itsuka extending the paper that the other takes with trembling hands. "I didn't want to touch it, but it was here... and well... the painting..."

"What did you say?" His voice, tiny and fragile, has lost the firmness from before.

"I'm sorry, I mistook it. I thought... forget it... I'm sorry..."

"It's okay."

They stay there, the two of them, with the silence around them, with the smell of nostalgia emanating from Izuku. His aroma shakes Itsuka, awakens her own melancholy. Before she realizes it, she begins to let off steam.

"You know, it reminded me of something. Someone, actually. An alpha they tried to mate me with. The first one I had. It wasn't... it wasn't as I was told it would be. We were supposed to cheat on the guards, but he didn't even want to hear about it. At first I hated him. We were both miserable and he just... he didn't want to... it took a long time for me to finally understand. That didn't make things any easier, but I got it."

"Understand what?"

Itsuka shakes her head, she doesn't know how to put it into words.

"I hadn't thought about him since I got here. I saw the flower and I remembered."

"Why?"

"Because of his brand. He had a red gladiolus flower of a bright scarlet color on his left side. It looked like a sword, a sword that was born in his heart and reached to his shoulder."

The change is immediate, so sudden that it is overwhelming. Itsuka is startled when she smells it. An emotion so overwhelming that it paralyzes her.

"What's the matter?" She asks, suddenly alarmed.
His heart pounds uncontrollably, his hands and stomach shake. His mood swings so suddenly that he cannot control it. He commands himself to remain calm, but his body's reaction is involuntary.

'Enough, stop, it's not him, it's not him.'

His ears get hot thanks to the anxiety that has been put on him.

"What's the matter?" When Izuku hears the question, he shakes his head, suddenly dumb and terrified.

'Breathe, you have to breathe.' His heart trembles in a compass without rhythm or pause. 'Breathe.' Making a titanic effort Izuku shakes his head without stopping rocking.

"I'm sorry," he says once he manages to speak, but his voice does not stop shaking. "I—"

"Calm down."

Izuku swallows his dry mouth, he notices the blood beating in his ears. 'It's not him,' he repeats himself for the umpteenth time, 'it's not him,' but he cannot remove from his mind the gladiolus flower. 'If you ask for him you'll realize that he isn't Katsuki. Ask her and you'll know.'

But he does not want to ask. He does not want to face the truth. 'Just a moment, I want to have him back for a moment.' He can see it, bright and magnificent, the gladiolus flower on Katsuki's chest. Alive and safe, it is only a dream.

"Well, maybe I'd better go—"

"What was his name?" Izuku interrupts when she makes a gesture to leave.

Itsuka blinks and Izuku gets ready for the reality punch.

"I don't know," she says after a moment, "he never told me. I told him mine, although later I learned that it wasn't customary to do so."

"What was he like?"

"Quiet," she says, she stays quiet, meditates on it carefully, and suddenly it seems that the memories come back to her, because once she starts she cannot stop. Izuku listens to her without ceasing to tremble. "Fierce. Untamable. Terrifying; he tried to escape several times. He never gave up. He wasn't afraid."

"Was he...? Did he have...? What was he like?"

"Physically? Handsome. He was skinny like everyone else, but he wasn't weak. He used to train no matter how tired he was. Once he asked me for a knife, he said he was good with them, but I never gave one to him. Blond, tall, and his eyes... his eyes were unforgettable. A dark scarlet color. They could paralyze you with the fury they transmitted."

Izuku bends over himself, has a hole in his stomach and is not sure if he will burst into tears or faint. 'It's not him, it's not him... it can't be him.' He is trying to recover when Itsuka ends up destroying his
self-control.

"The curious thing is that he was never cold... I suppose the people from the islands keep the sun in their interior."

Izuku begins to cry as if he were a small child. Relief. Terror. Agony. Hope. An endless number of emotions explode inside him like an inclement storm. He sobs aloud, covering his eyes with the palms of his hands.

'Kacchan.'

Chapter End Notes

Izuku knows! IZUKU KNOWS! F I N A L L Y

Okay so, I liked this... "explanation" that Roquel made and thought you should all read too xD:

*Hey, Roquel, how much longer is the story going?*

*Um, I really don't know. If I make an estimate and the same thing happens to me that happened with this chapter I would start screaming. At first I didn't have a fixed number of chapters (I thought maybe ~25 chapters + 3 interludes + epilogue would be enough), but my chapters break down into two parts or sometimes three. As history is written there are details to cover, there are scenes to crumble slowly and bam! We have 21 chapters and I can tell you that there are four important events (for our protagonists) that have not happened. And next to those there are small situations that affect the plot and are narrated from other points of view. Ugh...*

*But here we go. I try not to think about how much is left, but to advance event by event, until we get to that reunion that everyone wants to see. If I'm honest with you, there are days when I'm terrified of the idea of reaching it (there's a lot of expectation), but we'll get there... I have no doubt about that.*

So yeah, s t u ff is happening from now on guys! The upcoming chapters have strong things going on and I would love to see how you all take the news 😊😊😊?

Next chapter on January 26th.

"The Sun's Fall"
Chapter Summary

The sun, that great luminous, brilliant and energetic star. All living beings drink from it, the world grows under its light. When it's gone, what light will guide us?

Chapter Notes

The twilight refers to the setting of the sun and its remaining sunrays being scattered on the sky. The difference is that, after the sunset, you are sure that sunrise will come: The sun will return. But, will it be like that?

From the surprise Itsuka remains steady like a stone.

The cry she hears is intense and heartbroken, it is a devastating sound, worse than that of a helpless child. He is so full of anguish that her immediate instinct is to offer any kind of comfort, but when she is about to do so, she smells it.

She notices for the first time the aroma that emanates from him. It is not peppermint, no. It is a combination of species in which one of them stands out from the others. It is herbal and fragrant, as if she were in front of a garden filled with plants.

*Mint.*

She is thrown back thanks to the impression and remembers:

*She had made it a habit to sit near him, to see him train on the sunny days on which they used to coincide.*

"I want a knife," he hissed, without looking at her, studying the wall with an attention that he did not dedicate to anyone.

"No," she replied firmly because that was a risk she was unwilling to take.

*He did not insist and she knew immediately that he would leave. He would walk away and never*
speak to her again.

"Anything but a weapon," she said suddenly, as he walked away.

She saw him stop, turned towards her, and for the first, and only time, he gave her his full attention. He stared at her for what seemed like hours.

"Mint," he said before leaving her alone.

'Mint,' repeats Itsuka for herself and immediately denies it. 'No.'

"Where?" She wakes up from her trance thanks to the question, a torn, nasal, agonizing sound; when she lifts her gaze she realizes that Izuku has stopped crying even though his tears continue to fall. The boy's eyes are red and swollen, and his expression overflows with anxiety. "Where?"

She shakes her head, unable to process the question. Then she sees him take a breath, he recomposes.

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"Two years ago? Maybe three? I don't know. It was before I came here; he stayed in prison."

"What prison?"

"I don't know."

She sees him tense and suddenly begins to murmur, unconnected phrases, incoherent words, his voice rising with every syllable he pronounces. Each of his gestures speaks of anguish, disbelief and panic.

"If I show you a map," he says suddenly, "would you be able to locate it?"

"No, I never knew where it was."

"Do you remember... do you remember what was nearby? Any villages? Any mountains? A river?"

"No, no... they always transported us in closed wagons. I don't remember... I don't know."

She sees him holding his hair, rocking in his place without stopping muttering. His anxiety is so great that Itsuka can no longer bear it.

"But he's not there anymore."

"What—why?"

"Because they emptied the prisons."
"Who told you that?"

"In the last transfer many couples arrived. More than usual. Since there were so many of them and the omega adults couldn't cope, they gathered a group of our people. That's how the rumors began to spread. They said they had been forced to choose: Mate or die. They all repeated the same thing. It happened in all the prisons."

Izuku opens his mouth, but says nothing. His expression makes Itsuka's heart shrink and she is forced to offer him comfort.

"If he's mated, he must be here." She regrets her words as soon as they are out of her mouth because she knows the truth.

She knows it because she carries the words engraved on fire inside her: "I'm not going to mate with anyone." Itsuka knows. 'He is dead.' It is an indisputable fact; but she does not say it out loud. 'If he has cried like this now, how will he do it when he knows the truth?'

"Here...?"

If it were not because they were so close and there was no other loud noise being made, Itsuka is sure that she would never have been able to hear the question. Tiny, loaded with blind hope, with an indefinable emotion that makes his voice tremble. The sound is painful.

"Less than two weeks ago they began to arrive," she says without emotion. 'I won't tell him,' she says to herself with anguish, 'I can't tell him.' "Everyone is still locked up." 'Let him find out by himself.'

It is amazing how the mint aroma stabilizes. It loses its air of agony and in its place grows and thickens. Firmness, resolution. Izuku breathes in and Itsuka witnesses the change. The fire that shines in his eyes speaks of an iron will and determination.

"You must take me there."

"No one can go. The tunnels are constantly monitored and if you are caught you won't be able to keep your end of the bargain."

"I've promised to help you and I will. I won't break my word, but I have to go. I have to—"

He chokes, the emotion is too much. For a fraction of a second Itsuka is again tempted to tell him the truth, to tell him he's not there, but in the end she cannot. She does not dare to.

"Please," he says with his imploring expression, "you have to take me there."

'His eyes,' Itsuka thinks with astonished admiration, 'are two wells of fresh moss.'

"Okay," she says with a numb heart. "But first you will fulfill your part of our deal."

"I will. I will."

"Very well... I know someone who might be able to take you there."

[...]
On the last night of his heat the stiffness in his back is especially unbearable, so Denki refuses to sleep and instead plans to sit by the campfire to watch. Unfortunately the fire threatens to go out so he is forced to gather firewood. The barbaric sentries greet him politely when they see him pass by, and Kyouka, who is on duty at the time, departs from her post to go with him.

"Be quick," she growls while Denki yawns for the umpteenth time.

Kneeling on the floor Denki twists his back to relieve the tension, stretches, moves his neck in circles and tries not to think of the smell of saffron.

"Hurry!"

"I don't need a nanny," says Denki, suppressing another yawn. "If you don't want to be here you don't have to stay."

"Tell that to the Chief," there is so much annoyance in her voice that Denki forgets the wood and turns around, still with his knees on the floor.

"Have we offended you in any way?"

The question rips Kyouka from her lookout, she turns to him with a frown.

"What?"

"Why do you hate us so much?"

"I don't hate you," she answers after a moment.

"You do," Denki says, looking at her sympathetically, "You treat us as if we were useless. You're not the only one, some alpha do, especially if they come from Yuuei, but from your group you are the only one who's not kind."

"Well, forgive me for not being a servile alpha, but that's how I am."

"You are kind to Ochako, but not to everyone else," Denki shrugs his shoulders and resumes his task. "I'm not telling you to be kind to me, much less servile, I don't care, I just want to know why you treat us that way. I would understand if you came from Yuuei, but from your group you're the only one who looks at us as if our presence offended you. And you always put on the same face when it's your turn to stand guard... a face that says you'd rather be doing anything else than being with us. If it bothers you to stay at camp, you don't have to."

Denki finishes picking up his branches and pushes himself with one hand to stand up. After the prolonged silence he no longer waits for an answer, so he is surprised when Kyouka says:

"When I was born my size made them think I'd be an omega. I spent the first six years of my life between cushions, fabrics and special care. My parents wanted to ensure my survival, but then I got my flower," she points her face, "and since then I have fought for a place on my tribe. I've worked very hard to get recognition from Chief Togata. His orders are absolute for me, no matter what they are... but in spite of all the work I've done he trusts me only to leave me in charge of you. Inasa has been assigned as an escort. Kosei has earned his place to fight alongside our leader. And I am here, being a nanny."
"Why do we need a nanny?"

"Because the omega are weak."

"Is that the reason why you are so offended you've been mistaken as one of us previosly?"

"I don't want to be weak! The omega needs to be taken care of. I don't want anyone to take care of me. They don't survive. I will. They're famous just for having children. My fame will be entirely mine. My victories and my fighters. I am a warrior and I will never let anyone confuse me with an omega again!"

After the explosion everything remains silent. Denki sighs, rests the branches against his hip and with his free hand scratches his nose.

"Do you realize that we have no choice?"

"What?"

"You say they're famous only for having children, but it's not like they can do anything else. From what Inasa has told me, from what Momo has told me, when an omega is born they are taken care of, they are spoiled. An omega doesn't fight. You said it, Momo said it, Inasa said it. How do you expect them to survive if you treat them like glass urns?"

"It's because they're weak."

"Compared to the rest, yes we are, we don't possess the strength of an alpha nor the endurance of a beta, but that doesn't mean that our life is any less than theirs. To you, who only appreciate physical strength, our life may seem insignificant, but there are other types of strength. We have a high pain tolerance, we are adaptive, we are curious and persistent. Being weak does not mean we are doomed to die, it means we have to learn and improve. We would fight if given the opportunity. Don't judge us for leading the only life we're allowed to have."

She opens her mouth, though no word comes out of it, so Denki moves on to stand in front of her.

"And don't be too hard on yourself. You were assigned to care for us which proves that Togata trusts you. If we are as weak as you suppose, if we are as precious as you believe, then you should see it not as a second-class task, but as a job that requires the best, don't you think so?"

When he sees her blink, Denki smiles.

"And yes, an omega likes to be pampered, and who doesn't? When I... if I ever get married I want my alpha or beta to spoil me. I want to be treated with affection. There's nothing wrong with that. Ours is the capacity for sweetness and the affection we receive is our reward... Besides, Ochako also likes to be flattered."

He laughs when Kyouka frowns as if she had just heard something incomprehensible. When he finishes laughing he notices the flushed expression on Kyouka's face, and for the first time it does not cause him any discomfort. Instead of hesitating, as he would if he were in front of Momo, or feeling embarrassed, as he would if he were in front of Eijirou, Denki feels a different emotion sparkle inside him.

He reaches out with one hand and pats her shoulder affectionately.

"I'm sorry they confused you with one of us," he says without losing his playful tone. "I'm also surprised that they thought such an ugly little thing could turn into a pretty omega."
When Kyouka pushes him, Denki laughs so hard that all the branches fall to the ground.

[...]

As they return to camp Eijirou does not stop questioning his master. He wants details, dates, names. He wants to know the whole story from the moment the prince and his group left the palace.

His master does his best to fill in the gaps in the account Tenya gave them, but more than that his story focuses on Jin and the possibilities of assembling the remaining fleet under the command of the prince.

"With the death of the king," says Aizawa that night, at the designated rest stop, "the chain of command has been broken. If the second part of the fleet remains whole, the Council will face blind incense. They won't stand a chance."

"You said they sent Toyomitsu to alert the Council."

"That's what Shino told me, but we don't know if he'll succeeded."

"And Shino... will she be able to take control from Jin?"

"It's most likely that while Jin is on land looking for the prince, the fleet will be attacked. It's a possibility and Shino will use it to destabilize the traitor's position and take control. If she succeeds we'll have reinforcements to protect the prince. More than that, your group, all those who come from the prison, will be evacuated."

"And if she doesn't?"

His master sighs, carefully meditating on the answer.

"If Shino doesn't manage to take control from Jin, his only option is to flee and meet with the Council, or whatever is left of it. We find ourselves in an extremely delicate situation. If the Council falls the whole fleet belongs to Jin and nothing will prevent him from destroying it, but if the Council is still alive, what they'll do when they learn of our king's death is to order a withdrawal."

"They can't leave!" Tenya bursts down with a scandalised expression. "They won't dare to abandon the prince."

"They will if they think he's dead."

"But—," says Tenya.

"They can't," Eijirou adds.

"That means we're alone."

Eijirou looks at Bakugou who until then has remained on the sidelines.
"We have allies," says Aizawa calmly.

"The famous Kamui, which you can't even get in touch with. The barbarians, whose number is just sixteen. The woman, in charge of recovering the fleet, but whose success you can't guarantee. Am I missing anyone?"

"The entire army will obey the prince's orders."

"That's why we'll have to find him. And I very much doubt that you have considered what will happen to the group when we begin the search."

"The group, mainly the omega, will follow the path to the coast. If necessary, they'll continue through the desert, near the beach, and wait to be picked up."

As soon as Eijirou hears it he moves himself uncomfortably, he can't imagine separating from his group. *From Denki.*

"They'll wait for a ship that could take days, weeks."

"At least they'll be far from here."

"Far away and without help."

"It's only temporary."

"Aham," he looks away and straightens his back. When his eyes come back to lay on them again his entire face is painted in contempt. "You don't want to involve them, but that didn't matter to you when you decided to leave your prince in an enemy land accompanied by an omega..., am I right?"

Eijirou is startled. Not only because the question possesses a dry, cutting force, but because he is not accustomed to someone speaking that way to his master. Suddenly he straightens, the smell of smoke emanating from the blonde makes him react involuntarily.

"What?" His master asks without losing his calm. The fins of his nose shake, there is no doubt that he also detects the aroma, but he conceals it much better than Eijirou.

"You pick up an omega in the sea and decide to send it as bait, why?"

"Exceptions are made in war."

Eijirou sees him clenching his teeth, frowning. The scent that emanates from him is suffocating.

His master's response is to turn completely towards him and offer him the most iron expression of his repertoire. The expression that all his students learn to fear. His aroma, incapable of overcoming Bakugou's, is limited to standing firm without retreating.

"Five years ago they attacked the islands for the first time. I knew they had taken you. I knew the two ships had sunk. After that time the slave traders made sure to send more than two; but your ship didn't sink, the proof is in front of me... although the other one did. And there was at least one survivor. By chance, fate, or whatever, we met him. I suppose you know him as well. I won't ask you about him, but I'll assume he is someone you don't wish to see involved in the war. I understand that. Yes, I agreed to him coming. I never forces him to, I did not command him to, but let him do as he wanted. His fate already weighs upon me. No, the omega don't fight, but they have will. At least that's how they see it on the islands. Anyone else in my place would have forced him to stay on the ship, anyone else would have dragged him back to Yuuei, for that is the way things are there. An
omega has no voice. On the islands things are different. I know. I've seen them in activities that Yuuei would never approve of. If getting angry with me eases your pain, go ahead, but understand this. Your anger won't bring him back."

For a terrible second Eijirou is certain that Bakugou's self-control will explode. His scent is a threat in itself, but the blonde merely rises, never looking away.

"Perhaps it was his decision," it is the first thing he says as soon as he stands. "But yours was to abandon him, without support of any kind, with no guarantee of success. For your life, I hope that prince of yours will keep him safe."

He leaves without waiting for an answer and goes to stand guard with Inasa. As soon as his scent is mitigated, Tenya shakes his effect.

"How dare him," he says in a low voice. "To threaten Aizawa-sensei—"

"It's okay, Tenya."

"He even insinuated that the prince must watch over the safety of the omega, when he's not even his fiancé or relative, nor does he have any kind of relationship."

"It's peculiar," says his master and Eijirou realizes that he's talking to him.

Eijirou frowns because he knows that his teacher is asking him to share his impression of Bakugou and frankly he does not know where to start. Yes, the boy is violent, but he does not judge him. Not after what he has seen and what he knows.

"Bakugou is..."

Intense? Volatile? Abrasive? There is no qualifier that describes him completely.

"He only wants..."

He does not even know how to tell them how important that omega is. If Eijirou's assumption is correct, if that omega is the owner of the mint aroma, Bakugou will stop at nothing to find him.

"He searches for..."

How can he explain to them that this omega is the reason why Bakugou has refused to mate? How can he tell them that thanks to the aroma of mint their leader endures incense more than any of them?

"It's not..."

Eijirou surrenders, he can't explain it. Not without detailing months of watching him train behind bars, driven by anger, the thirst for revenge, the desire that only burns in those who are not afraid of anything. Days of watching him take care of the bottle he carries around his neck, of enduring his impatience to get there, only to discover that the prince is gone and that there is no trace anywhere.

"He saved us," he says at the end, staring at his master. "And he brought us here. I know, I don't know how, but I know, that he will take us wherever we decide to follow him... When... when I took my oath of allegiance to the crown I did it because I wanted to serve the prince. *We are the shield that protects him and the knife that he wields...*, but—but if I swore allegiance to Bakugou, it wouldn't be to serve or protect him, it would be to fight by his side. It would be to follow him and fight, not for his name, but for him." He sighs, he moves a bit and scratches his head. "My loyalty is to the prince, always has been and always will be, my duty is to protect him, but if he... if Todoroki-
ouji and Bakugou fail to understand each other... if they both don't... if they fail... I wouldn't..." He clears his voice. "I'm sorry, I don't think I'm able to explain it."

"And yet I understand you. Thank you for sharing your opinion, Eijirou."

His answer is to nod, rub his hands and chew his dinner unwillingly. In the end he can't resist asking:

"Will the prince be safe?"

"While Kamui is with him, yes; he's also warned about incense. He will know how to face it."

"No," answers Eijirou, recalling the aroma of honey. "No one can be prepare for that. it's... We've been practicing, we do tolerance sessions. You know it's coming. You know how it smells... but reality always surpasses memory. Even if you are cautious, you can't avoid the way your body reacts."

"What's it like," asks his teacher, and Eijirou proceeds to tell him about the drug in detail. Its effects, its duration, the way they use it.

Tenya joins the conversation by interspersing questions. After a while they divide the turns to watch and Eijirou sleeps without ever ceasing to think about the prince and the incense.

His master wakes him up long before dawn.

"Let's go," he says, and then immediately bows down next to Tenya.

Eijirou yawns, rubs his eyes and stands up. He is not surprised to see Inasa and Bakugou awake, extinguishing the fire and erasing their trail. Those two never sleep.


"If we go out now," says Bakugou, "we'll get there before everyone gets up."

Eijirou wraps himself in his blanket and advances, fighting against the yawns that makes his eyes water; although the continuous rains have stopped, the days when the sun can be seen in the sky full of grey clouds are rare. From time to time they are surprised by sudden showers that loosen the ground and refresh the atmosphere. So far they have been lucky and the weather has stabilized, but there is no doubt that the sudden drop in temperature indicates that this will change soon.

"It's going to rain," says Aizawa scanning the sky.

"When," asks Bakugou without slowing down.

"In the afternoon, perhaps."

"Again?" Asks Eijirou, "it's been like this all the time since we've been out. Rain. Stop. Repeat."

"It's the rainy season in Hosu," says Aizawa. "After this comes the warm season. Then you will miss the rains."

"Is it like our summer?" Tenya asks and Eijirou ignores the explanation.

The night fades and the sky begins to dye in lighter tones. Eijirou is trying to guess if his master's prediction is correct when he hears it.
"What was that," he asks aloud, unable to name whatever he has heard.

But instead of answering him, Bakugou moves, he rushes forward suddenly without stopping and a second later Inasa imitates him. With the sense of catastrophe growing inside him, Eijirou follows.

[...]

Shuichi is ready. Standing, surrounded by his men, he counts the seconds to give the signal and advance. Although his plan is infallible, and he has considered the possible scenarios, he does not stop feeling a pinch of anxiety at the prospect of fighting. It is inevitable. In war, a single mistake can cost you your life, and a stroke of luck can keep you safe.

'We'll win,' he says, full of confidence. And when the victory is his, he will go in search of Dabi to berate him for never returning. 'He was supposed to get reinforcements,' but reinforcements came without him. Dabi had vanished without any explanation.

'Bastard.'

"Lieutenant," he reacts to the voice and turns to see one of Uba's men. "We've located the leader. We're ready."

Shuichi nods and dismisses him, then gestures affirmatively to the soldier next to him.

In coordinated succession the incense packets are thrown through slings creating a whitish trace that traces a wide arc in the sky before falling beyond the first defensive line of the savages.

As the incense falls, the silence of the forest is broken by the sound of a horn reverberating with thunderous power.

Before the sound fades, Shuichi and his people advance.

* Hiryu is part of the first line of defense. All those who are there are from the alpha group of the prison, because if the demons attack there is no doubt that they will use incense as a curtain to charge from the front and they, at least, are familiar with its effects. As a precaution they have been placed in such a way that the wind blows in their favour, so even if the demons use incense, the wind will carry the smoke away from their camp.

Although he knows it, Hiryu does not stop feeling nervous. Bakugou and the rest should have
already met the person, or people, waiting at the waterfall. Enough time has passed for them to have begun their return. As soon as they arrive, the whole group will be set in motion.

Not to mention that Bakugou will take over again.

And even if the barbaric Togata is an impressive warrior, Hiryu does not trust him entirely. Not because he considers him dangerous, but because he does not know how the incense works, he does not know what they have seen or what they have lived.

Togata may be an exemplary leader for his people, but for Hiryu his leader is and will be Bakugou. And he is not the only one who thinks that way.

Hiryu's musings end when he sees the smoke in the sky. It is difficult to distinguish between the row of trees and the gray sky of dawn, but Hiryu moves away from his post in time to see it hit the ground. It does not fall on them, as one would expect, it falls far away so the smoke does not even touch them.

The sound of the horn causes the rest of his companions to prepare for the onslaught.

"What a lousy aim," shouts one of them facing the moving shadows.

Just then the high branches of the trees are shaken when the wind blows in their favour, towards the front. Hiryu understands. They're trying to separate us. 'He immediately concentrates his scent to attract the attention of his companions. 'Beware.' Those at his side join him to initiate the counterattack.

With Hiryu's incense and the rest having lost contact with the Chief Togata, it is now impossible to communicate with his group. All that remains is to fight.

As soon as the first line of demons appears, Hiryu moves. His entire group follows him.

•

Goro's group has been in motion since last night, they have moved upstream to use the current instead of fighting it. There are ten, all of them are able to move through the water without making noise.

They divide themselves into two groups, the first remaining at the top of the river and the other following its way to the other end of the clearing. Once there, they wait.

As soon as the sound of the horn bursts into the sky both groups come out of the water and enter between the defensive lines. Their mission: To set the wagons on fire.

On the other side of the clearing the group of archers have taken up position and are ready to beat anyone who tries to undertake a retreat down the river or to cover their men when they have to retreat.
Even though his heat is ending, the discomfort remains. It always has been like this and it always will be. Denki knows that the discomfort will last a couple of days, the same days that it will take the bitter taste of panax to disappear. So when one of them suggests preparing herbal tea to speed up the process, Denki joins the group that wants to bring the water.

They have not even reached the river when they hear it.

"What was that," asks Denki, suddenly terrified.

The answer he receives is the alarmed cry of the barbarian walking behind him, but the warning comes too late. The arrows fall on them like a rain of immense drops.

It is curious how his mind reacts. Instead of clouding, reality acquires an astonishing sharpness and everything stops, because he can only see her, there, motionless.

Chieka on the ground, bleeding, with an arrow piercing her eye.

Only a second ago she was beside him chatting, he was still able to hear her, "do you think the sun will come up today?"

The sun. She wanted to see the sun.

The next thing he knows, he is leaning toward her when suddenly a ferocious pain falls on him, like a mallet that falls on his shoulder. Denki screams and collapses.

Kyouka is on the tree line near the river waiting for the omega group to return. The morning is cold, the dewdrops remain attached to the leaves of the tree on which they rests, and the sky is painted in a delicate grayish shade. Everything seems to indicate that it will be another unproductive day.

She was yawning when the sound of the horn shook her from head to toe. Moments later she detects Kao’s alarmed aroma, which collapses until it fades away. She is ready to run when she detects movement in her periphery.

Kyouka runs towards the shadows she has seen moving, from them she does not detect any scent so she prepares to receive them. There are five of them, all of them with the appearance of a frog, all of them immense. Without losing a single second Kyouka spins her spear in a full circle, assumes a combat posture and allows her scent to spread around her.
When the first of the intruders draws his weapon Kyouka jumps towards them emitting an uninterrupted battle cry.

She uses the base of her spear to propel herself, the demon dodges her kick, but as soon as she lands she wields her spear in front at an impressive speed, as if she were a snake that stretches to attack. The tip sinks into the soft zone of the crotch. Kyouka immediately retracts it and a gush of blood follows.

As the demon screams Kyouka pushes upward spinning her spear over her head keeping her enemies at bay. Suddenly four of the demons move away from her and run towards the camp, Kyouka is about to follow them when the other—the largest of them all—stands in her way.

When he attacks Kyouka dodges him, after which she proceeds to fire her spear in rapid succession until the tip sinks into at least three different points. The demon is immense and the small wounds don't seem to bother him so she strikes again and again.

Kyouka does not retreat, she moves with feline agility, jumps and turns in a well executed dance, like a spinning peg-top that dances around a graceless mastodon. Her attacks are fast every time, they are not random blows, they are not insignificant cuts. Each of them has been made with the sole intention of making her opponent bleeding.

The demon breathes, his body is covered in blood, his head gets light and his muscles rigid.

Without wasting time Kyouka launches a final attack in which her spear pierces the demon's neck. As soon as her enemy falls to the ground Kyouka sets course for the camp.

She has not even begun to sweat.

The first defensive line is composed of beasts that fight with inhuman ferocity. Shuichi curses when one of his men falls next to him in an intense scuffle with one of the savages. Taking advantage of Shuichi's distraction, he raises his sword and sinks it into the back of the enemy, he is ready to finish him off when another of them throws himself at him, making Shuichi stumble.

The savage roars, his scream seems to alert the rest because they retreat and regroup without a single order, and at the same time he continues to stab with his knife while his companions rearrange his offensive.

Shuichi clenches his teeth when the knife is stuck in his forearm causing his sword to fall. He retreats by drawing a wide bow with the knife in his other hand. That way he gets the savage to retreat.

"Now!" He shouts loudly, and almost immediately another series of cylinders that emit white smoke fall into the field.
As he hopes, the savages retreat away from the smoke, leaving them among the white clouds that the wind drags in the opposite direction, but they cannot escape the incense that drags behind them.

'\textit{Now they are surrounded.}'

"Cross!"

At his command his entire troop answers with a battle roar.

On the second defensive line are the alpha group with the least resistance to incense and the group of barbarians who are not accustomed to dealing with it, yet Mirio has no intention of retreating.

When the demons cross the incense the aroma of Mirio thickens around him and spreads in all directions carrying a single order: \textit{Attack}. His aroma possesses a rich variation of contrasts that are overwhelming. When an alpha smells it their heart rate increases, their muscles contract and their whole body assumes an attack posture.

Mirio is the leader and at his command all move.

\textit{Hit, feint, knife}. Mirio shouts when he knocks down his first opponent, his aroma is enriched by creating electric shocks to the alpha fighting under his command. In response they react faster, fight harder, roar as they get drunk on their leader's scent.

Somewhere to his left Kosei laughs as he and his group contain the first onslaught of demons emerging from the white smoke. Mirio's aroma is so potent that he manages to inflame his blood with the desire for \textit{victory}.

To his right Tamaki is a solid, firm presence, but even if he is enveloped in the aroma of his leader, for his nature the aroma only sharpens his concentration and acute his senses, even if it does not fill him with that energy that only another alpha can appreciate.

Mirio struggles with natural abandonment, with the grace of those who have trained to survive in the harshest conditions. He has earned his title of leader by heart, he has beaten stronger, fiercer opponents than those who now challenge him.

No demon possesses an aroma, it is like fighting a noumu beast, because it is impossible to detect their determination or their state. Mirio finds it very sad that those creatures have to live their lives without knowing the intimacy, the familiarity that they share with only their sense of smell; but even if he feels sorry for them he does not plan to grant them victory. He has no plans to surrender.

So he fights and kills, not only because of the threat they pose to him, but because behind his line there is no one left who can protect the omega. It is that thought that feeds his energy and inflames his aroma. Victory is at hand, he feels it and tastes it. He knows that they will win. And that is when everything collapses.
Suddenly Mirio is surrounded. The situation does not intimidate him, he just dodges, attacks, manages to kill two before one of the demons mocks his defense. Mirio doesn't waste time and stabs him, but instead of dodging him the demon uses his last breath to blow the dust he has in his hand directly to his face.

He stumbles from the surprise and although his intention is to move away the natural reaction of his body is to cough and immediately inhale.

*Honey, dense and sticky and extremely powerful.*

The dust itches his nose as it ascends through his nostrils and stops at some point inside him. He feels the dust at eye level, spicy, sticky, annoying, *scorching*. He coughs, but that does not help him clear up. He shakes his head like a wounded animal.

While his nose tries to shake off the scent, his brain experiences a massive electrical short-circuit. Mirio is unable to dodge the knife that ends up sinking into his chest.

Far away, from such a large distance, he hears Tamaki's voice, it sounds muffled as if he were wrapped in cotton wool. He would like to understand what he says, but all he can see is a white stage wrapped in static. His whole world smells like sweet milk. Honey-saturated milk.

•

When a troop fights the most effective communication system are the subtle changes in aroma; of course the system does not admit a complex conversation, but it allows everyone identify the position of their companions, recognize warnings, follow orders, and all just by using their sense of smell. However, there is always an aroma that superimposes itself on the rest. There is one that dictates orders on everyone around him.

The aroma of a leader not only serves as a system of communication, it also encourages the combative personality of the alpha fighters alongside him and maintains absolute control over the beta fighters under his command. An alpha leader is not only the one who dictates orders, his presence is a stimulus for the heart of the soldiers who fight with him.

The aroma of a good leader can spread great distances and in combat makes the difference between victory and defeat, because as long as the leader fights, everyone else will; as long as the leader resists, his troop will resist.

An alpha leader represents the sun around which his soldiers drink from him to fight. By their importance, by their power, only the best can assume that role... but even the best can fall.

When Mirio's aroma collapses it is like covering the sun, like becoming blind, deaf and cold. Faced with the loss of his aroma the alpha are suddenly shaken, torn out and returned to cold uncertainty.

The confusion lasts a second, but it is enough. Then comes chaos.
"Will there be deaths? In every war there are. Will Izuku go unnoticed? *sigh* I want to believe it, but the boy walks with a sign on top: *I am here* and it's hard to ignore.

Where's the prince? As Aizawa rightly said, as long as Kamui is with him he'll be safe.

And the others? There are so many points in history that I find it tempting to go and write entire chapters of: Tsuyu-Fumikage, Kamui, Hizashi, Shoto's escort, Mina, etc., but I won't do it because then we would never move forward, although we will come to know what they do and how they are doing.

And Denki? Denki is a sun and deserves affection and respect.

Do they have dust now? In fact they have always had dust, they burn it when they want to turn it into smoke. We can say that Mirio has received a "pure" dose.

Finally I want to clarify that the end does not mean that everyone panics and runs away, but if you are in the middle of a fight for your life and suddenly you feel as if someone has ripped all the air out of you it will take a second for you to get yourself back together."

Thank you so much everyone for all your love and support! I have been kind of distracted with smash ultimate this week, so I'm sorry this came almost two days later xD, but I hope you enjoyed this as much as I did!

Next chapter on February 2nd.

"And the Moon that Bleeds"
**And the Bleeding Moon**

Chapter Summary

You will always be my prettiest memory, and when I look at the moon, I will see you there.

Chapter Notes

Hello guys and welcome to another update! On Roquel's notes she said that this chapter was like an anniversary for her fic, for 1 year for updating :D That actually made me want to look back to when was the time I uploaded the first chapter and it has been almost 2 weeks since the 1 year anniversary and I didn't notice?? ;v; Thank you everyone soooooo much for the support throughout last year, I'm so glad there are so many enjoying Roquel's story and I'm happy I was able to share to you all one of my favorite fics ever <3

Here are two fanarts from some wonderful people!! Milexnay who made a pretty Kacchan and LiYun who made the story's world map o(^◇^)o

Enjoy♡

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When the intense and powerful aroma of myrrh falls, Tamaki's response is automatic.

"Mirio!" His cry is thunderous and his aroma expands and grows in response.

As the world paralyzes around him, Tamaki moves. He covers the space that separates them into two strides, two heartbeats, and strikes the demon that wields the knife. Mirio stays where he is, but Tamaki does not give in to the temptation to look at him. Instead he roars, attacks, and stands between his leader and them.

The demons immediately choose him as their next target, all of them strike at par, but Tamaki's anger is unparalleled. When the first knife makes contact with his side, Tamaki responds by stabbing his attacker. When one of them tries to step aside to finish his job, Tamaki gets in the way by taking the stab wound to his shoulder. He gets rid of them and throws himself into an attack without pauses.

It is the fact that he is a beta that gives him the advantage in those precious seconds following the shock, that and that his bond with Mirio has created the instinctive response of his body. This allows him to react in time to save his leader's life; while the rest is still shaking the surprise and horror, Tamaki moves, fast enough to change destiny.

He does not care about the blood flowing from his wounds, he does not feel the pain or burning in his muscles that spit fire as he wields his knives with desperate force. Every stab he receives is one less for Mirio, he has sworn to defend him with his life and today is the day he will fulfill his promise. Tamaki fights without fear, containing the bloodlust of his adversaries until Kosei
materializes at his side and together they create the wall that stands between Mirio and death.

•

For a moment he can only think of pain. The sharp, warm sensation that his shoulder emits. It is impossible for him to tell whether or not he has fainted. What he knows is that the world is covered in a gray layer and his ears are not working well.

Pain.

He is familiar with the feeling, although he could swear he has never felt anything like this. Denki squeezes his eyelids and opens them. He is still blind.

'AHG!'

He grits his teeth and blinks again, this time the world regains some of its sharpness. He moans again with a tense jaw as he tries to overcome the wave of agony that runs from head to toe. When he tries to move, the pain shakes him again and he has to close his eyes and stay still to placate his body.

Carefully, Denki opens his eyes and blinks. One. Two. Three times.

His cheek is against the ground and his restless breathing is pushing the loose earth away from him. He wants to use his hand to get up, but as soon as his brain gives the order and his hand tries to carry it out, waves of pain ascend up his shoulder, leaving him blind.

After a moment of paralysis, Denki turns his neck and sees the arrow protruding from his shoulder.

'Fucking son of a b...'

A particularly strong exhalation raises small particles of dirt that hurt his eyes.

'You're not dead, Denki, breathe.‘

He obeys and concentrates on the air he expels, trying not to tense himself, because when he does, the peak of pain in his body reaches apotheostic levels. In a quick analysis Denki realizes that he is lying sideways on his right arm, in front of him there is a body, although his limited vision prevents him from seeing his face.

'Chieka. It was her. Ime was coming as well. And the barbarian. I heard the barbarian scream.‘

Turning is an option that Denki discards when he feels the tug on his back, which reaches the region of his shoulder blade and makes him sip air through his mouth.

'All right, Denki, even if it hurts you have to move. It doesn't matter if you think you're going to lose your arm, you can't stay here.‘

He is going to turn around, he has to turn around to take the weight off his healthy arm.
'No, no, ou, ou, ouuch, I can't...'

He stays still and breathes again.

'Wait, wait, where did the arrows come from? What if the demons are still there? What if they shoot me when I get up?'

'You can't stay here, Denki.'

'They attacked us! What if they're still nearby?'

'Did you see them? Did they cross the river?'

No, Denki does not remember seeing them. He tries to evoke the memory back.

'They came from the other side. The arrows came from the front.'

'Well, maybe they're not close enough to see you're still alive. More if you've been lying around for a while.'

'If I move and they discover me they will shoot me again.'

'Do you want to stay here?'

He thinks about it and then remembers Bakugou's boring expression. The expression that says 'You have two hands and a head, fix yourself'. And almost immediately he thinks of Eijirou's face. The very idea that he could look at him now with pity in his eyes fills him with shame.

Grinding his teeth, Denki moves his neck until he finds the line of trees near his head.

'Get up and run there. If you are fast you'll be covered before the arrows fall on you.'

'What if I am not?'

'Then you won't have to worry about the pain you feel now.'

Denki carefully accommodates his body. He drowns a curse as the cursed arrow moves, causing the pain to fire again.

'Good, with your good hand you'll push yourself, you'll lean on your knee and from there you'll run away. Straight to the trees.'

'I think I'm going to faint.'

'Move your ass, Denki.'

He cannot help but scream when he's pushing himself. He gets up and stumbles, runs, staggers and goes on. The adrenaline keeps him on his feet while another wave of arrows falls seconds before he disappears into the trees. Once safe Denki slips and curses noticing that warm blood soaks into his uniform.

'Don't stop.'

Grinding his teeth Denki leans on a tree, takes a breath, and runs.
Kyouka finds the wagons in flames. Her companions are dealing with the four demons that escaped
from her while from somewhere in the forest fire arrows arise that fall over the camp threatening to
feed the fire that has begun to get out of control.

"Get out of here!" She shouts as she pushes the crowded omega aside next to one of the wagons.
"Get out!"

To her surprise Ochako interposes herself with a fierce expression.

"We have to put out the fire," she says, and when Kyouka is about to curse, she adds, "The incense
is there.

'Shit.'

Kyouka leaves them and runs back into the forest.

"Where are you going?" Asks Momo, carrying buckets of earth.

"The archers!" Shouts Kyouka just as another handful of arrows fall near the beasts, causing the
animals to panic and try to flee.

The small group of draught animals—fat, clumsy and immense—charge the wagons in their
desperate escape from the fire. One of the wagons, the incense one, loses a wheel and collapses on
its side as the fire devours it. Kyouka is about to turn around when Momo intervenes.

"Go!" She shouts as she heads towards the disaster.

Kyouka goes into the forest, determined to get rid of the archers; but who she finds is Denki, who
slips when she calls him and runs towards him. She stops dry on her steps when she sees the arrow
through him, she can see the tip protruding from the top of his shoulder blade. The smell of orange is
so bitter that Kyouka is overwhelmed with the need to calm him, to erase his pain and fear.

"...the river," he says with his teeth clenched.

"What?"

Denki clutches her arm, his knuckles turn white as he sinks his fingers into her skin. For the first time
Kyouka realizes that he has spectacular eyes, like melted gold shining before the sun. Eyes that,
though overflowing with fear, glow with determination.

"Archers," he grunts with a gray face and chapped lips, "they're across the river."

Kyouka is about to answer him, ready to move when his leader's scent collapses.

Her head spins immediately, as if looking for the subtle frequency that should be there but is not.
Kyouka concentrates, searches for it, the firm, thick aroma of myrrh, but there is nothing.

"No." 'No, no, no.' "No, it can't be."
Panic hits her, it is instinctive, inevitable. Then comes fear. The certainty that something has gone terribly wrong. She doesn't realize that her emotions are out of control until the pull on her arm brings her back to reality. Denki tells her nothing, but their aroma envelops them, sweet and delicious fruit juice, reassuring and comforting only for her.

'I am here,' she hears it loud and clear and for a moment she wants to laugh because it is surprising that he is the who is offering her consolation when he has a damn arrow running through him from side to side and the pain emanating from him makes her tremble.

"We have a high pain tolerance."

"There's another group of intruders nearby," she says, concentrating on the smell of orange, "I'll take you to camp and I'll be back."

She helps him get up, but they cannot move forward. The blood loss is too abundant and Denki buckles after taking two steps.

Kyouka is aware that she cannot carry him.

"Go," Denki lets her go and pushes her.

"I'm not leaving you."

"Go get the intruders and come back."

"But—"

"GO!"

Kyouka releases him and when she sees him trying to stand up she clenches her teeth, takes her spear and resumes her march.

---

Hiryu coughs without ever stopping his count. 'Four hundred and thirty-three,' dodge an attack, 'four hundred and thirty-four,' strike and repeat.

They have followed the demons through the wall of smoke that separates the two defense circles and their group has no plans to retreat. As soon as he detected the aroma of honey, Hiryu began counting, when he reached three hundred, several of his companions began to show the effects of incense—slowness, imbalance, clumsiness—but others, like him, cling to Togata's presence. The aroma of myrrh floods the clearing and drives him to continue fighting even though his body begins to rebel against him.

And then it happens.

The aroma of myrrh falls; the loss is like pouring water on a crescent bonfire, in its place rises the smoke that confuses his senses. And suddenly he is surrounded by honey, exquisite and sweet
honey.

In his last moments Hiryu experiences the sweet and delicate peace of those who yearn for nothing in the world.

•

Momo is paralyzed and for a brief second the feeling that her heart has been torn out is vivid. As soon as she recovers, she moves away from the wagons surrounded by fire and runs without looking back.

•

Shuichi shouts with joy when his group manages to cross the defensive lines. Somewhere to their left Uba's team will be starting their approach, if they succeeded in getting rid of the leader. To their right the two groups of frog men will be wreaking havoc in the center of the camp.

'It's time to finish this.'

"Go forth!" He shouts, "kill them all!

His cry enlivens the forces of his men, who realize the enemy's fatigue and loss of concentration. But it is a matter of time before the incense that comes from the camp spreads and they end up falling.

"Go on!"

He has barely finished spitting out the order when he arrives. A mountain that strikes his men as he roars like a wild animal.

Shuichi squeezes the incense cylinder he has collected before and prepares to blind the monstrous beast that has come to destroy the formation of his team, but before he moves he is intercepted by another savage, smaller in stature, with a messy chaff-colored hair, but with an expression full of anger and contempt. His eyes are two incandescent embers that are fixed on the cylinder in his hand.

Shuichi smiles.

"Are you afraid?" He asks mockingly, "if you're a good dog and step back you won't suffer."

The savage spits and smiles. His gesture is a promise for blood.
"I will make you suffer."

Tamaki smells it. Milk, sweet and delicious, but unlike the alpha who are still alive the aroma does not incapacitate him, he continues to fight even though the battle has shifted, the enemy continues to advance waiting for the incense to paralyze them.

When the last man who fights him falls, Tamaki takes a moment to recover, his lungs seem to spit fire and each breath is more difficult than the previous one. He breathes hard and seems to hear a whistle inside him, but the thought fades as he opens his eyes and examines the area.

Kousei lies close by, victim of incense and blind to the knife that pierced his throat, but Tamaki has no eyes for him, nor for the demons that lie scattered at his feet, his gaze is on Mirio, who has collapsed and looks at the sky with eyes that see nothing.

Tamaki kneels beside him, touches him and calls him, but receives no answer whatsoever. With fear he bows to hear his heartbeat and moans of relief when he catches it. Weak, but it still beats. His wound, the only one the enemy managed to inflict on him, hardly leaks. The knife is still there preventing him from bleeding out.

"Tamaki!"

He lifts his face to greet Momo, with his face full of terror and his aroma uncontrolled.

"You're bleeding," she carefully touches his cheek and retracts her hand before reaching the wound on his shoulder.

Tamaki shakes her.

"Save him."

When Momo's eyes rest on Mirio, his fortitude staggers, but Tamaki shakes her hard again.

"Save him."

"Your wounds..."

Tamaki shakes his head. "Save him."

"But—"

"SAVE HIM!"

She freezes, then immediately surrounds the body, leans over Mirio and checks him carefully.

"He's not bleeding."
"It's his heart," Tamaki says, carefully stroking the blond locks, "it keeps beating, albeit slowly. You have to remove the knife and close the wound before it bleeds out."

Momo starts and Tamaki forgets about her. All his attention is on Mirio, his face relaxed, his eyes open and empty. He caresses him with the gentleness he is accustomed to, runs across his forehead with his blood-stained fingers and kisses him carefully.

"You can't die here," he says quietly. "You can't give up."

He rests his forehead against his cheek, evokes the aroma of his skin and the warmth of his body. He wants to curl up next to him, feel his arms around him, feel his kisses and the security that emanates from him.

'Don't die,' Tamaki thinks as he yields to temptation and lets his body shrink like a small knot that rests on the ground while his head falls on his consort's shoulder. 'Don't you dare die.'

"Mirio," he says as his scent thickens in an attempt to reach him. "Mirio," 'I love you. Don't die.'

He repeats the same litany until tiredness overcomes him. Without adrenaline, Tamaki's body gives way; he cannot move, he feels like he is floating, surrounded cotton clouds.

'It's cold,' he thinks just before dreaming of a green field and a radiant sun in the sky.

The wound occupies all her attention and Momo is thankful, with her hands occupied it is very difficult for her to be dominated by panic. She works automatically, moving in a hurry, pressed by the delicate nature of the situation. She removes the knife, carefully reviews the wound, applies ointment that minimizes the possibility of infection and then proceeds to close it using small stitches.

She is just beginning when she notices Tamaki's aroma intensifying, it coils around them like a silent request, a plea. Momo's hands move faster, determined to end the suture. Then she sees it.

Mirio's fingers shake, they tremble for a second then stand still again. The panic returns with greater force and Momo has to stop to look for his pulse. When she finds it, she breaks into tears of relief. 'Yes!' She takes up her stitches more decisively than before.

She is ending when her body straightens into an automatic reaction, she looks around her with frantic craving and it takes her a moment to identify the cause.

"Do you smell it?" She asks as she stretches her neck.

Despite the faint aroma, Momo recognizes the unmistakable traces of an alpha. One puff of that wonderful scent is enough for Momo's doubts to be erased like pieces of paper carried away by the wind.

"Tamaki, do you smell it?" Silence. "Tamaki?"
She circles the area until she reaches him and touches him with fear. His icy skin shakes her from head to toe.

"Tamaki!"

---

Eijirou's reaction is instinctive when he understands what is happening, he readjusts his direction and deviates from the path traced by Inasa. His intention is to get to the camp and make sure everything is in order, but he does not get there because he finds Kyouka immersed in a battle with a group of five men. The little woman moves at an impressive speed and her spear is a blurred line that stretches and recedes without losing its rhythm.

Without stopping to think, Eijirou runs towards her. With the help of Aizawa and Tenya, the five demons are quickly neutralized.

"Where are you going," he asks when Kyouka finishes off the last of the demons and runs off in the opposite direction. Aizawa and Tenya are swept away by the aroma, the delicious aroma of battle, leaving Eijirou behind.

But Kyouka, instead of answering him, disappears and Eijirou follows. The least he expects is to find Denki shrunken on the ground with an arrow across his shoulder.

"Denki!" He shouts, running the last meters that separate them.

As soon as he detects the bitter aroma of orange, Eijirou's nature responds by offering him comfort. The delicate essence of saffron extends towards him and surrounds him, stuffing him with his affection and concern.

"You have to take him back to camp," says Eijirou.

"It's too dangerous," replies Kyouka. "He was ambushed and I'm not sure if he's still undamaged.

"We cannot leave him here."

"I'll get Momo. She'll know what to do," she says before she takes her spear and leaves.

"I'm fine," says Denki with his pale face and his turbulent aroma.

"I know," says Eijirou unable to hold back his hands that have extended to hold the omega against him. "You'll be fine."

"You have to go," Denki replies, frowning his eyebrows.

That is when Eijirou detects it, the delicious scent that grows in the distance, sweet and intoxicating and it pulls him to fight, but the truth is that the fragrance pales in comparison to the aroma of orange, even if it is weak and altered.
"I'll wait for Momo," he says, wrapping the omega around his shoulder, careful not to touch the arrow.

"...mm faiin..."

"Denki, don't sleep."

"...nnnn..."

"Denki, please don't fall asleep.

Anger floods inside him, it is red and hot, and gives him the strength he needs to every muscle in his body. When he fights he does not hesitate, he does not pity. Katsuki is not the sun—not yet—but, as Eijirou once said, he is fire, smoke and sparks. His energy vibrates around him like a tangible presence, his fury is ambrosia, spicy and exquisite, devastating. His scent does not possess the elegance, the firmness that characterizes Mirio, who has trained for years to perfect his, no, Katsuki's scent is fire and smoke, wood that burns, dense, rich and suffocating. His aroma has a wild character, calcining with its intensity and life-giving with its power.

The alpha around him absorbs it and drink it with a fierce thirst. Katsuki roars and the rest answer back. They manage to contain the approaching wave of demons, but the situation is about to get out of control. The incense grows, thickens around them, threatening to erase them all. If the alpha group falls, there will be no one left.

And then Katsuki is there, near the camp looking at the burning wagons and the omega group trying to contain the fire.

"What are you waiting for?!” He roars with a power that shakes everyone away from panic and misery. "No one will come to save you!"

And without saying anything else he moves away to keep fighting, to cut as many throats as he can before he runs out of strength.

For a moment the omega look at each other, perplexed, and then the aroma of their leader reaches them. Delicious and intoxicating, exciting and addictive. Their nature does not allow them to react like their alpha companions, they do not respond to him fiercely, they do not feel the impulse to equal him, to roar to his compass. They respond to him with an enthusiasm that borders on desire.

And they obey, even without combative capacity they submit to the aroma and they do it willingly. Armed with sticks, torches, knives, they join the fray as their aroma responds to that of their leader.

And their aroma.

The aroma of an omega group is succulent. Full of rich sweet contrasts, with a pinch of acidity just right to activate the taste buds. Their aroma is appetizing, appealing, and beautiful. So beautiful and
seductive that it is capable of activating each nerve ending within an alpha.

The incense is created to calm them, to abuse their natural reaction to the fragrance of a pregnant omega, but at that moment, as the incense grows and swirls around them, its effect is lost, because it cannot compete with the appetizing aroma of a living omega that feels no fear.

And when Katsuki roars, the omega responds by concentrating and enriching their aroma, and the protective nature of the alpha rises to respond to that calling by delighting in the fragrance that effortlessly opacifies the aroma of milk and honey.

The entire forest gets immersed in the different aromas that grow and expand in response to Katsuki’s fierce determination. Perhaps he is not the sun—not yet—but the fire that burns within him is a bright, scorching light capable of destroying the world.

Chapter End Notes

If you combine the title of the previous chapter and this one you get: The Sun's Fall and the Bleeding Moon.

"If Mirio dies, there won't be an alliance with the barbarians, and now thanks to what happened he has a reason to gather his troops and fight. (I know, I'm evil)"

I love how much you hurt me Roquel xD

Next chapter on February 16th.

"Stars in the Dark"
Interlude: Kohei

Chapter Summary

Sometimes legends lose their form, they change and only preserve the essence. Only those who were there know the truth behind it.

The journey is not pleasant. As they head south the temperature rises and the humidity in the air makes it unbearable to stay in the cabins. Hizashi rests in the shade of the great sails as the wind—hot and humid—propels the ship toward its destination.

Days pile up one after the other without much change in the sky. At some point they glimpse a sea snake hunting in the distance and the captain decides to circle the area determined not to face one of those beasts.

When the tower's lookout announces land, Hizashi comes forward to see it with his own eyes. The Kohei Islands are a grouping of islands of various sizes, many of them too small, but there are at least thirteen of them large enough to maintain settlements of considerable magnitude. Each village has a matriarch and the thirteen make up the Great Council that decides and dictates the direction of the life at the islands.

Hizashi does not know any of them and his task is to convince them to join his cause. 'There is no time to lose.'

"Are we going to disembark at the main port?"

"No, turn east and take us to the third port in the area." 'To the island ruled by matriarch Nemuri Kayama.'

"How long will we be here?"

"I don't know. May your men rest, Captain, and I'll try to return as soon as possible."

The port is bustling, there are many who go in search of fresh fish and the novelties that the alpha sailors exhibit on their ships. Hizashi knows that the "capital" of the island, Kayama's home, is close to the interior. Getting there would take days.

Luckily for him it is not Kayama whom he is looking for, at least not at the moment. Aizawa's old friend lives in one of the villages near the coast. That is his first stop.

[...]
Mitsuki Bakugou's village is relatively large, so much that none of the inhabitants seem surprised to see a foreigner visiting.

"Mitsuki?" Asks the old woman when she hears the question. "Are you looking for Mitsuki?"

"That's right, could you tell me where her hut is?"

The old woman stirs in her place, sitting in front of her house, gazing at the world with her blind eyes.

"Go straight on until you reach the healer's house, then turn left to the edge of the forest, turn right and go on. Her house is the furthest of all."

"Thank you for your help, grandma."

"It's a pleasure, but I wouldn't go there if I were you."

"Why?"

"Mitsuki isn't there."

"Where can I find her?"

"She has gone to the mountains with her students for the graduation ceremony."

"Graduation?"

"Yes, the alpha kids who don't want to devote their lives to working at sea and prefer to join the army must undergo preparation after returning from their naval education. When they finish, their teacher takes them to the mountains for a final test. They won't be back for a few days."

"Oh! 'Goddamn it.' "Well, I'll wait for her to come back."

The old woman seems to detect his confusion because she adds:

"If you're looking for a place to stay, I can rent you a room."

"Do you manage the inn on the hillside?"

"Ha!" Her laughter is dry and noisy. "We don't have an inn. Most of them stay at the port where it's easy to find accommodation, but my granddaughter is one of Mitsuki's students, so I have an extra bed. I'd offer it to you for a small price or you can take the road that brought you here."

Hizashi sighs.

"Would it be possible to include the food?"

The old woman laughs with her mouth open.

"Come in, foreigner, come in. They brought me fish this morning and I've been longing to eat it."

[...]
Hizashi rests the remainder of the day and sleeps in a soft, coconut-scented bed. The next morning he wanders around the village; there is not much to see as it is not a tourist area. The market, the square and the points of interest are in the port. All he sees are young people chatting, children playing and adults taking care of their home.

By mere chance he finds the house of the healer. Although there is no sign or distinguishing feature he recognizes it because he sees a pregnant omega woman leaving, carrying another child by the hand.

Hizashi gives them a silent greeting, moves away from the house and for a moment is tempted to look for Mitsuki’s house, but in the end he resigns himself and walks in the opposite direction. He reaches the beach where he encounters a couple of watchtowers. Elevated wooden platforms at opposite ends of the area.

At the top, covered by a thatched roof, he can see the men guarding from there. In the sand the children play and Hizashi does not pass unnoticed the alert and vigilant expression that adults maintain while patrolling the coasts.

‘How many attacks have they seen, how many have they taken?’

Hizashi sits in the shade and rests.

The routine absorbs him without contemplation. He has breakfast with the old lady, walks around the village, chats with the adults who explain the measures that have been implemented against the slave traders, returns to eat and spends the afternoon enjoying the humid climate while sleeping in the shade of the trees.

The weather is excellent for his wound, which heals by leaving a simple scar on his side. One day, as he examines it, he remembers the omega that sewed it.

"Do you want me to take a message home?"
The boy shook his head, "No".

"Are you sure?"

"Yes... I don't want to give false hope"

"As you wish."

Now he thinks maybe he should have insisted.

'I don't even know which island he's from.'

That night, while having dinner with the blind old woman, Hizashi is surprised at how many people pass by at that hour. As he looks out he discovers that the entire village is walking along the streets towards the beach, some carrying lamps, others carrying candles, and a few carrying lanterns.

"What's going on?" He asks. "Is there a party?"

"A party? Oh, no, it's not a party. It's a ceremony." She stays silent for a moment and then sighs, "come on, let's go. I'll take you there."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I usually go with my granddaughter, but since she's not here, you can come with me."

The woman covers herself with a shawl and accepts the arm that Hizashi holds out to her. They join the tide of people, although they do not take long to stay behind because the woman advances very slowly.

"What are they commemorating?" Hizashi asks as they walk around the beach's boundary, away from the village.

"More than five years ago the demons first arrived to our islands. On that occasion they took many of our children. They were persecuted, but our boats are not made for a race at sea. We arrived too late. A storm wiped out the slave traders and sunk their ships, taking our ships to the bottom. Since then the demons return, twice a year, in spring and autumn. They attack several islands at the same time, sometimes creating distractions. Warriors patrol constantly, but it is impossible to establish a perimeter twenty-four hours a day. Kidnappings continue and they don't seem to stop."

They leave the beach behind and go into the wooded area that separates the bay from the village.

"Twice a year the entire village has a night watch," the old woman continues as Hizashi studies the serious faces of the people around them. "To remind us of what we have lost. To remind us never to let our guard down. To say goodbye to those who have left."

Both stop at the edge of a clearing. On the other side there is a carved stone structure on which they
they have placed an endless number of lamps and candles. People surround the clearing to place them, none of them crosses the land where a lot of blue flowers are shaken by the wind.

"Why here?" Hizashi asks.

"The first time the demons arrived, they did it through the bay, crossed this way, and headed for the village. Since then the warriors have set traps and nets to prevent history from repeating itself."

"Did they place the monument?"

"No," says the old woman sadly, "that was Mitsuki. She placed it in honor of her consort and her son, whom she lost in the ambush."

"The flowers, too?"

"No... those you see there are the flowers of Myosotis. They are flowers that grow high in our mountains, in the land of feathered serpents. They are wild flowers, difficult to obtain, difficult to maintain. These are the first that have managed to survive far from home."

"Myosotis?"

"Thay are also called Forget-Me-Not flowers. All those who have lost someone to demons bring a candle with their name and place it here. Never to forget."

"Did the person who planted them also lose someone?"

The old woman sighs.

"Many years ago our tribe used to go looking for them as a sign of courtship, but the custom was lost because it was too dangerous to go for them. Then one of our own brought them back. He found not just one but three sprouts. He transported them from there, planted them as an offering to his beloved. As a promise. And he did it with such care and affection that the plants not only survived, but spread out and continue to grow."

"And was it fulfilled? I mean, was the promise fulfilled?"

"They took them away when the demons first arrived. Both died in the sea, this is all that remains of their love. For us it is a constant reminder of the losses we have suffered."

When the old woman is silent, Hizashi concentrates on the faces around him. The aroma that covers the clearing is tinged with sadness and melancholy.

They stay there for hours until the first candles are consumed and then slowly everyone begins to return home. Hizashi is ready to leave when the old woman stops and lifts her nose, apparently detecting a particular aroma.

"Inko, darling, will you be able to receive me this week?"

The woman, small and robust with green hair and opaque eyes, stops three steps from them.

"Good evening, Sehaba, has your knee began to hurt again?"

"Just a little bit, I've finished the ointment you sent me."

"All right, do you think you'll have time to come tomorrow at noon?"
"I think it's perfect, do you mind if I bring food and you accompany this old lady at lunch?"

"It's all right, Sehaba. I'll see you tomorrow."

The woman says goodbye and Hizashi keeps looking at her as she walks away.

"Isn't Inko just a beauty?" The old woman murmurs as she detects his uncertainty.

"She is, but she looks familiar. I don't know where I've seen her before."

"She's the village's healer, she usually travels to the small villages of the island. You've probably seen her before."

Hizashi murmurs a vague assent. He does not tell the old woman that he has never visited the islands, but that there is something about the woman that is familiar to him. At last he sighs and gives one last glimpse of the flower field.

All the candles are gone, the lamps and lanterns have been collected. In the end there is no light left in the clearing, only the silvery reflection of the moon that falls on the grey monument.

The blue flowers continue to flutter in the wind. "Don't forget me."

[...]

A few days after that night Hizashi is struggling with the drowsiness of sleep when a noisy young woman burst through the door.

"Grandmother! I'm back! I brought you dinner!"

Hizashi straightens up in time to see a tall, beautiful young woman enter through the door. She has a beautiful mole next to her mouth and a splendid red camellia is displayed on her left shoulder. There is no doubt that she has come of age and is ready to devour the world.

"Oh," she stops as soon as she detects the stranger. "Good afternoon."

"Say hello to our guest, Meera, his name is Hizashi and he comes from Yuuei. This is my granddaughter Meera, a soldier under the matriarch."

The girl laughs.

"I'm not a soldier yet, grandmother. The Matriarch has yet to welcome our group."

"Did you pass?"

"Yes."

"Then the rest is just a formality. The Matriarch Kayama always accepts Mitsuki's students, she knows they are the best. Do you have a date to go to the capital?"
"It's in a few days. Mitsuki has given us permission to rest."

"Wonderful! Once you leave the house it will feel so empty. If you are assigned to patrols I won't see you for many months."

"Don't worry, Grandma, I'll write to you and ask Saha to read my letters to you. And I'll come whenever I can to visit you."

"Sweet Saha has come to see me regularly, the poor girl misses you."

"I want to go and see her, but first I had to see you, grandma."

"Don't worry about me, dear, I'm so proud of you."

"Hey, um, excuse me for intruding, is Mitsuki back? Do you think she can receive me?"

The two women turn to him, suddenly remembering that he is there.

"Yes, she is," says the girl, "but...."

She shuts up and looks at her grandmother as her scent changes. In response to it the old woman sighs.

"It's all right, Meera. I don't think it'd bother Mitsuki if he knows; besides, he's been waiting a long time to talk to her."

The girl nods. "Well, Mitsuki must be greeting her consort. She always goes to see him when she returns from a long trip."

Hizashi bids farewell and leaves, allowing the two women to engage in conversation. The sun has begun to lose strength and instead the atmosphere is warm and perfect for an evening stroll. There is a festive atmosphere in the village, where Hizashi passes by and sees houses disturbed by the arrival of the alpha youths.

Hizashi moves away from the village and returns to the field of blue flowers, he has taken the habit of visiting them regularly. It serves him to think and helps to calm the craving of his heart. Every day his impatience grows and he does not stop feeling that time is running out.

As he approaches he tries to make noise and lets his aroma expand as a sign that he is coming. It works because as soon as he arrives Mitsuki receives him.

"Are you lost?" She says while giving him her back, kneeling in front of the stone which someone—Mitsuki for sure—has placed a small lamp beforehand. "How do you know about place?"

"Sehaba invited me. I've stayed with her for the last few nights while I was waiting for you. I know it's discourteous to interrupt you right now, but I've waited so long to talk to you. I need you to listen to me."

Mitsuki does not respond, she stays firm in front of the polished rock and Hizashi bites his tongue and retreats to give her privacy. Until finally the woman rests her forehead on the stone, murmurs something that Hizashi cannot hear and stands up. When she turns, instead of looking at him, her eyes traverse the meadow of blue flowers with an indecipherable expression. In an attempt to break the ice, Hizashi says:

"Sehaba told me about the clearing and what it means. About the lovers and the lookout night."
"In a few years everyone will remember the story that way," Mitsuki says. "That's how legends are created, after all. Some will say that they were planted in honor of the abducted children. Others will tell the story of the lovers, they won't even let the names go down in history... but I was here. I was here while that moron planted his flowers. He didn't like gardening, although he knew by heart all the damn plants that exist in the region. Never in his life he had shown an interest in planting things, and there he was, planting those three," she points to the three small bushes lined up next to a tree, "with a care of which I would never have believed him capable."

'Her voice,' Hizashi thinks, surprised to hear it because her voice reveals what her aroma does not.

"He was a grumpy perfectionist dwarf," she says and once she starts she cannot seem to stop. "Once he spent the whole night reviewing a book of plants, he spent months looking for a perfect damn seashell, and when he heard about these flowers he wanted one. He couldn't settle for something as banal, as simple, as easy as the damn shells that people offer, no, he had to go up into the mountains to look for the flower that only grows on top. And the little monster did it, because he had always achieved everything he set out to do. And when he brought his bushes I sat here with my lamp all night, while the fool planted them. He was determined to not let them die. I made fun of him, I always made fun of him, I said 'If you're interested in being a gardener I can get you a job', but this time he didn't bite back. He didn't get angry. It was fun to watch him get angry. I said, "A flower would have been enough, why did you have to bring them with roots? They'll die anyway and all your effort will be in vain." I will never forget his answer. "They won't die. They'll grow and Deku will always have a fresh flower in the window of our house." He was already thinking about his house. He was a brat whose voice had not yet changed and he was thinking of his house. He was sure that the bloody flowers would live. And look at that, here they are; and every spring more are born."

Hizashi is silent. There is nothing to say.

"So, as you can see, the history of this place is much simpler. It's the result of a spoiled alpha who wouldn't settle for a stupid seashell. That he had to do something a thousand times better because there was no other way for him to express what he wanted. Because if he didn't do something that wasn't damn great then it didn't make sense."

Mitsuki shakes her head, grabs her lamp and walks along the edge of the clearing to Hizashi.

"How old would he be now," he asks when he has her nearby.

She answers without blinking.

"He would have been seventeen in the spring of this year."

"I'm sorry."

"Why? Did you take them? No. The culprits are the demons who cross the sea to tear our children from their homes. They should apologize. Not you... Now forget everything you've heard me say, every year I get older and there are times when I lose my tongue. Especially after the graduation of my students. Whenever I look at them I think of those who have left. Usually it's Inko who supports me, but you showed up before I had let off steam."

"It's okay."

"Even if it is, forget what I said. And don't repeat it. The last thing I want is for the people here to look at me with pity."
"As you wish."

"Well, I've already spoken, now it's your turn. What are you doing here, Hizashi? If your king has sent you to ask for our help, you will receive the same answer as the messenger they sent months ago."

"It's not the king who sent me. It is the prince. We need your help."

Nemuri Kayama's house rises on top of a hill, from there he can see the villa, the forest that covers the island and in the distance the sky and sea that meet on the horizon. If Hizashi had time, he would stay on vacation, but he does not, so he follows Mitsuki up the steep ascent as he tries not to spit out his heart.

Kayama receives them personally. She is an exuberant woman, with long, silky black hair like the color of the dark night, with a majestic demeanor that overflows with sensuality and power. The alpha woman gives him her most captivating smile, and despite her status she embraces Mitsuki with an effusivity that Hizashi finds charming.

The three sit down for tea on the main terrace, from where they can contemplate the sea.

"I was hoping to see you again in a couple of weeks, Mitsuki," says Kayama when the greetings and presentations are over. "And I was hoping to see you in the company of your students."

She takes a fleeting look at Hizashi, but he concentrates on his tea and lets Mitsuki lead the conversation.

"I've come here before it," says Mitsuki without touching the tea in front of her. "This is Hizashi, Aizawa's friend. He has brought a warning and supplication from the prince, the heir to Yuuei."

"Has the king given up dealing with us?"

"It's not like that, Kayama, now listen."

By the time Mitsuki finishes speaking, the tea in the three cups has cooled and Kayama has lost her welcoming smile.

"A drug?" She murmurs for herself.

"We have no news of how it works," explains Hizashi opening his mouth for the first time, "but if it does exist, perhaps it can explain why the attack on the prison turned out to be a failure. It is likely that someone close to the king was able to convince him to withdraw so as not to expose the existence of the drug at that time."

"I don't know what is more terrifying, that they have a way of controlling us or that there is a spy in the court of Yuuei," says Kayama.
"We have to inform the rest of the Matriarchs, they have to know the threat hanging over us."

"The Matriarchs have refused to participate in Yuuei's war, they won't want to mobilize the troops. Not if that means leaving the islands defenceless."

"It's not only Yuuei who is in danger. If they fall, the demons won't stop there, we'll be next and they won't have to cross the sea to get here. They'll have a port nearby, they'll be able to come and strike whenever they want."

"What's your suggestion, Mitsuki? Take the ships and cross the sea to fight the demons?"

"Aizawa believes they'll try to take Yuuei while the fleet is out," replies Hizashi.

"I can assure you that the Matriarchs will never agree to let the troops go only for Yuuei's sake."

"But—"

"No!"

"Wait, Nemuri," Mitsuki says rigidly, "I've never told you that I wish to support the motion to defend Yuuei."

"What?" Two voices ask at once.

"If Aizawa's assumption is correct, the demons will come. We cannot allow it. The Matriarchs will understand. It is not only Yuuei who is in danger. So are we. We'll send our army to intercept them. We'll sink their ships into the sea and make them regret the day they chose to invade our home."

"Mitsuki—"

"No. We've lost too many and every year we bleed again. Enough! We will fight, not for Yuuei, but for our own. We will put an end to the threat that is approaching. And when they're gone, then yes, then we'll set course for Hosu and raze those who have dared to raise their weapons against us."

"It's a risk—"

"We live with the sea, there is no greater risk than it. I know you want to. I know you have found a beta genius who is dedicated to improving our boats. I know that Mei Hatsume has designed light ships, specially designed for our people, whose sole purpose is to hunt down slave ships. And you are not the only one who prepares. I know that the other Matriarchs have taken precautions as well. We are all ready, we all want revenge."

"Revenge could kill us all."

"They will kill us first."

"Even if you are right, Mitsuki, we cannot make a unilateral decision," she takes a breath and sighs as she watches the porcelain cups. "I will take the request to the council. I will convene them this week. As soon as possible. And together we will decide whether the risk is acceptable. Until then both of you are my guests."

"Thank you," says Hizashi. "It'll be an honor for me."

"I appreciate you, Kayama," interrumps Mitsuki rising inopportune. "But regardless of the Council's decision, I don't plan to stand by idly."
"Mitsuki."

"No... no; even if I have to go alone, I plan to face the demons. I plan to make them pay for what they have taken from us."

She leaves before any of them move; Kayama sighs instead of going after her.

"Go with her, Hizashi," she murmurs without looking at him. "Try to convince her to wait, even until the Council's decision."

"And if they oppose it? Will you let her go alone?"

"Mitsuki is not alone... she doesn’t realize, her pain is blind, but in her village everyone is willing to follow her. If Mitsuki goes to war all the alpha she has trained will follow her. Everyone who knows her, all my warriors, my navigators, each of them will join her cause."

"And you?"

Nemuri Kayama looks at him and her expression is all the answer Hizashi needs.

'Perhaps my journey was not in vain,' Hizashi thinks as he says goodbye
Stars in the Dark

Chapter Summary

His presence elevates the group's spirit. His passion extends all round him. Both are stars in the dark.

Chapter Notes

We have two new drawings <3

Less and Aru made some wonderful drawings, both of them are so adorable!! Please give them some love :3

Hope you enjoy today's chapter~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"How are you feeling, Fumichan?"

Tsuyu Asui descends the slightly curved stairs, she carries in one hand a bucket and on the other, which she uses to balance on the wall, a lot of old rags. The room consists of two bunk beds, on the right, in the lower bed, a dark bundle shakes each time the boat is shaken.

"I brought you a bucket."

The person hiding under the blankets grunts, stirs and finally comes out. As soon as he sees the bucket that Tsuyu places next to the pillow, he approaches and vomits without any shame. When he finishes, he puts his face against the edge and closes his eyes trying to breathe.

"I think you'd better go out for a while and breathe some fresh air," says Tsuyu while sitting on the floor next to the bunkbed. "Down here the movement is worse."

"Ugh," he vomits again and hugs the bucket against his chest.

"Well, if you decide what to do, let me know and I'll help you up the stairs."

Fumikage keeps his face on the bucket and Tsuyu takes her eyes away to offer him privacy. She takes one of the rags and starts cleaning his boots. They are not dirty as they have been at sea for days, but in the absence of things to do, Tsuyu finds comfort in a simple task: Take care of the only memory she keeps of her family.

She works silently, with a care that borders on obsession. She takes the tip of the rag and rubs each surface, two or even three times. She makes sure to remove any trace of dust until each piece glows as if they were new.

"You're going to wear them out by rubbing them so much."
Tsuyu turns to look at her friend. Fumikage has glassy eyes and an unhappy expression, but at least he has stopped vomiting and seems composed enough to speak.

"Do you want me to call the doctor?"

"No, I'm fine... just... I feel like I've swallowed shit. Ugh. I hate the sea."

"Here, eat this, it'll help you feel better and mitigate the taste in your mouth."

"Ugh," he twists his face when he sees the little paper wrapper. "I'm not sure. I don't want to have to throw it up later."

"Come on, eat. It'll be good for you."

"Umm," he takes the package and unwraps it. "What's this?" He brings the leaves close to his nose and smells them, "mint?"

"Yes, I bathed the leaves in sugar. Chew them for a while and you'll feel better."

Fumikage obeys and for a while the cabin remains silent.

"It works."

"I know."

"How?"

"Zuchan said they were good for mitigating dizziness. He showed it to me while making his list of provisions. He packed them too."

The memory of Izuku leaves the cabin in silence again, this time loaded with a pinch of nostalgia.

"He'll be fine," says Fumikage suddenly as if he could hear the uncertainty that beats within Tsuyu.

"Do you really think so?"

"He prepared himself conscientiously. Even if the worst happens and he's captured, I made sure he could count on help. Shoji gave me his word to keep an eye on the beta prison. He knows the code. And he'll make sure to seize any opportunity that might arise to help Izuku."

"But the sea... we've only seen one storm so far and it's been terrible. A storm sank the ship that was transporting him years ago. Not to mention the sea serpents. One of those things nearly sunk one of the ships at the outpost. Zuchan wouldn't have had a chance against one of them."

"Izuku traced his route making sure he stayed away from the hunting grounds. That was why he planned to approach Yuuei instead of heading straight for Kohei. If everything went according to plan right now it's likely that he has reached Yuuei, he may even be on his way to the islands already."

Tsuyu rubs her hands and shakes her head; she looks towards the door and when she makes sure the coasts are clear, she open her mouth.

"What good will it do?" She murmurs with a stormy expression. "Even if he's safe now, what will happen when we get there?"

"Tsuyu..."
"We'll have to fight. I—"

"Don't say it."

"I don't want to fight them."

"They are the king's orders."

"The king is still at home. The king is sick. It's the prince's orders."

"Prince Chisaki is our ruler."

"I know... but—"

"Shh."

Tsuyu's heart shrinks upon detecting steps in the hallway. She contains her breath immediately and releases it when the footsteps move away from the cabin.

"You shouldn't repeat what you just told me."

'I know,' she thinks sadly. Not only does she risk her life, but also that of her family. The king was always severe, but fair... his son... his son on the other hand does not tolerate any kind of insurrection.

"When the rumors of war came," Tsuyu says after a moment, "I thought I'd have to fight to defend our home. I was fine with that. I thought we would be sent to Hosu as reinforcements against them. I had made up my mind. But I never believed they would send us across the sea to conquer their lands."

"They sent their army first."

"We should be fighting them then, why do we have to be here?"

"Because we're soldiers. Because we are loyal to our king."

Tsuyu leans against the bed and her head falls on the mattress.

"I don't want to be here," Tsuyu murmurs, staring at the ceiling. "Is it treason if I refuse to fight?"

"We'll have to fight. It is to fight or to die. We're going to invade their lands, they're going to defend themselves. And when we meet on the battlefield, they won't stop to ask us if we agree with this."

Tsuyu looks at him and hugs herself until she becomes a tiny knot.

"Is there any way to stop this war?"

"I don't know."

"If we hadn't met Izuku, would we hate his race?"

"Probably."

"If everyone knew Izuku—"

"Izuku's not here."
"But he's not the only one... if any of them... if one of them—"

"They hate us."

"Because the General has harmed them, if he did not exist—"

"Shut up. Don't let them hear you talking like that. Remember what happened to Itto. The General is not our king, but he's our ally. And our lord has sworn allegiance to him."

Tsuyu closes her eyes, shrinks and finally cries, in silence, without moving. Her tears slide down her cheek until they soak into Fumikage's sheets.

"I want to go home."

[...]
"Well, give the mobilization order. We have to go."

"Where to?"

"The king has been wounded, we have to get back to him. There's no time to lose."

"But sir, they'll follow us. They've been after us since the ambush. If we leave now, we run the risk of taking them to the king."

"It's a risk we must take; the king is in danger."

[...]

"This time I can't stay," Itsuka says as soon as she enters the room while throwing a small package of food at him. "What do you need? Give me a list and I'll try to get them."

Izuku sits with her and dictates a series of ingredients to her, when she goes away, he lies down in the dark again and goes to sleep. He uses the time to rest and think. And he also dreams. The excitement of knowing that Katsuki might be around is overwhelming, sometimes he cannot calm down and has to get up to walk in circles within the dark nest.

His mind is the one that does not stop thinking about him. The one who insists on being filled with hope and longing. 'I will find you, Kacchan.' He dreams of him and the desire to see him again becomes almost a physical torture.

Itsuka returns two days later carrying more food and a bag with the roots he asked for.

"Dinner is on the move," she says as Izuku begins to work. "I can stay until it's over and then I have to go back to my cell."

"Do you think I can go with you?"

"Why?"

"The effects are not immediate, but I'd prefer you to be in bed as soon as possible. I want to accompany you to make sure there are no complications and also because it's time for me to learn how to move in this place."

When Itsuka agrees, Izuku returns his attention to the plants brought to him.

"I need a stove, do you think we can get out now?"

"Usually there are guards in the dining room, they don't go near the kitchen, but I don't want to risk being seen there, what do you want to prepare?"

"You have to boil this."

"Give it to me, I'll take it and come back when it's ready."
"Bring some hot water, too."

"Okay."

She leaves carrying the lamp and comes back after a while carefully balancing a tray in which two small pots tremble. One with clean water and the other with a brown substance from which emanates a dense herbal aroma.

In a separate bowl Izuku begins to crush a handful of seeds by adding tablespoons of hot water at regular intervals, when he ends he empties the contents over the herbal teapot and carefully removes the infusion.

"And...?" Itsuka asks as she watches him work. "How does it work?"

"You'll feel an intense pain at your belly. The pain may last for hours, but it's important not to panic. You'll have a fever and possibly chills. You'll bleed. Very much so. It's normal. Make sure you have clean sheets and a bucket."

"Okay."

"Does your alpha know about this?"

"Do I need his permission?"

"It's not his decision, it's yours. However, I doubt it's possible to hide the truth from him. You'll have to stay in bed for a few days. And he'll probably be there when you're bleeding. It's best to prepare him so that he can help you in case there are complications."

"Complications?"

"It's a high-risk process. You could be allergic to one of these plants. You may bleed out. Fever can kill you. And there's the possibility of infection."

"Infection?"

"Sometimes there are remains inside. When you finish bleeding I'll have to check to make sure there's nothing left, but there's still a risk. It's important to have someone with you watching for symptoms. If your alpha doesn't know, he won't be able to help you."

"I've talked with him. He doesn't like the idea, but he supports me."

"Well, are you sure about this, do you understand the consequences?"

"Are you trying to convince me not to?"

"Even if I knew we'd get out of here before your son was born, I wouldn't dare make the decision for you, but I won't lie to you either. This is a delicate process, and even if you take every precaution, things can go wrong. All I want is for you to understand what's going to happen."

Itsuka nods firmly, her aroma, a delicate combination of fruits, remains firm and without fluctuations. Izuku stretches out the tea cup with the bitter infusion from which white spirals rise.

With the cup on her hands, Itsuka pauses.
"It's just this?" She asks, staring him in the eye.

"Yes, once you drink it there's no going back."

Itsuka takes a sip and her face wrinkles, she pauses and then empties the contents of the cup in one gulp.

"Come on," she orders, staring directly into his eyes.

Nervously, Izuku rises. She steps forward and after a moment beckons him to follow her. Outside there are only the omega who clean, all of them give her a deafening glance when he appears next to Itsuka, although no one comes close as there are guards waiting to close the dining room doors. They join the group as if they have just finished cleaning the kitchen and advance towards the exit.

When they have left, Izuku dares to look back and sees the guards lock the doors. After advancing down a short corridor they meet another guard who lowers a metal fence when everyone is inside. Immediately the omega disperse and Itsuka walks towards the stairs next to the wall.

"We've returned to the dome." Izuku murmurs as they begin to climb.

"That's right. My cell is on level 2, counting from top to bottom. In total there are four levels. In the first one there are three entrances. The first that takes us to the outside, to the orchard. The second one the alphas use when they go to work and the third one that connects with the next dome. All these doors are kept closed when not in use, and each one is a control point. They count us when we get out and when we get in. Guards patrol every day at all hours. On the second and third floors there are only cells. On the last floor there are also cells, but there are also corridors that lead to the kitchen, the warehouse and the bathrooms, as you may have seen those doors closed at nightfall and open in the morning. There's no exit down there, only a manual elevator used by the guards to go up to the first floor and down without having to go through the inside of the dome."

When they reach the second floor they come out of the stairwell and head left. Wherever he looks, Izuku sees cells with open doors.

"I thought you were all locked up."

"Only at the beginning. Anyway, there's no way out. All the entrances to the dome are closed, the only thing they do is chain us in our cell."

"You said that the adult omega group takes care of the food."

"Actually, they take care of the pantry. They also take care of the new ones and the children. They don't sleep here, they have their cells elsewhere."

"Don't the guards ever enter the dome?"

"They keep a record of the omega's on a list and when the birth approaches they go down in a group to take our children. Other than that, no, they never come here."

In Itsuka's cell they find her alpha waiting with dinner. Izuku learns then that it is they who go down to the kitchens to collect the rations that they will then take back to share with their companion.

"This is Izuku, the one I've talked about with you before. Izuku, this is Sen."

The alpha shakes his head without saying anything; he has marked cheekbones that reveal his poor diet, and an exhausted expression that is alarming in someone his age. He has two gardenia flowers
on both shoulders and a line of leaves connecting them through his collarbone. He also reeks of pain and sadness.

"Hello," Izuku greets him with sudden shyness.

The alpha just shakes his head, focusing his attention immediately on Itsuka, but she signs him calmly to stop before turning to Izuku.

"You'll have to wait until tomorrow to return to the kitchen."

"Will no one notice that I am here?"

"As I told you the guards don't enter the dome, you can go anywhere you want, but try not to go near the doors of the first floor, if they see you prowling you might have problems. If you want you can sleep here, if you want privacy there are a couple of free cells in—"

"Itsuka."

Izuku turns to the voice. The visitor is a young alpha, much younger than himself, with an expression of absolute tiredness and exhausted eyes.

"Hello Kato," Itsuka greets him. "What's up?"

"It's Inue, she's still sick, do you think...?"

He does not finish the question, but he looks at Izuku with intention and the boy turns to Itsuka.

"I spread the word," she says, showing herself slightly ashamed. "It was inevitable. Your scent would have given you away, was it wrong?"

"No," his answer is automatic, firm and sure. "I want to help."

He bids them farewell and follows the alpha that leads him to his cell, where he finds a young omega extremely skinny and emitting such an intense aroma of sadness that Izuku's stomach shrinks inside him. His natural reaction is to join her, curl up beside her and offer her comfort of any kind as is common among his own, but it is enough for him to look at the cells around him, the faces spying in the neighbouring cages, to feel the determination twinkling within him.

Yes, he allows his scent to surround her like a warm blanket on a winter's night, but he also listens to her calmly, taking her pulse, checking her pupils and striving to hear her lungs on a dry cough that will not leave her alone. He is methodical and direct. And at the end he gives a series of instructions to the alpha boy who nods silently and babbles a thank you. He has not finished saying goodbye when another alpha calls him from the neighboring cell.

After that comes another and then a third. And before Izuku knows it he finds himself doing a full round all night long.

[...]
"We lost one?"

"It's not—"

"I don't want any excuses, Kurogiri. I think you understand the importance of keeping this a secret. Right now Yuuei's army will be watching for the alpha drug, once they organize they'll send an attack using beta officers. Then, we'll destroy them. It's of vital importance that they don't know about our weapon."

"I know, General."

"Well then, explain this to me: If the beta test was done days ago, why am I finding out just now that one of the prisoners is still missing?"

"We knew that in some cases incense didn't act immediately. Some managed to get away from the point of administration. We sent a patrol to look for them. In one case the body was found almost five kilometers from the starting point. We had to comb the whole area in that radius, but there is still no sign of the missing prisoner."

"That's even worse, it means that the incense is not perfect. It means that we could have, not only an information leak, but also a possible product failure. We have to find that prisoner."

"Very well, sir. I'll deal with it personally."

"No, send Shigaraki, it is a delicate matter. You will take care of the communication with Jin, I want to know if he has already found the prince. And I also want him to start preparing for the last battle. I want to get rid of Yuuei's forces before they decide to return home."

"As you command, sir."

"Also, send a note to Overhaul's army. I want to be informed as soon as they reach land."

"That's the way it's going to be done, General."

"And finally... do we have any news about the prison escape? Have Iguichi and his men cleaned up that mess?"

"His last message was three days ago informing us that they had made contact. They planned to attack at dawn the next day."

"And?"

"We still don't know."

"Well, I want to know. I won't tolerate any more disasters."

"As you command, sir."

[...]
Victory is his, though the price is high.

Katsuki wastes no time. He has a wound on his shoulder and even as he bleeds he does not stop barking orders or attending to incoming reports. The camp is in chaos with missing animals, wagons turned over and many wounded, but he still manages to impose order and start the cleanup.

"Em..."

Katsuki turns to the voice. He finds the omega with round cheeks and brown hair, twisting her hands as she tries not to look at him.

"What?"

"Your wound. It must be cleaned."

When Katsuki finishes giving orders, he follows the omega to the area where the wounded are treated. There, the tall black-haired woman distributes her attention among everyone as she throws orders to the omega group that helps her.

Katsuki sits down and waits his turn. When the beta woman approaches him, the first thing Katsuki notices is her desolate expression. Her eyes are puffy, her face is pale and her mouth has a bitterly distorted, yet she works quickly and efficiently, barely throwing a couple of questions in his direction to study the damage and the shape of his wound.

When she finally finishes, she helps him put on the top of his uniform.

"Avoids abrupt movements," she tells him, "like this one or this one, to make the points jump. I will remove them in a couple of days and in the meantime avoid wetting the bandages."

Katsuki gets up, he is ready to go, but in the end he cannot resist pointing:

"How's he?"

As she follows the direction of his hand, the woman takes a sudden breath of air before recomposing herself.

"Unconscious. I treated his wound as best I could, but he's still unresponsive. I'm afraid that—"

"He'll wake up," Katsuki interrupts her. "If he survived the first administration, he'll awaken. Usually the first time is the hardest, but eventually he will come back."

She nods stiffly.

"Without your leader, who is second in command?"

The woman's expression worsens, her aroma fluctuates for a brief second revealing pain and agony, but she immediately recomposes herself, swallows tears and responds with a firm voice.

"Tamaki is dead. Kousei too. Of the sixteen of us there were only seven of us left, including Chief Togata."

"Who makes the decisions now?"

"By law, it'd be Inasa, the last alpha of our group. By hierarchy, it's me; my father is one of the
"Well, get someone to replace you now, we have decisions to make. Meet me on the other side of the clearing."

"Decis—?"

But Katsuki does not let her finish because he turns around and moves to where the redhead is trying to be a nurse.

"Bakugou!"

"Where the fuck have you been?"

"I'm sorry, but..."

He beckons to the figure leaning against the trunk beside him as if that were a sufficient explanation. The blond omega is naked from the waist up, but his right shoulder is wrapped in bandages that cross his entire torso, and his arm is pressed against his chest, motionless.

"You did well," says the omega, raising his eyes towards him. His face is ashy, his eyes glazed, the sweat pearls his forehead and the scent of oranges has the indistinguishable hint of pain, but even so the boy is able to offer him a weak smile. "Congratulations on your victory."

"Congratulations on not dying."

"You mean this? It's nothing. You should have seen the arrow that Momo pulled out of me. I didn't manage to see it. I fainted in the middle of the whole process, but Ochako says it was the size of my arm."

"Looks like it doesn't hurt you if you can joke like that."

"Don't get confused... it hurts enough to make me cry, but at least I'm alive."

"Can you get up?"

"Yes."

"No!" The redhead intervenes. "Yaoyorozu ordered absolute rest."

"I'm all right," replied the omega, "and it must be important, isn't it?"

"It is."

"But—"

"If it bothers you so much, carry him in your arms," Katsuki replies, turning his back on them. "We'll talk on the other side of the clearing."

He doesn't stop to listen to the nervous babbling of the redhead, instead he moves to where the beta with the azalea flower on his face is inspecting one of the cylinders containing the incense.

"What are you doing?" Asks Katsuki.

The man's answer is to shake the cylinder, spin it between his fingers and stare at it.
"How long have they been having this? How do they produce it? What is the base? Is this the only one?"

"The only one?"

"Imagine that you have a weapon... why use it only to neutralize a part of the enemy troops?"

"If you knock your head down, the others will fall."

"It is like that in most cases, but once the enemy knows how it works, he can take the right precautions to avoid disaster. And then your weapon stops being lethal."

"Do you think there's another kind of incense?"

"I don't know... but I'd be inclined to think this isn't the only ace under their sleeves." He keeps the cylinder in his trouser pocket and turns to Katsuki. "Was it true what you said?"

"About what?"

"That you'll look for the prince to retrieve something that is yours?"

"It is."

"Do you mean Midoriya?"

He hears the name and feels his heart contract inside his chest. His mouth suddenly gets dry so he clenches his teeth and avoids answering him, but his expression must betray him because the man sighs with tiredness.

"If your intention is to find the prince, I'll go with you, I'll help you, but first you must decide what to do with them." And to give his point emphasis he turns to scrutinize the entire camp.

"I won't decide anything," replies Katsuki firmly.

"But—"

"We'll talk over there," he points to the other side of the clearing, "and then a decision will be made." He turns around and is ready to leave when he stops. "Tell me the truth, do you think..." He chokes, squeezes his fists and stiffens. "Do you think he's safe?"

"I suppose you don't mean the prince."

Silence.

"Todoroki-ou is a noble man, he accepted Midoriya's help because he didn't plan to get involved in combat. The prince will make sure he's safe. If they didn't make it to the coast, it's probably because they had to hide. The prince would never put the life of an omega in danger."

That is all Katsuki needs to hear, he leaves without looking back.
"We can't stay here."

Katsuki's powerful voice gets everyone to turn to look at him. The entire camp is silent as they gaze upon the group that, from the other side of the clearing, remains motionless.

"It's a matter of time before the demons send more troops against us."

Murmurs, whispers filled with fear and anxiety rise all along the clearing.

"Calm down," intervenes Tenya, raising his hands to impose order. "We'll follow through with the plan. We'll advance to the desert and wait for a boat to pick us up."

"We cannot enter the desert," Kyouka intervenes. "A group of this size would attract the attention of all the noumu. And with so many wounded it'll be difficult to keep them at bay."

"Maybe it'd be ideal to look for a place near the coast," says Aizawa, "and stay there, waiting for Yuuei's troops to come."

"Establishing a camp is the same as marking a target," says Katsuki. "It's raising a signal to be attacked. Those who go must be aware of the danger."

"Who will go?" Denki interrupts. "Won't you go?"

"No," Katsuki answers and he straightens his back. "It's time for everyone to make a decision. We got here, running away, but I won't do it anymore. I am sick and tired of being chased like a dog. My intention is to return. We'll seek out the Yuuei's prince and fight the demons."

"If you say it that way, you are forcing them to follow you. They'll do it because they think you're going to protect them."

"Is that so? Then let's make things clear. If you come with me, it'll be to fight. There are no guarantees here. There's no safe place, not unless we make one. If you decide to accompany me it
will be at your own risk, it will be the same if you decide to continue and wait for help. The only difference is that you will have chosen it."

"You can't take them, they're not fighters."

Katsuki laughs.

"If they weren't, they would have died long ago. They have no fighting skills, it is different."

"What Inasa is trying to say," intervenes Momo, "is that your responsibility is to take care of them."

Katsuki's anger fills the air with the scent of burnt wood, he puts one hand to his chest, where he clings to his shirt, and the jar that hides underneath, with force. *Izuku.* He takes a breath and his eyes glow in scarlet tones.

"An alpha must take care of his omega, his safety will always be primordial, but that doesn't mean making them useless. They must know how to defend themselves. These omegas don't need you to cover them in silk while you swear that everything will be fine, they don't need your charity. Your responsibility is to take care of them and make sure that they have all the means to get ahead when you are not there to defend them. Be their shield, but also give them a knife."

Silence is absolute and then:

"I'll go," says a pale Denki with a tiny voice attracting all eyes on him.

"We don't want to live with fear," adds Ochako with a terrified but firm expression.

"The omegas don't fight," repeats Inasa.

"If they want to," intervenes Katsuki, "they'll learn."

"And who's going to teach them? You?"

"No, I'm nobody's teacher... I'm also an alpha. I only know how to fight as one."

"I can teach them," Kyouka intervenes, staring at Denki, "if they want... I will teach them to defend themselves."

"We want to," says Denki.

The murmurs are repeated around them, shy voices that rise, that exchange glances with their neighbors trying to share the security that at that moment they feel.

"Are you really going to take them?" Aizawa asks quietly, staring at him.

"We need them," says Katsuki looking ahead. "We won this battle because of them. The incense had surrounded us, but somehow their power was neutralized. We have to figure out how to do it. That is if we want to win this war."

"What's the plan?"

Everyone looks at him, but instead of feeling overwhelmed, Katsuki is filled with courage and resolve. There is no going back. *I will find you.*

*Izuku*
He does not know that at that exact moment his legend begins to be written.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter on March 2nd.

"Anemone"
Anemone

Chapter Summary

Hope is the only common good in humanity; those who have lost everything still possess it.

Chapter Notes

Anemone is a flower that symbolizes a strong and drilling love, but at the same time fragile or threatened. They exist in many colors and are precious. Some say they represents expectation and honesty. It is because of its resemblance to this flower that the anemone water plant also recieves the same name. As you will know, if you touch one you will suffer an intense pain.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Despite the rain Shino stays where she is, the only concession she makes is to snatch a hood for herself that covers her upper body. Because of the clouds she cannot see anything, there are only shadows and black lines that blur in the distance.

She tries not to think of all the reasons why Aizawa might not have returned.

"A boat!"

Ryuoko’s voice floats toward her from the crow's nest. The alpha woman repeats her warning and then leaps, using the ropes to descend. The drug doesn't seem to have left any after-effects on her, but Shino knows that she still blames herself for Tomoko's death, even though she was not even there.

"I've counted twelve ships," Ryouko says when she stops in front of her, "but there could be more. It's too dark to see anything."

She grimaces as soon as she says it and Shino knows she is thinking of Tomoko. She does too. The attack has left a trace of gravity on both of them. A sense of loss so intense that they have only been able to overcome it by working together tirelessly. The expression is unusually unheard of in Ryouko's smiling face.

"Shino?"

Hearing her name, she shakes her introspection away and begins to distribute orders. They are accustomed to the sudden attacks from Hosu's fleet, so they prepare to repel them as they have so far. She does not expect Ken to suddenly appear beside her, informing her that the approaching ships have deployed a known sequence of lights.

"What did you just said?" Shino asks, unable to believe it.
"They are the signs of the royal fleet," says Ken without being able to hide his emotion. "Taishiro has returned."

She still is not believing it while her ship answers with another series of lights that receive an immediate response deploying another pattern known only to the king's men. She does not believe it until she sees Taishiro Toyomitsu crossing her ship's gunwale with an anxious expression.

"Where's Jin?"

She just needed to listen to that question to feel violent. Every time she hears that name she is attacked by a sensation of visceral hatred that closes her throat.

"We left him on the ground," she answers, holding her elbows tightly.

"What? Why?"

"Because that filthy worm sold us out. Because that disgusting, treacherous rat organized the plot that led to the death of our people. Because that evil pig came down to Hosu with the excuse of looking for the prince while he ordered us to stay behind to be sacrificed like blind guinea pigs."

Once she starts she cannot stop. She spits out everything to the increasingly incredulous expression of Taishiro, the truth about Jin, the warnings of Aizawa, the death of the king and the disappearance of the crown prince.

"As soon as I put my hands on him that piece of crappy trash cursed alpha will end up with a smile on his neck."

"The king's dead?" Asks the incredulous and terrified Taishiro.

"He died the same night you left."

"...and so Jin took over."

"He wasted no time, paralyzed the search for the king's assassin, immobilized the troops, prepared another attack against Hosu in the hope of getting rid of the rest of us. So once he left, I had to take over the fleet... where is the Council?"

"There is only one of them left, Yoroi Musha, but he's very old and crossing the sea has made him ill. Young Iida took over until I appeared."

"Great, just great. So we lost the king, we lost the council, and our prince is in Hosu."

"You said Aizawa went to look for him, has he contacted you?"

"No, but he warned me he wouldn't. The ship that brought him to Hosu returned without any problems. Now all we have to do is wait. Aizawa told me that if I could snatch the fleet from Jin our duty was to entertain Hosu's army and that is what we have done until now."

"Why?"

"If we remain here the General will concentrate his forces against us, perhaps that will distract them from their quest for the prince."

"But they know that Todoroki-ouji is in Hosu."

"They think he's infiltrated near the capital, they'll look for him in the west."
"Are you sure?"

"Jin intended to go there. I don’t know how long it will take them to realize that the prince is not even remotely close to the capital."

The man covers his face with his hands, stretches himself in all his magnitude and emits a deep sigh that combines stupor and impotence. Shino is still amazed at how tall he is, muscular, immense, growing and growing to cover everything.

"So our choices are: Stay here and wait for Aizawa to contact us or disembark in Hosu to look for the prince."

"If we disembark, the General will send his army against us. We will fight, yes, but without a way to counter that damned drug, the alpha group that goes with us will be useless, and the rest will not be enough to confront the enemy troops. The only thing we will achieve is to endanger the prince."

"The prince is in danger."

"Oh, I know, and I'm waiting for this to end so I can yell at Aizawa until I'm speechless. I will. I have no idea what was in his head when he decided to agree to send him to Hosu. Damn it. With the prince there we are stranded. We can't go back, we can't move."

"Are we only left to act as a decoy?"

"Welcome to my world."

"It's the worst possible scenario."

"No, the worst scenario is for the prince to die, for us to be wiped off the map and for the demons to make their way to conquer Yuuei."

"Shit."

"Exactly; now you'll understand why I'm in such a bad mood."

"Well... the best we can do is distract them. Attack and retreat, keep them busy away from the prince."

"With you we will be able to extend our reach along the whole coastline."

"Okay, but first I'd like you to share with the rest of us what you know about the drugs, we need to know all the details. Those affected do not remember anything and it is impossible to get information from them."

"We'll get the officers together and we'll be able to warn them."

Shino sighs, turns and contemplates the black horizon. The threat that awaits to destroy them.

"At least luck is on our side," she murmurs without strength.

"What?"

"You said it," Taishiro turns with his hands on his hips looking down at Shino who is still cross-armed. "The serum they use is ineffective against the beta group. If we take advantage of it, I think we have an opportunity to turn the situation around."
"Do you think that's luck? I'd say it's more of an alarm. I wouldn't risk my life assuming it's a failure."

Shino takes her eyes off him and refocuses them on the horizon. She cannot shake off the feeling that they are blind pieces walking towards disaster.

Izuku wakes up wrapped in dark shadows. He gropes carefully until his fingers collide with the oil lamp near his head, from which he only has to slide his hand across the floor until he finds the flint.

He has become an expert at lighting the lamp in the dark so it does not take long for him to have a small flame that throws orange reflections against the walls. His first reaction, almost automatic, is to lower his gaze to look for his bandages.

When he does not find them, he remembers that he is no longer in the cave in the lands of Overhaul. He no longer has to go out to welcome Tsuyu or Fumikage. He no longer has to go out to prepare his boat.

He no longer lives in the forest alone, abandoned, with the dream of returning home. Now his home is inside a mountain, hidden from the light, where he spends his nights consulting for the omega group, going from one cell to another, looking for plants that can replace panax, making inventory lists to improve the diet with the provisions they receive, attending to colds and general ailments. During the day he sleeps, hidden from the guards, far from the surface in his small niche behind the false wall of the kitchen.

The only thing that remains the same is his desire to see Katsuki again.

Izuku rises, shrugging his legs against his chest in an instinctive gesture. He still is not used to wearing only his trousers, he misses his bandages, and most of all misses his notebook. He does not have material to paint here, so he has to be content with rubbing his fingers when he is tempted to sit down and draw gladiolus flowers.

Izuku stretches himself, he washes his mouth, face and hands with a little of water. He begins to chew peppermint as he examines his small drawer with the plants he has managed to gather by snooping around in the kitchen cupboard. Once he has finished separating the leaves that he will take with him, he places them in a cloth bag that he leaves them close to him. Then he sits down to eat his portions while he waits.

Itsuka arrives and beckons him to join the afternoon group.

In the kitchen, while the rest is in charge of preparing dinner, Izuku devotes himself to making infusions that he will hide in the water bottles destined for the alpha group that comes down for dinner. Since there are no stoves or firewood in the dome, this has been the only solution Izuku has found to deliver the remedies to the omega group without the guards seeing him transporting a pile of plants and treatments every night.
If the remedy is solid, he tries to pack it in a piece of cloth that is then tied to the side of the corresponding bottle. The challenge is not the workload, but it is remembering what remedy is for whom even though many of them share the same decease; so Izuku has devised a simple system: Each jar has been marked with two numbers. The first one indicates the floor and the second the cell, so if an odre has marked 110, it means that it is for cell ten of the first floor, considering that the numbering starts at the right of the staircase.

In order to avoid suspicions the wineskins are placed in groups, in this way the alpha do not attract the attention of the guards by grouping them all on the same side. They take their wineskin, form to receive dinner, and leave without attracting any attention.

When dinner is over Izuku joins in cleaning and finally they return to the dome where they are locked up until the next morning. There, Izuku spends the rest of the night reviewing his patients and taking care of their progress. Every day he makes mental lists, forcing himself to remember what remedy to send to whom.

Unlike his nest—which is warm and comfortable because it is near the kitchen—it is intensely cold in the dome and Izuku learns to work with frozen fingers; but he doesn't give up. He works hard hoping to make a change, and in the meantime he waits for Itsuka to fulfill her part of the bargain.

Every night he dreams. He dreams of Katsuki and the day he lost him.

[...]

"You made me come all the way out here to give me the job of a fucking tracker?"

"Tomura—"

"No, fuck you, don't lecture me. When you said there was an important mission, I thought you meant an attack on Yuuei's navy. I thought you would send me to fight. Not to chase a rat through the forest."

"It's an important mission."

"To capture a prisoner that you yourselves liberated?"

"It's important that the beta serum is kept a secret. The General has given permission for large-scale production and once it's ready we'll use it against the remaining forces of Yuuei. It's vitally important that until then we avoid all possible leaks of information."

"Ask Toga. She's the best tracker there is."

"Toga is right now moving from the border to the capital."

"The border?"
"She was hunting down Yuuei’s spies and I don't want to mention that that had been your original task. The General himself entrusted you with the search and capture of the spies, a mission that you left in the hands of Dabi while you left to participate in the ambush against the king and his group. I don't want to mention it because the General doesn't know it, and I don't think it's funny to know that you left your task incomplete and that therefore our best tracker is wasting time hunting a spy and the traitor, when she could have been occupying her talent in other areas."

"Are you blackmailing me?"

"I need you to find the prisoner."

"Order Toga to return."

"I suppose I could. Then, I'll go to the General to explain that Toga is currently busy finishing your work and that she cannot look for the prince because she'll have to take on the task he has given you."

"Wait, prince? What prince?"

"Yuuei’s heir is here, in Hosu."

"Where? Has he been captured? Is he dead? Why hasn't anyone told me anything?"

"Do you want to know about the prince? Find the prisoner."

"No! Just tell me what I want to know."

"Bring the prisoner."

Tomura straightens up, squeezes his fists and glares at him with the best murderous expression in his repertoire, but he doesn't manage to dent Kurogiri's stone face.

"Fuck it!" He throws his hands to the air and leaves the room, cursing the entire time. "The moment I find your prisoner I'll tear his guts out."

•

It has been months since he last visited this place. The cells are empty, except for one on his right, but Tomura does not have time to sit down to play with the old blond alpha, so he walks down the hall to the guards' break room.

As soon as he enters they all run to form a line against the wall, effectively covering the two side walls. Tomura walks in front of them in silence, observing faces, many of them young, and doing a mental count.

"How many more had contact with the prisoners," he says when he returns to his place in front of the door.
"Three, sir," replied the man on his right, first in line. "They are in charge of food and cleaning."

"I'll talk to them later," he looks at them one by one until he gets them nervous. "One of the prisoners has escaped. I want to believe that you all know who he is. You'll tell me what he was like, when he arrived, how he behaved when he was here, and whatever details you can remember. I want to know who was the bastard that survived the serum."

---

"Are you dead, old man?"

The bump on the floor shakes at the sound of the voice, rises carefully and turns to look at him through the bars separating the two cells. Tomura glances sidelong at him as he walks around the small room looking for clues or signs on the floor.

"What are you doing here, Tomura?"

"Tracking."

When he finds nothing but dirty straw and loose gravel, Tomura approaches the bars and carefully studies the man's face.

"Did you know the prisoner who was in this cell?"

"They come and go, faces are often confused."

"Really? They told me he was sick."

"I myself was sick a few days ago."

"They told me he was young."

"I've reached the age when everyone seems to be."

"They told me the boy was the last one to reach here. Alone."

"Do you think I have more information than the guards guarding this place?"

His blue eyes reveal nothing and his face is a white mask. Tomura wants to tear off his serenity drop by drop.

"Maybe I should interrogate you calmly," he says, folding his hands behind his back. "Get you out of here and cut off your skin while you tell me about the prisoner of this cell."

"If you want to waste your time, go ahead. Why do you care so much about just any prisoner anyway, what's the difference between him and everyone here?"

"Nice try, old man, but I'm not here to give you information. I'm here to get it."
"As you say."

He moves away from the bars and returns to his place. His passive attitude makes him angry. His desire to tear his eyes out comes back stronger than ever, but there is no time for that.

"I look forward to the day my father gets bored of you, old man. I look forward to the day when he will let me rip your heart out."

He leaves, but not before taking the dirty blanket that remains in the cell.

---

Each interview is more boring than the previous one, each answer is an exact copy with small variations on it. Tomura is fed up. Luckily for him, he is two interviews away from finishing. The soldier who enters the room is extremely tall, with silver hair and six limbs on his sides that remain rigid while the boy assumes a firm position with his eyes to the front.

"My lord," he says and Tomura yawns.

"Do you feed the prisoners?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you remember the prisoner in cell five, the one next to the permanent prisoner?"

"Remember him, sir? I'm sorry, I don't usually pay attention to the prisoners. I give them their food and go."

"This prisoner was young, he was the last one to come here. According to others he was ill."

"I'm sorry, sir. Many get sick and don't always accept their food tray. It's impossible to identify them unless you look through the crack in the door and they've taught us not to approach."

"Did you hear any conversation between him and the alpha in the next cell?"

"No, sir."

"I was told that he was repeating the same thing over and over again. Something like a Dark Banquet."

"No, sir. I may have heard something like that, not in those words, but I supposed it was about food."

Tomura nods, thoughtful.

"You may retire, soldier."

"Yes, sir."
"Wait, what's your name?"

"Shoji Mezo, sir."

"Well, soldier Mezo, one last question, where were you during the trial with the prisoners?"

"It was my day off, sir."

"Very well... you can leave."

When the interviews are over Tomura has two things in his possession: A vague description of the beta boy and the old blanket he took from his cell. Both, by themselves, are useless. So Tomura takes the second one to one of the tunnels where they keep the noumu beasts. After making the animal familiar with the scent, Tomura rides and both leave for the area where the prisoners were released.

The guards do not have a detailed description of the fugitive, none of them spend time studying the captives, the only thing they could tell him is that he has an orchid on his leg, that he is young, and that he has dark green hair, but Tomura has managed to discover the truth. He knows that his prisoner is one of Yuuei's spies, captured at the border and sent to prison.

After the interrogations and the first inquiries, Tomura begins to suspect that this prisoner got help, there is no way that he managed to get too far away in his convalescent state, if in fact he was sick to begin with; but perhaps his illness was a lie with the intention of going unnoticed. If so, the fugitive may have gotten further away than they suspected.

Tomura plans to interrogate him to find out if he received help and from whom; although first he has to find him.

His saddle spins in the clearing where the Beta were released, no doubt overwhelmed by the aroma of the serum it do not know, then they wander through the forest after a faint and almost vanished trace. Because of the rains they lose the trace in the slopes of the mountain and Tomura is forced to walk by the rocky zone looking for clues.

But there is nothing.

Standing on a rocky elevation from which the valley can be seen at his feet and the mountains at his back, Tomura begins to suspect that his spy is dead. No beta man would have been able to cross the mountains alive. The noumu guard the area with absolute distrust, they have made their home in the ravines that cross the entire mountain range and no army would be able to move around without the beasts hurling themselves at them as they have been trained.

No, either the spy is dead, torn by the jaws of a noumu, or has somehow found a way to walk between them without being seen, but the latter is impossible. So Tomura meets with the General to inform him of his discovery.
"You didn't find him," replies the General after hearing his report.

"He's dead. There's nothing to find."

"Do you really think so?"

"No beta would have survived in the mountains. Beasts are trained to attack intruders."

"Well, that's true."

Tomura nods, gets up and is ready to leave when his father's voice stops him in his place.

"But it's also true that he is the only beta that survived the serum."

Tomura turns around, not surprised by the intensity he sees in his father's eyes.

"You think he's still alive," it is not a question, but his father answers as if it were.

"I believe so."

Tomura frowns, he does not like what he sees in his father's eyes.

"He had an orchid in his leg. Toga herself saw it. The guards saw it. It was a beta."

"Did he smell like one?"

"You're not... what does it matter? He couldn't have gotten far. Even if he was an alpha, the beasts would have destroyed him."

"Maybe he managed to outwit them."

"What do you want me to do? His remains must be in the stomach of some noumu."

"Send an alert to the tunnel guards. Have them inspect the outside, if they find anything let them know they must report it. I want to make sure the prisoner is dead."

"Well, it'll be done. Now, can I go after the prince of Yuuei?"

"At last you find out... yes, go. Jin probably needs help with that."

[...]

At first Izuku does not press; after all, Itsuka spends days in bed, sick. The guards go down to see her once when she loses her turn to go up to the outside garden, but when they notice that she is unwell, they leave her without offering her any kind of treatment.

When Itsuka recovers and returns to her activities, Izuku keeps his distance, it is obvious that the girl is dealing with an emotional imbalance and he does not want to disturb her too much, so he only watches over her and offers her comfort when she suddenly cries without explanation. Luckily for
both of them, Itsuka's alpha helps her overcome it with a great deal of affection. He is a noble and patient boy, who does not give in to despair.

Not everyone is like that, and Izuku understands that circumstances have brought excessive behaviour to the surface. There are others who have become irascible, who explode easily and take it out on their own companions. He himself has had to attend to his wounds under the sour and violent gaze of the angry alpha. However, the great majority show signs of exhaustion and reluctance. They work most of the day and have no energy left to do anything but eat and sleep.

Izuku does not let himself be carried away by the oppressive environment, his hands are full, he works tirelessly taking care of the omega group that languishes in black cells, but his tiredness does not prevent him from thinking of Katsuki and his anxiety grows like waves on the beach.

"When will I be able to visit those who have recently arrived?" He asks one afternoon as soon as they enter the dome.

"I'll have to consult it," Itsuka answers without looking at him.

Izuku nods and lets go. The days go by and she never touches the subject again.

"When will I be able to visit those who have recently arrived?" He asks as soon as Itsuka crosses the entrance to his hiding place.

"That will take time."

Izuku understands and tries to distract himself. The patients get better, but Itsuka finds more tasks for him. In the end his patience runs out.

"When will I be able to visit the newcomers?"

"Soon."

"When?"

"I don't know."

"We had a deal. You promised to help me."

"And I'm doing so."

"You promised you'd help me find him."

"I never said—"

"You said you knew someone who could help me, who?"

"It's dangerous."

"I know, but you promised."

"It's better—"

"You promised."

Izuku looks at her sternly and she twists her hands, uncomfortably; when it is obvious that he will not abandon the subject, Itsuka sighs and faces him.
"I don't want you to go."

"You don't?"

"Why do you want to go there?"

"What?"

"Why do you want to go there? What will you get by going there?"

"Uh? ... there's someone... someone I want to see."

"And then what?"

"And... then?"

"If the person you're looking for is here, he'll have an omega by his side, what will you do then?"

Izuku blinks, too stunned with the idea to answer.

"And if he's not here," Itsuka continues, "it means they left him behind. It means he's dead."

The reflex to move away is instinctive and Izuku notices that his insides twist.

"Let him be. Forget him. You gain nothing by going there. It's dangerous."

"Are you worried about me?"

It is Itsuka's turn to hesitate.

"Your help has been invaluable," she says after a moment. "With you we may be able to stay with our children. You'd better stay here and help us."

"I promised I would help you... but I have to go."

"Why?"

Izuku does not know how to explain it to her, the only answer he can think of is simple:

"I have to see him."

Three words that get the girl because she loses her iron determination and shrinks.

"What if he's dead?" She asks in a tiny voice. "What will you do if you don't find him?"

Izuku's answer is tiny but firm.

"He was dead before," he says. "I mourned for him, I can—... but if he is alive, if he is here... I must see him. Even if it's only once."

He is not sure Itsuka understands, but after a moment of hesitation, she nods.

"Very well."

Izuku sees her disappear, and once he is alone he fits into the old blankets to sleep the rest of the day. Itsuka's words echo in his mind over and over again.
"He'll have an omega by his side."

He has not even stopped to think about the possibility.

'I just want to see him,' Izuku thinks as he closes his eyes. He thinks of his non-flowering leaves, green stems that cover his belly like a meadow in spring. There is no color in his body, no beautiful flower he can share. The thought is bitter and takes him back in time to when he was eleven years old and constantly held back from touching Katsuki believing he was not up to the task, that he did not deserved it.

Perhaps it was fate that decided to find Katsuki a companion with a precious flower worthy of him. The only thing Izuku has is a vehement and unwavering desire to see him again and hear his voice.

'It doesn't matter if he has someone, I just want him to be alive. I just want to see him.'

If Katsuki has an omega, Izuku will open his arms and offer them sincere affection.

[...]

"I don't want to go," it is the first thing Himiko says when Dabi finishes explaining Kurogiri's new orders for her.

"I don't think you have a choice."

"No, Dabi, no. I don't want to go. I have to finish this."

"Listen, Toga, this is currently being discussed. Kurogiri orders you to move to the capital. We have to look for the prince. Our source confirms that he's in Hosu. If we hurry, we can capture him before he withdraws."

"Well, you go ahead, I have work to do. I must capture the spy."

"The spy is worth nothing compared to the prince."

"For you. I want to find this bastard. I want to know who's helping him."

"How many days have you devoted to this hunt? How many more days are you going to dedicate to it?"

"The time it takes."

"In any other circumstance I would support you, but this is important. The Yuuei's prince is circling the capital and Kurogiri wants us to find him. I had to leave after sending Shuichi's reinforcements, I didn't even have time to send him an explanation. The situation is of top priority."

"But the spy—"

"You caught one. And Shuicihi will be able to find the other."
"You'll ask him?"

"Once he's finished hunting the escaped savages, he'll have time to organize a large-scale search."

"But he's my prey..."

"Imagine a bigger dam. The prince himself."

"The General will want him alive."

"That doesn't mean he has to be complete."

Toga smiles, a carnivorous gesture that exhibits her fangs in all their magnitude.

"Well, we'll go look for Yuuei's little heir, but when I find him we'll come back for the spy."

"That is if Shuichi hasn't found him before."

"Even if he does... he'd better leave a piece for me."

[...]

Itsuka comes back days later with a package under her arm.

"I know an omega who helps with inventory in the warehouse. I got her to steal a piece of cloth for you. It's usually used for blankets and clothes, but we'll make a uniform similar to that of the guards."

"Will it work?"

"We will dye it a dark color, it won't be perfect, but under the light of the lamps no one will notice the difference. The guards won't look for you, they don't know you're here, if you move during the shift changes you'll be able to move through the tunnels without being stopped. It doesn't mean you can come and go, the best thing is to stay there as long as possible, and to not exit that place often."

Izuku nods and for the next few days they both work cutting and sewing without pause. An hour every night Izuku sits with Sen who draws the tunnels on the floor and repeats the guards' schedules over and over again.

In an attempt to improve his chances, Izuku agrees to have his hair cut. He sits on the floor with his legs crossed while Itsuka cuts the locks of his green hair with kitchen scissors.

"How do you recognize an officer?" Itsuka asks as the scissors tinkle in her hands.

"They have a golden strip across their left shoulder."

"What do you do if you come across one?"

"I stop, salute and hope he lets me go."
"If he asks you, what patrol do you belong to?"

"If it's morning to the seventeenth, if it's afternoon to the twenty-second."

"And at night?"

"I must never go out at night."

"What do you say if he asks you what you're doing?"

"It's a shift change. I'm going to my new position."

"Remember, you must never remove your hood."

"I know. I must also avoid natural light as my uniform would not pass a meticulous inspection."

Itsuka kneels in front of him, her eyes are filled with fear and uncertainty.

"I think you're ready."

Izuku runs a hand through his hair, sees the green hair on the ground, notices he now has clear neck and a whirlpool in his stomach.

"Yes, I am."

That night he dresses in his uniform and waits until Itsuka beckons him out. His palms are wet and slippery as he crosses the dining room towards the exit. There are no guards nearby so Izuku goes out and stands by the door as if he were watching hidden at first sight through the soft curve of the corridor.

His heart does not stop beating as the guards cross the corridor back and forth, none of them dedicating a second glance to it. There is only one who enters the dining room to inspect and stops to see him as if he were surprised to find him at his post, yet the man just greets him lifting his chin to which Izuku responds in the same way.

"I thought it was my turn to take care of the door," he says as he approaches.

Surprisingly, despite the fear that beats in him, Izuku's voice does not break.

"I was assigned with it today, but if you want to stay, go ahead, I'd like to leave early for once."

"No, no, if they gave you the order—"

"Then go, you don't want the captain to see you here and decide that the door now needs two guards... or maybe you don't have anywhere else to go."

The guard leaves without a second thought; from time to time a guard shows up for a round, but when they see that one of them is already watching they leave, anxious to finish their shift.

When dinner is over Izuku takes the lead in front of the omega group and arrives at the dome door where another guard waits to close the entrance. Izuku stands there, motionless, watching the omega pass by, while he tries not to squirm with anxiety, hoping that the guard at the door and the two behind do not realize his discolored uniform, his size, or the fact that he has no weapons; but the two rear guards are chatting and laughing, pausing briefly to hear the soldier's report at the door that nods to confirm that everyone has entered, after that they resume their conversation as if nothing had happened.
There are no possible hiding places down there, the warehouse and the kitchen have external locks, which prevents anyone inside from escaping, so the only guards left are those in charge of closing the dome door. All four board the box without any problems. The door guard spins the crank and shakes; the elevator rises slowly, the two guards continue to chatter, sharing their desire to sleep and eat, the door guard continues to work on the crank so Izuku can crush himself against the wall to pretend he is tired and sleepy.

Upstairs Izuku follows the group of guards lagging a bit at a time. When he loses sight of them he deviates to the nearest tunnel attentive to the signs or to the people with whom he may come across. In a matter of minutes the tunnels will be emptied and he will not be able to move without raising suspicions.

Each dome has three entrances on the first floor, during the day there are guards guarding and monitoring the three doors. One is for the alpha group, the other for the omega group that goes up to take care of the orchard, the third is the tunnel that connects the domes and that during the night nobody watches. Nobody watches because it is an impossible door to open from the inside.

Izuku finds the handle on one side of the entrance, he has to use both hands to activate it, but once he does so he turns it until the door rises to a handful of the ground. From there he uses a piece of rock to stuck the mechanism, takes a breath and counts to five, when nothing happens Izuku crawls across the floor to the other side, barely straightening up when the door falls with a thud.

Izuku spins, his fear dispersing around him. He notices the blood beating in his ears with force and is certain that the guards have heard the fuss, that in a matter of seconds the two entrances will open bringing an endless row of soldiers.

But nothing happens.

Izuku stands up and carefully slides across the floor, glued to the wall towards the stairs; as he comes down he removes the hood and squeezes it against himself. Suddenly he stops, his heart beating unchecked.

There are shadows in front of him, waving against the faint light of the torches.

They are the guards, thinks Izuku suddenly terrified, but then the unmistakable aroma of alpha floats to him. The group advances, tentatively, until their faces meet the light.

From his place on the stairs Izuku sees a handful of faces looking at him with surprise and disbelief.

"Hitoshi said you'd come," says one of them. "But I didn't believe him."

The amazement is repeated countlessly in muffled murmurs. All of them looking at him as if they did not believe what their eyes were seeing.

"Hitoshi?" Asks Izuku looking at the group.

"That's me," answers one voice, the farthest of them all.

The whole group moves and suddenly Izuku has the boy named Hitoshi two steps away from him. As he is a couple of steps below, his dark eyes are just as high as his. His dark circles are pronounced and tiredness has left its mark on his young face. The most amazing thing is the violet flower he has on his left pectoral, it is bright and delicate and it stands out with an unusual clarity on the white skin.

"I listened to Sen," says Hitoshi while looking at him. "he was questioning others about the new
couples. When I asked him, he told me that a medical omega had entered his dome and was looking for the newcomers. I didn't believe him. None of the others did, but I didn't lose anything by trying."

"Trying what?"

"To bring you here."

"What?"

"Sen said you helped his omega, did you?"

"I did, but what do you mean?"

"The new couples aren't here. I lied to Sen. I told him so he'd send you here."

"Why?"

"My omega is sick, he needs help."

Izuku doesn't respond, too dazed with the revelation to react properly, and he is too uncomfortable standing in front of an alpha group that keeps examining him from head to toe. He just appreciates being completely covered by the uniform.

"If I help you," says Izuku after a long silence, "you will tell me in which dome the newcomers are in."

"If you save him I'll give you something much better," he bows and whispers by his ear, making sure that no one else can hear him. "A way out."

Izuku blinks and moves away, looking critically at the alpha who just looks at him silently. After a moment Izuku reaches out his hand, Hitoshi smiles before taking it and shaking it vigorously.

The alpha group moves away, whispering constantly, as Izuku follows Hitoshi down the stairs to the first floor. From there they head for the cells on the left. The alpha enters first, Izuku cannot hear what he is saying to the omega in the cell or the answer he receives.

Hitoshi beckons and Izuku enters behind him, kneeling near the sleeping area.

On a bed with dirty blankets there is a blond haired omega lying down who looks as white as a magnolia and has very thin hands. The shackle that holds his leg has cuffed the skin, making him bleed a lot. The area also looks swollen and red, but the wound he is looking for is at belly level, hidden behind a rag covered with brown spots.

Izuku's first reaction is to extend his hands to examine him, but he cannot even touch him. The omega opens his eyes and throws a direct punch against the back of his hand.

"Don't touch me," he grunts with pain making an effort to move away and failing miserably.

"Neito," says Hitoshi in a firm voice, but he is silent when the omega's eyes focus on him, conveying an exaggerated anger.

"I don't want him here, Shinsou, take him away. Go away. Disappear!"

"Neito."

"Shut up! Don't call me that."
"He came to help you, Monoma, you have to let—"

"Leave me alone! Tell him to go away. Get out!"

The omega closes his eyes, leaning his head against the wall.

Izuku beckons to Hitoshi to leave.

"What happened to him?" Izuku asks quietly, staring at the entrance of the cell.

For the first time Hitoshi's expression is transformed into a rigid gesture. His aroma thickens announcing anger and violence until he manages to control himself.

"There's a man," he says in a very low voice. "His name is Shigaraki. He likes to tear the flowers from our bodies. They say he hangs them in his room like a collection. He always chooses the most striking, the most beautiful, but he especially likes to take the flowers of the omega." His anger prevents him from speaking for a moment and Izuku has to contain the desire to move away from him, to flee from his aroma. "Neito's flower is an anemone, of an intense purple. He ripped it off the first time we arrived here, but the flower sprouted again on the scar tissue. It was born again. And he ripped it off again. He always does it when we're not here. This time he was not content with a flower. He took three and the wound doesn't stop bleeding. His fever doesn't go down. He doesn't want to eat. And he won't let me near him."

Izuku has to make a great effort to contain the nausea that rises up his throat.

"I'll help him," Izuku says decisively, clenching his fists against his side, "but I'll need water. And medicine. Who works in the kitchen?"

"I'll take you with them."

"All right..." Suddenly he stops and looks at him, "do you really know a way out?"

"It is a way out if you have nothing to lose."

"I still need to find the new couples."

"If you save him, I'll help you."

Izuku nods, suddenly frowning.

"Why did he call you Shinsou?"

"That's my name. Hitoshi Shinsou."

Izuku blinks, a vague sense of familiarity shaking within him, but before he can understand it the smell of pain coming from the cell distracts him.

"Get me water... and the cleanest blankets there are."

When Hitoshi leaves Izuku returns to the cell, kneels next to the omega and extends his hand towards his wound. The answer he receives is a weak punch, nails that get stuck in his arm and a bite at the end, but Izuku does not give up.
Hello everyone, I'm sorry about the delayed chapter. On February 22nd, my baby cousin was born a month earlier due to complications, so I went to help my aunt with her every needs during last week <3

Since me and my parents are the only family she has around the city, I'll have to focus on her and my baby cousin for some time, please bear with me during this period of time.

Updates would be made every 2 weeks until further notice, but I'm hoping it wont be for too long. (And since I'll be pretty much living at the hospital now, maybe I can finally start answering coments again xD)

Thank you everyone for the kudos, comments, bookmarks and views. Thank you so much for the support, thank you for recomeding the story to your friends and thank you for staying with us thought this angst wormhole, we truly appreciate everything you guys have done, thank you so so much :)')

Next chapter on March 16th.

"The King's Cradle"
The King's Cradle

Chapter Summary

Let us talk about the bloodline that was born among the ruins. Let us talk about the people who settled in the upper part of the enemy's land. Let us speak of those who swore allegiance to the slave who broke his chains.

Chapter Notes

...remind me next time to never underestimate the power of a newborn baby, even if we were four people, it was so hard to take care of her...

My apologies for the wait, but it has finally gotten easier to handle school and babylife. I hope you enjoy today's chapter a lot (we got bby Katsuki here).

So yes, thank you for everyone that keeps supporting Roquel's wonderful story, thank you so much for all the kudos, comments, bookmarks, hits, recomendations, fanarts, frantic fangirling, theories, etc XD I hope you a lovely day!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"We can't expect help from anyone," says Katsuki looking at everyone. "There's no ship to pick us up, no army to come and save us. We're alone. We can stay here and remain an easy target. We can go to the coast and hope they don't attack us on the way. Or we can prepare for when they come. We'll put down roots until they can't tear us apart without destroying themselves."

When Katsuki sets out his plan some hesitate, but before the resolute expression on the blond's face the doubts are contained and the group prepares to embark on their journey. The most difficult thing is to decide what to do with the dead, there is no time for burials or farewells so there is no choice but to abandon them on the battlefield.

Tamaki is the only one who receives a burial and that is because Momo organizes it.

Momo cannot help crying as she kneels next to the mound of earth; beside her Kyouka stands firm with her face stiff and her spear buried in the ground in an unequivocal sign of farewell and mourning. In front of her Inasa imitates her, but he dares to cry, not only for Tamaki, but also for his fallen companions. He is the only alpha in his group and instead of it filling him with pride, for him
it is an affront, because he was not there when the rest was sacrificed.

The beta of his group say goodbye with emotional words, each offering a piece of their hair, as they usually do in the mountains to say goodbye to a loved one. All of them cry without restraint, offering comfort to each other.

The only one not there is Mirio who is still under the influence of incense and remains blind to the world, but Momo makes sure to remember the place to return when the time is right. The truth is that she does not wish to be the one to tell him, but she knows that she will have to.

While the barbarians say goodbye to theirs, the rest enlists the wagons, recovers the beasts and transport the wounded to begin the journey. The rains return, not as intense or as long as the first days, but constant and cold. This does not prevent the caravan from moving although instead of moving backwards, they move away from the river in the direction of the nearest prison. The journey is heavy and uncomfortable, but Katsuki forces the group to move as quickly as they can.

Just a few days later, grey turrets rise from the trees in the distance, Katsuki immediately organizes a group of scouts who move forward to ensure that the area remains clear. Once they receive confirmation that the building is clear, the entire group moves.

It is not easy to re-enter through the prison walls, even if it is not the same one they escaped from the first time. There is something about that place that inspires repulsion and abhorrence, but none of them contradict the order of their leader.

Ochako’s stomach twists as she sees the black walls grow as they approach, bile threatens to ascend down her throat as the wagons cross the immense steel doors; as the rest advance, she stops and raises her eyes toward the high towers.

Rain soaks into her black uniform and her hair sticks to her skull, running rivers of water down her cheeks.

"Are you all right?" Asks Kyouka, stopping by her side.

The beta woman is just a couple of centimetres smaller than she is, and Ochako is still amazed to learn that despite her size she is capable of fighting with a spear that doubles her height.
"The first time I walked into a place like this," says Ochako, looking through the wet tufts of her bangs, "was when we were transported in dirty wagons. We were piled up like animals, hungry and afraid. They put us in a room and forced us to take off our bandages."

The story makes Kyouka uncomfortable, she turns her eyes away and twists nervously. Ochako keeps looking at her.

"They ripped me out of my home, and there was nothing I could do to defend myself."

"I'm s—"

"I won't let that happen again. I won't stand still again, terrified as they try to chain me." She tightens her fists and forces the knot in her stomach to settle. "Will you really teach us how to fight?"

Kyouka looks at her again and after a moment nods solemnly.

Ochako breathes, perhaps for the first time since she left the cells, and something inside her loosens as if she had just recovered a small part lost long ago. She looks back at the doors and when she crosses them, she does so at will.

It is after they pass through the doors, after they settle down in the barracks of the soldiers, that the energy changes abruptly. They are no longer fleeing prisoners, they are no longer terrified children who walk away in fear of an ambush... but they are also not an army. Nor are they a defensive force ready for battle. They are a group of kids torn from their homes, eager to regain their freedom, anxious to control their lives and banish fear from their hearts.

They cling to their leader and roam near him like moths hungry for fire and energy. When Bakugou starts handing out orders, each of them nods and immediately obeys. Fear is put at bay as they fulfill their tasks, one by one; it is easier to concentrate on a small, immediate, easy task than to be distracted by the possible outcomes that will come tomorrow. So they quickly make use of their time by cleaning, building and training.

One of the most pressing tasks is to organize a small clinic, which Momo immediately takes over. Among the most delicate wounded are Mirio, who is still unconscious, and Denki, whose loss of blood has forced him to sleep for most of the trip.
"I can help you," says Denki, lying in bed with a pale face and an expression of deep pain.

"I thank you for the offer," replied Momo without looking at him busy changing a bandage, beside her an omega assists her in her task in silence. "But you are forbidden to get out of bed for now."

"But I'm fine."

He says it with his head resting on the pillow and his eyes closed, Momo remains silent and at the end of her task she finds out that the boy has gone back to sleep. She smiles without being able to avoid it, but the gesture dies when she directs her eyes towards where Chief Togata sleeps. His wound heal slowly as he remains unawakened.

•

Kyouka is in charge of the training sessions among the omegas. She is determined to teach them the use of the spear, knives and basic notions of hand-to-hand fighting, but not without first improving their physical condition.

•

"That's fifteen laps."

Ochako stops, exhausted, squeezing one hand against her side.

"Those were far too many, I'm going to vomit."

"You've got to keep going."

"Goddamn it, no! I thought we'd learn how to fight and all we've done is run in circles for a whole week. In fifteen minutes I have to go and cover my chores in the kitchen and he won't be back until tomorrow. If I keep this stuff I'm not getting anywhere! I want to learn how to handle a knife."

"I won't give you a knife as long as you can't run fifteen laps without stopping every time you complete one. You need to improve your condition. Everyone needs it."

"Easy for you to say, you didn't spend years in an underground cell where the only exercise you did was washing clothes and carrying water."

"You can't keep using the same excuse to run away from training. You have to strengthen those muscles."
"But—"

"No more complaints! You said you still have another fifteen minutes? I want you to do another ten laps."

"Ten?!"

"MOVE!"

---

Inasa's job is to supervise the guards' watches and turns, but he also takes on the task of training the inexperienced alpha group in combat. He teaches them communication through aroma changes, the use of long knives and melee combat. Even after doing all of this he still finds time to train with Katsuki.

---

Inasa throws a blow with the left arm, Katsuki sees it coming and dodges it by moving the right shoulder back and twisting his body. His answer is to use his palm to encircle his opponent's neck, push his right leg to one side and use his attacker's impulse to turn it in the air.

"Shit," murmurs Inasa on the ground while Katsuki regulates his breathing. "You're improving."

"I've still got a lot to learn."

"You are very strict with yourself. You've beaten me three times in a row."

"You have beaten me more."

"First I'm bigger than you, second you've spent years behind bars without a chance to follow a strict training, and third I still have a better physical condition."

"None of that matters, neither the size nor the training you have... Stand up, we'll try again."

Every day Katsuki trains, he trains harder than ever, not only does he seek to regain five years of lost training, he also aims to polish each of his movements, strengthen his body and sharpen each sense until his body can move by instinct.

He will not allow anyone to lock him up again.
Yosetsu becomes the leader of the explorers, he has an excellent memory and possesses the slender and flexible complexion of the hunters. One of his tasks is to memorize the maps of the area and organize trips to the outside with the intention of knowing every inch of the terrain that surrounds them. Their main mission is to try to find some trace of Kamui or the prince.

"There's a village here," he places a mark on the table map and continues. "Another one here and here. There are some blackened ruins here. We are keeping and eye in each one for the pink-skinned woman, but we didn't see her in any of the villages."

"She's probably back with her troop." Aizawa replies, studying the maps for the umpteenth time.

"Maybe we haven't seen any soldiers in the region, but we're still patrolling."

"It's important that no one discovers you."

"We stay out of it. We leave no trace and always leave before daylight, but we still haven't found any clues."

"Maybe it's time we expanded our search radius."

They both look at Katsuki whose eyes wander the map from one prison to another, from the waterfall and back.

"Keep looking," he says without taking his eyes off the map that tells him nothing while playing with the little bag he carries around his neck.

There are so many things to do that during the first few weeks Katsuki holds daily meetings almost
three times a day. His life becomes a list of endless things to do and tasks that require his attention. Every little detail, every doubt, every damn question comes to him for an answer.

Luckily he has Aizawa, whose advice is always timely and his ideas are intended to anticipate any eventuality. The man is familiar with the management of a large-scale group and has the nerve not to panic. The best thing is that he never reacts badly when Katsuki gets exasperated, he is able to give him an overview of the situation, and always has a calm and impartial opinion.

Their conversations are always plans, suggestions and assumptions.

"If your friends don't hear from you, what will they do?

It is nighttime and they both gaze at the sea as they patrol the outer walls.

"Assuming Shino regained control of the fleet, they'll keep the army distracted long enough for us to find the prince, but they don't have sufficient provisions for a long-term assault. If they manage to take possession of a fortress and defend it, they'll wait until we communicate with them. Another option is for them to decide to attack and plunder for supplies while they wait. If all that fails, they are likely to move away. Whether they return to Yuuei for supplies or border the desert to the nearest port it is unknown. If so, Hosu's army can chase them or let them go.

"Would they go, even without the prince?"

"If the supplies run out, they won't be able to stay even if they want to. We must also consider what would happen if the General decides to coordinate an attack to destroy them. In any option it is unlikely that we will receive their help, not as long as they don't know about us."

"Have you found a way to communicate?"

"We have no messenger birds. The only one who could send a message that way was Kamui."

"Kamui, Kamui, Kamui. Do you realize that you put too much faith in a man you have never met?"

"My brother-in-law knew him. That's enough for me."

"And where is your brother-in-law now?"

"Probably dead."

"It doesn't help in his favor."

"Kamui is loyal to Shinsou. He would never betray us. And once he knows it's the prince who’s with him, he'll makes sure to keep him alive."

"Why?"
"Because Kamui doesn't want a war, because he doesn't want to see his people being massacred, enslaved or imprisoned."

"And yet his people do all that."

"You must understand that not everyone shares the General's vision, but his power is absolute."

"If these people were really against it they would not join their army, they would not kidnap children, they would not treat us like animals."

"If they don't, they're considered scum, they're exiled. Refusal to participate is a surefire condemnation under the General's government."

"I don't give a shit if they don't feel comfortable following orders, they follow them, that's what matters. If it were up to me, I would wipe out all these villages as punishment for what they have done to us."

"Do it and then the image of savages will be justified."

"We are not beasts."

"Then don't act like one. I understand that you want compensation for what they have done to you, but you can't just jump in and cut off all the heads that cross your path. You can't kill civilians whose only crime is to raise and educate soldiers. Maybe there are people who support the General, maybe there are people who think that his way of acting is adequate, but not all of them are like that. Kamui is an example of people who don't want a war and who are ashamed of the collections. And he is not alone. If he were, the girl we are looking for would not have brought you the jars. People like them are protecting the prince. They protect Midoriya."

Katsuki stops.

"Let us hope so."

He walks away and Aizawa sighs as he lets his eyes wander through the forest, 'where are you, Shouto?'

Yaoyorozu is also an unexpected help, she knows the intricate nuances of dealing with an alpha group, she is correct and discreet, always with an opinion and a suggestion. Without Togata, she assumes the leadership of her group naturally and it is they who teach them the many and varied ways of using all parts of the animals and finding medicines in the vast forest.
"I need supplies for the clinic."

Momo drops a list on the table where Katsuki marks the explored areas.

"Bandages?" He reads without touching the paper, "do you understand that we don't have a fixed supply?"

"I just need cloth, I'll make the bandages myself. The list is a reference, I can find a substitute for most of the things I've put there."

"What are you giving it to me for, then?"

"So you know what we're looking for."

"Do you plan to go out?"

"That's why I'm here. I want an escort. I'll take a small omega group with me, they help me in the clinic and they want to learn about medicines, they've been asking questions about treatments. One of them learns quickly, I dare say that I find myself in front of the first omega healer, she's a smart girl and she's not afraid of blood... Bakugou, do you hear me?"

Katsuki blinks.

"I hear you. Talk to Yosetsu and tell him you have my approval. He could help you gather ingredients if you tell him exactly what you are looking for."

"Good. Another thing, there are a handful of alpha boys who like to sit in front of the clinic and look at the omega. Sometimes they make comments."

"Tell Inasa."

"If Inasa confronts them it will only be temporal. They only obey you."

"I don't have time to go yelling at a bunch of assholes."

"I don't want you yelling at them, they're spoiled puppies, give them something to do. They have too much free time, they need to burn energy in some other way."

"You tell them."

"They won't listen to me."

"Why?"

"Where do you come from?"

"From the islands."

"What do they do when alpha puppies get impertinent?"

"We tell them to shut up."

"Even if you're a beta?"
"Even an omega."

"An omega?"

"If you are rude or imprudent with one, they have the right to punch you. Besides, their father, their brother, your father, and even the village leader can come and shake you up if you dare to keep bothering. We are taught to respect them."

"Wow... I'd like to visit the islands someday. It doesn't work that way in the mountains, I suppose it doesn't work in Yuuei either. The alpha puppies only obey the alpha leader. Give them work, keep them busy."

Katsuki sighs, "something else?"

"Hm... could you make Kirishima not spend so much time in the clinic?"

"Does it bother you?"

"Not me, but he's gotten into the habit of sitting with Deki and he's excessively... ahh... he distracts everyone, including the omegas that help me; besides, after each visit Denki has trouble sleeping and keeps stirring in bed."

"How long before you let him out?"

"If the wound continues to improve at the same rate, in a couple of days; he will be forbidden to do heavy work and will continue with his arm in a sling, so he won't be able to train either, but at least he will be standing."

"All right, I'll take care of the goofball."

"Thank you."

Momo turns around, but before leaving she hears him:

"She's not the first."

"What?"

"That healer you've got. She's not the first."

"I don't understand."

"Forget it."

He walks away before she can investigate, all she sees is his thoughtful expression while his fingers are entertained by the little bag he wears around his neck.
Eventually Mirio wakes up.

Momo is not there the first time he reacts and he does not call her either.

---

*He opens his eyes and blinks.*

*He has dreamt of Tamaki, he has seen him dance in a green field in the sunlight.*

*If he closes his eyes he can still see it, even hear it: I love you, don't die.*

*That night he cries in silence, motionless, and alone.*

---

The next time he wakes up Momo is there and her face of joy is turned into an expression of pain in a matter of seconds, their conversation is brief:

"Tamaki—"

"I know."

This time it is she who cries and Mirio notices a hole where his heart used to be; instead of wasting time Mirio tells her:

"I want to talk to Bakugou."

He ignores her when she tries to convince him to eat, he has no stomach to digest anything and no courage to answer her questions, only anger and sadness roar inside him. He doesn't know which of the two will end up consuming it.
Ignoring Momo's advice, Mirio sits on the bed to receive the alpha. His side pricks, but he just ignores it.

"I made a mistake." It is the first thing he says when he is in front of him.

"Save your speeches," says Bakugou, staring at him. "Nobody can get ready for the incense."

Mirio nods, mute and broken, he takes a moment to study the expression of the committee that surrounds his bed: Tenya looks at him with his face full of grief. Inasa has a defeated grimace. Momo's face is still an open wound. Kyouka carries a severe rictus of punishment and shame. There is a man behind them, with an Azalea flower around his eyes, who also shows an expression of mourning. They all look at him as if he had just lost an arm, when in fact he has lost something far more valuable... the only one who does not look at him like that is the blond alpha in front of him.

From him emanates a dense aroma, fire and ragweed, violence and anger. It is to smell him and feel his withered heart shake. They are not there to hide their heads and sink into despair.

"Sir, if you'd let us—" The man with the Azalea on his face begins to say, but Mirio cuts it off with a gesture.

"I came here because I wanted to meet the prince of Yuuei, because I wanted to re-establish the ancient alliance. I rejected the prince's request for help, now I see it was a mistake. This war does not only affect Yuuei. The drug they use is a threat to all of our race. We must stop them."

"We need reinforcements," says Bakugou.

"I'll get them."

"Chief," Momo intervenes with her discreet voice, "the return journey will be dangerous, your injury requires rest and care."

"You will have time to heal as we prepare for the journey."

"Chief..."

"Will this place hold out until we get back?"

Bakugou's answer is immediate, his smile is carnivorous and fierce: "It will."

Mirio's group leaves soon after leaving Kyouka, Momo and Inasa to continue their work in prison. Katsuki travels with them and bids them farewell under a dark sky studded with stars; he has not even lost sight of them when he applies himself to his reconnaissance mission.

Despite the workload, Katsuki insists on participating in at least one of the outdoor patrols; he does not go out daily, but when he does, he tries to travel at night, always sheltered by the darkness. His group is compact and is made up of light and fast alpha youths, who have no problem keeping up
with him.

There are days when he wanders around neighbouring villages—he sees the lights in the windows of houses, the incoherent murmurs buzzing in the area, black silhouettes moving at night—sometimes he spies on their fields—long stretches of green and black bathing in the silvery light of the moon, with its vigils that keep beasts away from crops—even visits the blackened ruins as well—shattered huts and fallen roofs.

There, Katsuki stopped to contemplate the square where hundreds of scorched bodies lie piled into an infamous pile; when he looks at them his anger shuts up, there is nothing left that he can hate.

'What if Deku is here?'

The thought is a deadly blow, the prospect horrifies him and at the same time renews his anger, inflames it to the point of drowning it all. Unable to remain there, Katsuki turns and continues his journey.

For long nights Katsuki crosses the forest, familiarizing himself with the area, searching for any trace, any clue that might lead him to Izuku. And he finds nothing. It is both a source of frustration and relief. If he were so easy to find, they would have done it by now. If the prince had fallen into the hands of the General, they would have known, so there is no doubt that the prince is still safe and so is Izuku.

It is the only thought that keeps his anger under control.

After each trip Katsuki's group returns with no signs or answers. It is at that moment, while most of the prison is still sleeping, as the sun rises on the horizon, that Katsuki finds a moment of silence and calm for himself.

There is a field of flowers near the prison, it is a good place to sit and watch the sunrise. From there he can look out over the valley and the forest that stretches out in the distance. There are all sorts of flowers that grow in the fields surrounding the prison, but the one that stands out the most is a flower of an unpolluted white, elongated and oval, with immense leaves of an intense green, the spathe in the middle is long and tainted in a delicate yellow color. The climate has made them prosper and the countryside seems to be a white and green extension that announces prosperity.

Katsuki is not interested in white flowers, but the leaves are a vibrant dark green, reminiscent of Izuku's eyes. Every time he sees them, his resolve is strengthened. He is determined to build a shelter, a place where Izuku is safe once they find him.

“We need to think long term,” says Katsuki one day when he returns from his patrol abroad, he is joined by Aizawa, Yaoyorozu, Kirishima, Tenya and Yosetsu. "So far we have stocked up on the forest, but we have to start filling the pantries."

"Are you worried about a siege," asks Kirishima.
"It's a sensible precaution," adds Aizawa. "The ideal would be to cultivate, can you take care of that, Tenya?"

"Yes, sir. I'll organize a group and we'll start to prepare the ground for the garden."

"I think we can also use the inner courtyard," Mom says. "They are the perfect size and we can cover it with fertile soil."

"A praiseworthy idea," says Aizawa. "We'll use the inner chambers to store the food. The temperature will keep it cool."

"Not many will want to go down to the chambers," Yosetsu intervenes. "It's best to store them on the first floor and seal the tunnels that descend to the lower floors."

"Maybe we can have a funeral," Momo says, "for those who died there."

"I think it's a perfect idea," says Kirishima.

"We will cultivate," Katsuki orders after a moment. "But we must begin collecting supplies now."

"What do you have in mind," asks Aizawa.

"We can appropriate the crops destined for the army."

"If we do that, we will attract the General's attention."

"It is inevitable, the time has come to make ourselves known."

"We need more men. If we rush now we will have problems and Togata's reinforcements will not come to save us."

"We will get more men."

"Where?"

Katsuki looks at Yosetsu and he responds without wasting time:

"There's a storage building a few days from here. They use it as an armoury and control several fields of crops: Wheat, carrot, pumpkin, apple and pear fruit trees. They don't start harvesting yet, but most importantly they use alpha slaves."

"And the omegas?" Kirishima asks.

"We have not seen any omega, we suppose that their intention is to use the slaves as labor and not for the mating itself."

"Bakugou, are you sure...?"

"We will take the building," Katsuki replied, looking at everyone without fear, "and everything in it."
It requires a long planning, a delicate and almost perfect synchronization. The omega stay behind to protect their camp, the rest enlist with perfumed scarves hidden in the pockets of their pants.

With Katsuki at the head, the retinue leaves.

The guards see them approaching and immediately inform the captain.

"They must be Iguchi's men," he says as he finishes eating. "The reinforcements we send must come with them."

"But weeks have passed since they left."

"They were going to hunt savages, surely they took advantage to rest, have we received news from Kurogiri?"

"No, sir, the last message asked for reports on Iguchi's troops."

"Well, I'll tell that old lizard to write a message to Kurogiri to report, they'll probably have more orders from the General. Warn the stables and open the doors."

"As you command, sir."

The plan: Pretend to be a troop of reinforcements traveling to the capital. To ensure that the deception works they prepare the wagon with the incense, another one with provisions and they all dress in the full uniform of the guards.

They have studied the routines, the organization and its number. They try to synchronize their arrival shortly before lunchtime, while the slaves work in the fields. The retinue advances slowly, as if it were composed of a pile of tired and exhausted soldiers.

And as they approach the scent of Katsuki is inflamed.
Yō sees them coming. When he straightens up to relieve the strain on his back caused by the countless hours he has to spend leaning, pulling out the weeds and taking care of the carrots, he takes a moment to contemplate the approaching caravan.

At that time the dose of incense that they administer to them early begins to lose its effect, at any moment they will call them to eat and while they do it they will return to bathe them in the incense that makes them lifeless dolls. He is ready to continue his work when he smells it.

Wood and smoke.

It is faint at first, but it begins to grow as the procession approaches. It smells of burnt wood, of fresh oak that melts in the fire. It is spicy and dense, if it had color it would be blood red.

The mind of Yō shakes the traces of the incense and his body is straightened without him noticing it, around him other alpha imitate him, they rise as if someone had just stung them with a hot stick and marked them.

The owner of that aroma goes to the front, alone, behind him there are other essences that accompany him, others that answer his call, that turn around feeding on that fire; for Yō they are tenuous shadows, pale in comparison. The aroma of wood is so intense, so powerful, that it reminds him of the bonfires of his home. Incandescent embers, burning flames that heat the cold nights of festivals.

Blood roars in his ears, tense muscles, pain and the weariness of hard work have vanished from his mind; yet he does not move. The scent of wood conveys a clear message. A simple word: **Do not move.**

The undoubted order of an alpha. Yō submits to it with a facility that surprises him.

The caravan goes on its way, the aroma of wood grows as it passes and remains even as the retinue approaches the fortified tower. Yō does not take his eyes off them, he sees the right moment when the captain of the demons comes out to meet them. He and all the slaves in the camp hold their breath as the two groups approach.

Everything happens too fast, a blurred silhouette, a battle cry, but even before chaos breaks loose, Yō is moving. When the aroma of wood and smoke explodes, he responds. He runs to join his owner, to fight by his side.

The resistance is fierce, but the slaves join Katsuki's group without hesitation; in the end they manage to win. The roar of victory frightens the birds in the neighboring trees and resounds within the stone walls. But there is no time for victory celebrations.

Katsuki installs his group and immediately begins the looting, appropriates all available wagons and
fills them with weapons, fabrics, clothes, medicine and anything useful they find within the walls of the tower and immediately sends them back to prison. They clean the rooms of the guards and when the wagons return empty accompanied by the group omega all hasten to harvest the fields and to gather the fruit.

•

Yō has listened to the stories that are told, knows about the omega group that lives with the others, but that does not prepare him to see them arrive. He has not seen an omega in years..., has not touched one.

He had forgotten the delicacy of their aroma, how beautiful they are; even while they are wearing a uniform it is obvious that they are not soldiers. Their size and the shape of their body gives them away, the way they move is light and charming.

Yō is tempted to reach out and touch one. And he is not the only one, but the alpha who dares to do it gets a slap and a dry look.

"You look at it, but you don't touch it," says the omega with a tense body.

She is small, pretty with round cheeks and a short hair of a brown hue. She smells of chestnuts and berries, a slightly acidic and dry aroma. She still looks gorgeous with her steel look and bitter rictus; Yō is familiar with her.

Instead of apologizing, the alpha frowned and moved away. The omega returns to her task and the alpha group working in the same section is quick to imitate her, but Yō can see them spying, studying the shape of their wrists and the delicate neck that hides under the uniform. He knows it because he does it too.

He does not even pay attention to the sour expression directed at them by the beta woman who works nearby.

•

Several trips are required to transport the entire crop, stable animals, and canned meat; and when they are finally finished, the entire group leaves the fields. They have doubled their number, this time the reason has been reversed and the alpha group effortlessly doubles the omega.

And they all go back to the prison.
Yō sees it from afar, elevated on top of a cliff, imposing and terrible. The discomfort he feels upon returning expands beyond him, and his companions respond by imitating him. The atmosphere decomposes, transmitting anger and nonconformity.

The answer they receive is the aroma of wood emerging strongly among them, the aroma of smoke shakes their discomfort to drown it completely. Yō turns to study the face of that called Bakugou: imposing and strong, with a bad character and a dry look. The others obey him with absurd docility, Yō and his group do not stop observing him.

When his eyes meet there is no sign of discomfort, there is no distrust, only pride and ferocity. His expression is a challenge in itself, with just seeing him he feels that his nature responds to him with the desire to try and roar.

Yō balances his shoulders and enters.

The first thing he sees as he walks through the doors is a beautiful omega with shiny blond hair, an uninhibited smile, and eyes like the sun. Even though his arm is in a white sling and a face tinged with pain, the boy smiles when he sees them approach; he has a tiny, almost shy, and absolutely adorable smile. The most surprising thing is that it smells of fresh juice, of acid orange pulp. As soon as the aroma reaches him, Yō notices that the saliva sticks in his mouth.

Without thinking twice, he stands in front of the omega like an astonished little boy; this time the feeling of familiarity comes back stronger.

The smile of the omega hesitates at the sudden movement, two seconds later Bakugou passes by and goes straight on. The omega follows him like a moth following the light. Behind him is an alpha redhead who turns to look at him. His expression is dry and conveys a mute warning.

The answer of Yō is to raise an eyebrow.

Between the reconnaissance outings, the provisioning in the forest, the surveillance in the villages, and the attack on the supply tower, the rainy season comes to an end and the summer falls on them like a heavy and embarrassing mantle. The days lengthen and the first shoots appear between the furrows of their crops.

So much activity cannot go unnoticed and it is inevitable that rumours start to run.
"Have you seen the smoke in the prison towers?"
"I saw it, I thought it had been emptied."
"I thought so too, what are they doing there?"
"I don't know, but they didn't come to ask for the usual tribute."
"That's strange."

"Did you hear about the tower?"
"On the empty fields? Yes, I didn't think they were going to harvest so soon."
"Maybe it's the war's fault, all the soldiers have mobilized towards the capital to fight against the savages' ships."
"Oh, maybe that would explain why there are no guards left in the tower."
"Is there no one left?"
"None."

"My son says he's seen soldiers hunting in the woods."
"Hunting? I thought it was forbidden, and they're supposed to get monthly supplies."
"I know, I plan to tell Koe, he'll have to complain for us."

"Are you sure it was a soldier?"

"It was wearing the black uniform and my son says they were headed towards the prison."

"A renegade troop?"

"Puru believes it."

"Have they gone to see them?"

"No, but they haven't visited anyone."

The rumors grow as slowly as the heat dropped on the area. They grow and expand, slowly but inevitably. Soon, it is not just the neighbouring villages, the news reaches the ear of the General himself.

[...]
"I know. I have ordered the immediate transfer of the first shipment. We'll be able to use it against the savages as soon as they reach the hands of our men at the front."

"Well, have we received more news from our fleet?"

"The attacks on Yuuei's ships have been unsuccessful, we have lost several ships, provisions and supplies. Their resistance is weakening, but not at the rate we had predicted."

"Jin said it would be easy."

"Apparently he didn't expect them to organize fast enough."

"A mistake that could cost us dear, do you at least have news of the prince?"

"Jin's men met with Toga and Dabi and have swept all the land around the capital and near the coast. Shigaraki is with them. I'm afraid there is no sign of the prince."

"How is that possible? I thought the information was reliable."

"From my point of view, sir, there are two possibilities. The first is that they have help."

"And the second?"

"That the information was incorrect. Perhaps Jin's betrayal was exposed."

"So either we have another traitor or we have lost a spy."

"Personally I am inclined towards the second, if the prince had been near the capital we would have found him by now."

"That is to say, we have been deceived. The prince is not here."

"Actually, I think he is."

"You said—"

"If you'll excuse me, sir. Yuuei's fleet continues to fight, even without their king, even with their supplies counted, they move along our coasts, attacking, looting, and keeping our ships occupied. The logical choice would have been to leave after the death of their king, but they are still here. I think they are waiting for something."

"If the prince is not near the capital then where would he be."

"I don't know, but maybe we should turn our attention to the point where the beta spy was captured."

"The spy who disappeared?"

"Yes, sir, I'm afraid the area might be compromised."

"What makes you think that?"

Faced with the ominous tone, Kurogiri tensed up trying not to reveal his nervousness.

"Rumors have come about a troop installed in one of the prisons near the border with the Noumu desert."

"I thought you had emptied the prisons."
"That was the order."

"So who's there?"

"At first I thought it was Shuichi Iguchi's troop, perhaps the confrontation with the savages was more difficult than they had estimated and they needed a place to rest."

"And?"

"I sent my crows to investigate, none of them came back. I tried to contact the nearest supply tower, nor did I receive a response."

"Order Nezu to send a troop."

"I'm afraid Colonel Nezu refuses to cooperate."

"What?"

"I sent messages to his village near the mountains, but the responses I have received are not encouraging."

"What's the problem?"

"Weeks ago, when Shigaraki went to the border to find the traitor, he ordered the execution of an entire village. Apparently some of its inhabitants, including the leader himself, had made deals with the alleged traitor Shinji Nishiya. Shigaraki ordered the burning of the entire village and all its inhabitants were sworded. The situation has horrified Nezu, who demands a public apology, the return of his soldiers and asks to be excused from participating in the war. He also demands a law prohibiting the extermination of any village without the prior approval of the leader of the region."

"Does Tomura order an execution without consulting me?"

"He also abandoned the persecution of the spies, which he left in the hands of Toga, and went to the front to fight against the king of Yuuei; and Toga could not complete her task, so I had to send her to the capital to help in the search for the prince."

The silence continues almost indefinitely, until the man sitting at the table full of maps and notes reacts by straightening himself to his full height with an expression of indignation and anger.

"There are still free spies?!!"

"We've tri—"

"Why wasn't I informed?!!"

"I'm sorry, sir, I thought—"

"Shut up!" The jug of water he had on the table is knocked off by hands, and the liquid spills over the wood on the floor, darkening it.

Kurogiri shrinks on himself as he waits for instructions, in front of him, the General murmurs and grunts as his mind shuffles possibilities.

"I don't know which is worse, Shigaraki's folly or your stupidity."

"Sir?"
"We have a free spy and a prison break, and we still have no news of the troop that was sent to clean the area, right? Damn it, I could even bet that behind that group is the missing prince. He had a beta traveling with him, didn't he? His bodyguard in all likelihood. Now it is logical how the bastard managed to slip through our noses."

"But he's dead."

"I doubted it before, and now I'm sure. That bastard is alive, surely he was sent by his prince to get information."

"But he wouldn't have been able to get through the Noumu."

"We'll find out how he did it as soon as we find him; in the meantime organize a mobilization, order Toga and the others to join it. If it is Shuichi's group that's in prison, let them initiate a large-scale hunt to locate the spy and the prince if they are not the same person. And if they are the savages who escaped, they won't know about Jin, so send him as a spy. Also, contacts Nezu and requests a formal meeting, we cannot stay without his men."

"Very well, sir."

"And damn it, bring Shigaraki here!"

Chapter End Notes

(Im sorry Momo, but that first omega healer you supposedly got there is absolutely BS and Katsuki knows that)

"Originally titled The Beginning, this chapter changed its name so many times that it's funny. From the beginning" (a pun? on both languages wow that's new) "its title was meant to be something like Birth/Start/Genesis or some synonym.

I was sure it was a title that wouldn't change. As always when you're writing the chapter, it tells you on its own if the name fits or not. While searching for synonyms I found the word "Cradle" and I remembered a flower called "Cradle of Moses" in Mexico. It's a plant that grows all year round and gives flowers of an elegant white. It is a flower that purifies the environment and means long and healthy life. So I had to use it and I added it." — Roquel

Shindo Yō is here now :)
This is the chapter that marks the third arc of the story (YAY!) Flower Bouquet technically should be divided like this:
I - Prisoner Katsuki
II - Free Katsuki
III - Fighter Katsuki

I CAN COME BACK TO A SEMI-NORMAL ROUTINE SO DO FINALLY EXPECT ME BACK IN TWO WEEKS :D

Next Chapter on May 4th

"Whispers in the Night"
Whispers in the Night

Chapter Summary

The day has eyes. The night has ears. The secrets told in the darkness remain there, trapped within walls that reveal nothing.

Chapter Notes

Roquel made a map on her blog where you can see how far away our protagonists are from each other! You can check it out here! (Its in spanish though, so take your time)

Characters:
Kaoruko Awata — BubbleGirl/Sir Nighteye's sidekick
Moashi Juzo — Centipede
Shinji Nishiya — Kamui
Ken Ishiyama — Cementoss
Hawks — He currently does not have a real name so Roquel left his name untouched

Enjoy! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I brought you something to eat, Mina."

The lump on the bed does not move or respond. After a moment of hesitation, Mashirao cautiously approaches until he is three steps away, once there he leaves the food tray next to the little table and murmurs:

"You have to eat, Mina."

But that does not get him an answer either.

Mashirao sighs, walks to the window and moves the heavy curtains made of a soft, dark cloth to the side; outside the sun shines and the view exhibits an immense garden, full of fruity trees, green shrubs and mountains in the background.

The world is green, beautiful and bright, but within him there is only such a big sorrow that no matter how beautiful the vision, he cannot help but see black bodies piled up like garbage. He keeps remembering his shattered home, wrapped in the soot of the bonfires.

His memories absorb him in such a way that he does not listen to what Mina whispers behind his back, he has to turn around and approach the bed. His friend's puffy eyes look at him on the edge of the blanket. Her skin, which is an intense pink colour, looks dull and sick.

"Forgive me, Mina, I didn't hear you, what did you say?"

"I'm sorry."
"No, Mina, no... we've talked about this. It wasn't your fault. It wasn't Kamui's fault. It wasn't Ishiyama's fault. The only culprit is the General's men; they are to blame."

"But if I didn't—"

"If you had been the cause of everything they would have arrested you immediately, but they didn't. His intention was to keep them away, to send us to fight without telling us the truth. They were going to lie to us, they were going to use us for their war. What happened was not your fault."

Mina cries, as she has done every night since Mashirao had to drag her away from the black ruins that were her home.

"You can't let them defeat you," says Mashirao. "Don't let them destroy you."

She nods weakly, when the tears calm down she carefully straightens herself and accepts the bowl of soup he gives her. She eats slowly, sipping without energy and giving small bites to bread and meat. It is the ritual that they have maintained since they arrived there; foods that lengthen and silences that weighs too much.

When the meal on the tray is over, Mashirao begins to collect the dishes.

"Do you want to go for a walk?"

The answer is the same one Mina has given him since day one.

"Maybe later."

But he knows that she won't do it, that she will fall asleep and stay there until nightfall arrives. Then the nightmares will arrive and he will come back to keep her company.

"All right, I'll come back later with dinner."

Mina turns around, she's a cocoon of blankets shrunk against the wall of the room. Neither her hair nor her horns are visible, it is as if all of her disappeared along with her village.

Mashirao leaves with an empty tray, his tail hanging behind him without the usual vigour that characterizes it.

He returns the tray to the kitchen and when he comes out he experiences again the same helplessness and frustration as always. Since they have arrived there he has a lot of free time, they no longer have to worry about fleeing, about feeding, about advancing, and in a certain way he misses it because at least that way he got his mind busy.

Now he cannot stop thinking about the black ruins and the smell of burnt hair.

"How is young Ashido doing?"

He turns around when he hears the voice and when he recognizes the speaker, he bows down in a gesture of absolute respect. Although the person in front of him is a tiny creature that looks like a rodent—long snout, pointy ears and white fur—Mashirao gives him an unwavering devotion.

"She's getting better, sir."

"Really?"

Mashirao straightens slowly while his expression hesitates.
"At least now she talks and eats alone."

"It's an advance, do you think she's ready to go out to the gardens?"

"Not yet, but maybe soon."

"I hope so. How are you? Are you adapting well?"

"I think so... but I'd like to help in some way."

"Do you want a distraction? Well, I'll talk to my officers and we'll see what we can do."

"Thank you very much, Colonel."

"There's nothing to be thankful for, young Ojiro. Ishiyama was my friend, and I'll always regret not having convinced him to move to this region. Anything you can do for the inhabitants of your village is a pleasure for me."

"I will never be able to express my gratitude to you. We had nowhere to go, not after fleeing our troops. Our village had disappeared, our home no longer exists... knowing that this was the only place that would receive us kept us on our feet..."

"All the children of Ishiyama are welcome here. I am ensuring that my men contact all recruits coming from your village to inform them of the situation and offer them our support. For me it is more than enough to see them go ahead and fight. We cannot let this injustice go unpunished. We must ensure that it does not happen again."

"Thank you, sir."

"Well, now come on, if your offer of help still stands, you can accompany me to the meeting I will have."

Mashirao obeys. The corridors of the Colonel's residence are wide, luminous and with large windows behind which the green and unblemished landscape of the mountainous area is displayed. From there you cannot see the sea, only peaks that rise towards the sky hiding the village from the rest of the world. On the walls are exhibited paintings full of landscapes and characters that he does not know, everything there is new, elegant and beautiful.

It is a stark contrast when compared to the remains of his burnt village and his last weeks as an army fugitive.

There are two soldiers guarding an entrance, who bow respectfully before the arrival of the Colonel, one of them opens the door and closes it when both cross it. Inside the rectangular room there is a desk near the window and a circular table in the middle of the room.

The people sitting there get up when the Colonel enters and wait until they see him take a seat before imitating him.

Mashirao knows that in mountain villages it is common for people to show more pronounced special features and not just small details like Mina's horns or her own tail, she knows that there are entire villages of people who exhibit notoriously animal, reptile and insectile characteristics. Colonel Nezu's village is full of eye-catching characters.

To the right of Nezu is Moashi Juzo, his most loyal advisor, a tall man whose upper torso resembles a centipede more than a human. Behind him is the young Togaru Tamakiri who exhibits two blades
at mouth height like those of a mantis. On the other side of the table is the captain of the guard, a young, athletic man with light blonde hair and a bored expression. The most striking thing about him are his immense wings of a red color that keeps tight against his back. Next to him, standing like a motionless statue, is Kaoruko Awata, a woman with light blue skin and vibrant yellow eyes.

"Good morning."

"Good morning, Colonel, the four voices answer in unison."

"Very well, Moashi, have we heard from the General?"

"We have received a crow from Kurogiri. He has granted us an audience."

"I think it's perfect, I want you to make it clear that we won't pay taxes, or send any more supplies, soldiers or weapons, until the culprit of that pyre faces trial for murder and treason."

"If it is proved that Ishiyama had committed treason—"

"They'll have to prove it first, and I doubt they can do it. In the unlikely event that this is true, they will have to prove that the whole village knew about the situation. Which is impossible. No, we want justice for the murder of Ishiyama and all the people who died for no reason. I want you to make that clear."

"As you command, sir."

"Well, Hawks, what news have you got for me?"

"We've closed the borders," says the blond man flapping his wings. "We keep a constant watch on the roads and the mountains. From the news I have managed to gather, Yuuei's army continues to resist, I doubt their supplies will last longer so it is a matter of days before they are forced to leave. The General has mobilized his entire army to protect the ports and the citadel, they won't disturb us."

"They won't, but what about the enemy troop that has settled in the prison?"

"Thanks to Togaru's timely warning, we have followed their trail from the beginning. They faced the army of Shuichi Iguchi successfully, we know that Iguchi was the executor in the assassination of the village Ishiyama, but without him we can't know who gave the order. As for the fugitives, they started collecting food and livestock, they are maintaining the prison, planting fields, chopping down trees. In short, they are settling in. Most of the General's army is on the other side of Hosu so for now they have had a free hand to fortify the place.

"We'll see how that goes. I also want to know how many of Ishiyama's boys have received my message, and how many of them we expect to recover if the General does not deliver the murderer. Kaoruko, how is our guest?"

"Strengthening and getting better; the fracture in the leg is healed without problems. I'm not sure if there will be a limp or not, we'll have to wait until he's ready to get up. And of the wounds on his torso, the most delicate is the one that was near his abdomen, which was where one of the wooden posts went through him, but he has shown no signs of infection or complications. He has been awake for several days, lucid and able to retain information."

"Is Nishiya with him?"

"Young Kouji is assigned as a companion. Nishiya has asked to speak with you."
Nezu sighs, "is you here?"

"Outside."

"Send him in."

Mashirao smiles sadly when Kamui comes in and first approaches him and pats his arm with affection, then immediately turns around and goes on to the other end of the circular table.

"Good morning, Nezu."

"Good morning, Shinji, what did you want to talk to me about?"

"You must contact Yuuei's army and inform them that their prince is here, alive."

"That'd be treason," interrupts Hawks while he smiles dryly.

"Treason is to keep him here without informing the General," replies Kamui.

"When you brought him here we weren't sure that he would survive," says Nezu, "and for the first few weeks he gave the impression that he would not. He's barely recovering, I think the sensible thing to do is to wait."

"Wait for what?"

"Wait and see how this war unfolds."

"I brought the prince of Yuuei here because this is the only place where he could recover without risk. Without Ishiyama I didn't have... I thought you'd help us."

"I did."

"To help is not to keep him a prisoner."

"He is our guest."

"A guest that you will give to the General if the occasion arises? Or a guest that you will exchange with Yuuei as a prisoner of war?"

"I'm sorry, Shinji, but this matter is beyond you. When you brought the prince here you risked us all. If the General finds out he'll have an excuse to replace me as he has always wanted."

"If you keep the prince as a prisoner Yuuei will have an excuse to invade. Talk to the boy, force him to force an alliance, with his help we can face the General."

"Your intention has always been to destroy him, you have risked all these years to help Yuuei, but my responsibility is with mine. Not with them. Yuuei's army has no chance to win. Hawks' reports tell us that they have lost much of their strength, that they run out of supplies, and that it is a matter of days before they have to face another of the General's inventions. No, Yuuei's army won't win. There's no point in waiting for their help when it is obvious that they cannot help themselves."

"If the rumors are true, if the king is dead, then the prince—"

"As far as they know, their prince is also dead, do you think they're going to believe my word? I'm sorry, Shinji, but I need more than the word of a broken prince and a decimated army to even consider joining the enemy and fighting the General. He has an army seven times larger than mine, I
won't sacrifice my people in vain. I won't do the same thing Akaguro did."

"What will you do with him, then?"

"The prince will stay here, and maybe when his army leaves I'll let him go home. That's my last word. Now get out, my officers and I have things to discuss."

With the exception of the three men at the table, they are all on their way to the exit. Mashirao waits until Kamui passes by him to follow him, and remains silent until they have moved away from the office and the guards guarding the entrance.

"Now what?"

"If I can't convince Nezu to communicate with Yuuei's men, I will have to do it myself."

"How?"

"I'll go get them."

"But the Colonel has forbidden it."

"Because his most pressing goal is to get justice for Cementoss."

"Isn't that the most important thing?"

"Do you really think we'll get justice from the General? No one but the Colonel of the region could have ordered the execution of your entire village, but he didn't do it. The order came from above. If it was not given by the General himself it had to be given by someone from his closest circle. Kurogiri or his son, do you think the General would hand over any of them? No. There won't be any justice for Cementoss if we wait for the General. We have to seek justice on our own."

"But the Colonel—"

"Nezu is taking care of his people, we have to force his hand, we have to convince him that there will be no justice unless we demand it. We have to fight."

Mashirao remembers the black ruins and the charred bodies.

"I will go with you."

"No, stay with Mina, she needs you."

"She'll want to come too. She'll want revenge."

[...]

There is so much work that every night Eijirou sleeps as soon as his head is on the pillow; it is not only about patrolling, it is about gathering food, taking inventory, making arrows, expanding crops.
A group of their size gets the job done quickly and efficiently, but it also creates chaos.

The new alpha group settles in barracks that are free. They are so noisy and lively that the omega group asks permission to move their rooms back to the tunnels. They do not go back to their old dormitory but they get installed in one of the large rooms that are on the first floor underground and that used to serve as storage.

Now it is rare to see the omega group unless they are training.

Unfortunately Denki is forbidden to join combat training so Eijirou has to manage to find him. It was easy when he was in the hospital, he could stop by during his breaks, he could eat with him almost every day.

He had become accustomed to sitting by his bed and chatting about any nonsense, he had become accustomed to making him laugh, but then Bakugou had ordered him out with the reconnaissance patrol to watch the supply tower and on his way back he had found that Denki had been discharged.

The worst thing is not actually not being able to see him, but to find him accompanied.

*Because of the sling, Denki cannot help in the kitchen, in the crops, or in the cleaning, but that does not prevent Bakugou from leaving him in charge of the organization and does not take too long to turn it into his filter for complaints and petitions. It becomes common to see them in the same room, always making to-do lists, always chatting.*

Eijirou is surprised by Denki's comfort when he is with Bakugou, the calm and serenity. He wishes he were the one who induces them.

*Because of the sling. Denki cannot train, but that does not prevent him from trying. Since Jirou does not let him participate in the activities with the rest, Denki manages to convince Inasa to teach him how to handle a knife. The alpha gives in on request and it does not take long before he is teaching him to differentiate knives and use one with his healthy arm. They always practice during the early morning, when the sky begins to lose the blackness of the night, two silhouettes of different heights that move on the outer wall.*

Eijirou is intrigued by the spark that shines in Denki's eyes when he is with Inasa, it is all laughter and charm. Bubbly and delicious tenderness. He wishes he could see it up close.

*Because of the sling. Denki is forbidden to sleep with the rest of his group and Momo has a bed reserved for him in the hospital, but that does not prevent him from visiting his companions daily. The problem is that when he returns he sometimes finds Yō when his watch ends.*

Eijirou is annoyed by the alert posture that Denki assumes when he is near Shindo. Tense neck, fixed look, tense jaw. And the alpha is never self-conscious when it comes to approaching him.

"Denki, have you had dinner yet?"

As soon as he hears the question Denki's posture loses its rigidity, he turns towards him with an expression of joyful surprise. The gesture makes something blossom inside him, but Eijirou knows that it is only gratitude for interrupting.

"Haven't you?" asks Denki and Eijirou murmurs an excuse while his eyes are fixed on Shindo.

The alpha smiles and retreats, Eijirou doesn't take his eyes off him until he sees him disappear.

"Are you going to eat or not?"
Looking at Denki is like looking at the sun. His eyes of a bright gold are hypnotic, but the best thing is the reaction he wakes up inside him. Sweet, warm happiness that is born at the base of his stomach and extends to his extremities.

He smiles without being able to avoid it, longing to awaken in Denki the same emotion that he feels.

'Don't push.'

"Will you come with me?"

"Only if you promise to give me the apple puree they give you for dessert."

"I have something better, I can convince Ochako to serve me a double ration. And both would be for you."

To put a smile on Denki's face is as close as to drink fruit juice, it is addictive and very sweet. If he could, he would extend his hands and eat that smile with kisses.

'Don't push.'

"What do you say?"

"I'll settle for just one ration."

In moments like that, as they walk towards the dining room area, Eijirou forgets all the other people who receive Denki's smile and limits himself to chatting with him, smiling, looking at him while he hears him complaining about how sick he is of his sling.

Sometimes he cannot help but think about what will happen once he got home. Will he return to the palace? But, what about Denki?

Is anyone waiting for him out there?

'Don't push.'

He is trying to approach things calmly, trying to give him his space. The problem is that time is running out.

"They're leaving!"

The scream resounds from the top of one of the towers, manages to paralyze the camp for a moment, then everyone is moving. Eijirou runs towards the outer wall with Denki behind him, and at some point Bakugou joins them. They climb the stairs and stop to look in the direction the lookout points.

"What did that mean?" Asks Denki after a moment of silence.

Eijirou has no voice to answer him. There, at the sea, the unmistakable ships of the Yuuei Fleet are moving away from the coast. They are leaving.

"What does 'they are leaving' mean?" Denki repeats.

"Yuuei's army is withdrawing," says Bakugou in a dry tone. "It means there will be no reinforcements. It means no more distractions."

"What?"
Izuku remembers that when he was eight years old his mother attended to a fickle, weeping child who could not stand the smell of medicines or pain. He had broken his left collarbone and spent hours crying until he got tired.

Now Izuku would like to return to that moment, to hear again the agonizing cries of a child who almost broke his throat while kicking and tapping. No doubt it is far better than dealing with a young, imperious, obfuscated omega with a hobby of biting.

Treating Neito not only involves checking that the wound in his belly heals properly, it also requires patience and a lot of temperance. What he gets in return are red hands from the blows he gets, bite marks on his arms when he's not careful, and scratches on his neck, face, and forearms. Treating him involves convincing him, bribing him and forcing him to drink concoctions that will help him regain weight and avoid infections, endure his whining for the taste, his whining for the harsh treatment, and be a constant victim of his sharp, viperine tongue.

There is a lot of anger in him, a lot of pain and sadness, but unlike the omega which shrink until they wither, he does not stop biting. While the union between Itsuka and her alpha seems to be a relationship where both support each other to face difficulties, Hitoshi and Neito are the clear example that they have been mated by force, and although the bond that unites them is there, there is also a constant rejection of the life they share.

Izuku watches them interact in silence. Neito's pain is so intense that when Hitoshi bows down and offers him comfort, Neito clings to him without thinking twice, but the calm doesn't last long because then the omega remembers that this union is a farce and doesn't take long to detach itself releasing irascible and violent comments.

"Go away!"

"Neito."

"No!"

The sad thing is that they only have each other. Neito depends entirely on the food, the affection and the small details that Hitoshi offers him, in return Hitoshi cannot turn a deaf ear to the pain or the agony that his omega feels.

Izuku's arrival represents not only a voice that intercedes between them, but also becomes Neito's favorite attack object.

"How stupid do you have to be to come here by your own free will?"

"I wanted to help."
"Help? Help what? To prolong our miserable existence so that the pain continues?"

"We can change it."

"You and who? There's no one to fight here. There's no one to make a difference."

"There are."

"Oh, yes, I've heard about them. They are the ones who get rid of their children. Well, I don't need help with that. I've lost three, all without anyone's help."

"I'm sorry."

"Why? My kids are smart enough to know they don't want to be born into this world. They'd rather die than live in this cage."

"How long ago...?"

"Shut up! Who told you that you can ask me questions? Just shut your mouth and disappear."

He is in a state of depression that makes him jump from one emotion to another without pause or warning. He can shout and curse loudly for a long time until he is silent, turns and cries with clenched teeth and a tense body.

In that dome there is no hiding place where Izuku can rest during the day, he has to stay in the area of the cages. If Neito allows it, he can sleep in his cell while the alpha leaves to work. If the omega needs space, Izuku can usually be accommodated in any other corner.

From time to time Izuku takes turns with some omega to go down to the kitchen instead, he dresses like one of them and works organizing supplies, making infusions, medicines and helping to improve the diet of the group in general. He repeats the same work he did in Itsuka's dome, but now he is alone and there are few omega who dare to help him. The difference between the two domes is very big.

Itsuka is the voice and the guide in her group, the one that instigates, asks questions and imposes herself. In Neito's dome nobody has that role, the difference is shown not only in how they behave when they see him—some distrust him, others are shy—, but also in the number of pregnant consorts. There are almost twice as many young omega pregnant women.

There is one in particular whose alpha has made the decision to move to another floor.

"Why do they do that?" Izuku asks Hitoshi, on one of the rare days when Neito sleeps after a long struggle to change his bandages and check his wounds. "It's assumed that during the last three months is when the omega begins to prepare its nest, needs its alpha to prepare for childbirth. I'm surprised he doesn't feel the urge to stay with her."

"Haven't you noticed?"

"Noticed what?"

"The smell."

Izuku blinks and understands. The omega has crossed the seven-month barrier, her natural aroma—lemon—has begun to fade to give way to the unmistakable traces of honey and milk. There will come a time when her aroma will be entirely like sweet milk.
"Wait, you're telling me it's common? Other alphas have done it too?"

"Not all of them, but some prefer to distance themselves for a while."

"Who takes care of the omega?"

"His companions... sometimes the omegas without tongue come down to lend a hand."

"But the aroma of honey starts to appear two or three months earlier."

"And yet you'll see an alpha sleeping near the stairs or in some dark corner during that time."

"But it's not like it's the same thing."

Hitoshi yawns, the dark circles on his face are always deep and marked. He is always the last to fall asleep and the first to wake up.

"It's not the same thing," insists Izuku.

"Can you tell the difference?"

"Well, I've only been in front of incense once, but it has very sweet, cloying tones. I knew it wasn't natural."

"Deep down we all know there's a difference. We don't react the same, it doesn't leave you blank, but when you smell it... If we are being fair not everyone runs away, but it's difficult. If we ever get out of here... aahh, I think that anyone who gets out of here won't be able to smell that smell again without feeling fear and repulsion. It's terrible, to think that they've even taken something as simple as that from us."

"But after childbirth the omega still smells like milk, at least for a couple more weeks."

"Sometimes, when the omega recovers its normal aroma, the alpha returns to its cell. The truth is that many are grateful that the puppies don't stay after birth."

"Is it because they also smell like sweet milk?"

"Yes, even more than the parents."

Izuku nods silently and lets the conversation die. That night he has to take turns on the upper floor and while he is working he does not stop thinking about that conversation.

_The pups smell like milk._

The idea does not leave him alone, and for the next few days it comes back to him again and again, while he eats, while he cares for his patients, while he tries to sleep.

_The pups smell like milk._

The lemon scent disappears completely and is replaced by the delicate sweet milk scent that slowly thickens. Izuku makes constant visits, he knows that once the aroma reaches its highest note it will be a matter of days for the delivery.

But even as the milk aroma thickens, Izuku notices subtle traces of fear in her. Fear. Sadness. Pain. They are faint, but they are still there, and they are unmistakable when you spend a lot of time with the omega.
As the days go by, Izuku keeps his attention on his new patient, trying to remember the scent of incense that enemies use. It is impossible for him to believe that they could imitate such a perfect note, even enhance it, since the original aroma has to be necessarily contaminated with the omega's emotions.

'Even after childbirth,' Izuku thinks one day while trying to sleep, 'the milk aroma will only last a couple of weeks before the omega recovers its natural aroma. When and how did they copy it? He does not see them coming down to take their blood, nor to study them. They let them languish in these cells without help. They do not die because the bond allows them to endure the pain, but if that were not the case...'

Izuku stops stirring between the blankets and looks at his hands.

'The death rate among the omegas is high, but not as high as it would be if they did not have a companion. The presence of his alpha gives them security, comfort, and emotional support. Is that why they force them to mate? To prevent most omegas from dying during pregnancy, why?'

'Pupps smell like milk.' The thought comes back to him strongly, he knows it is important, but his mind refuses to join extremes.

'Pupps smell of milk, it is said, they smell of honey with milk with an intensity even greater than that of their parents. Wait, let us go back a bit. During the last two months of pregnancy the aroma of the omega begins to mutate, it begins to acquire the characteristic aroma of honey and milk. The aroma that identifies a pregnant omega, which activates the protective reaction of their alpha and generates pheromones to deter any attacker. This aroma grows until it reaches its peak and then it is time to give birth. After a few weeks the omega will recover its natural aroma and it is the pupps that smell of sweet honey, but not forever. Pupps stop smelling of honey when they acquire their own aroma, which is almost always a year after they are born.'

Izuku shakes.

"A year," he murmurs quietly as he remembers what Itsuka told him.

"None of our children live longer than a year."

He straightens between the blankets with his eyes fixed on something that is not there.

'They are using the pupps to create incense and when they cease to be useful they get rid of them. To ensure a steady flow of babies they use the matings. No matter what failures they have, how much incense can a baby who lives and breathes for an entire year provide? A pup who does not feel fear, someone whose scent is not contaminated with stress and death.'

He moves away from his niche and gets up, but there is no one with him. The alpha group is working and the omega group are in their daily chores. With him there is only Neito, shrunken in his corner.

'Breathe'

He forces himself to sit down again.

'Everyone believes that the scent belongs to a pregnant omega, but it is not them... it is the aroma of their children... but if so then my theory is true. Incense does not work if there is an omega present... Will it be enough? Just be there, or does one need something else?'

The questions do not leave him alone, he cannot sleep while he discards theories and proposes
That night when Hitoshi returns from work Izuku approaches him as soon as he crosses the cell door.

"I need your help."

"For what?"

"I need you to make a map of all the tunnels you know. I need you to show me where the domes of the new couples are, the tunnel leading to the pier, and the exit you promised me."

"Neito still—"

"I'll stay here until I'm out of danger, but I can't waste any more time."

"Why do you want to go to the pier? Surveillance there is impossible to circumvent."

"I know someone who works in the prison near the entrance, I have to see him, I have to talk to him and convince him to send a letter."

"Who are you going to write to?"

"To Kamui, hopefully he will be able to communicate with Aizawa—"

"Aizawa? Shota Aizawa?"

"Do you know him?"

"Who are you? Why are you here?"

"It's a long story."

"Well, I want to hear it."

"What? No, I don't have time. You have to—"

Hitoshi grabs him by the arm before he can say anything else.

"Shota Aizawa is my mother's brother, he's my uncle, how do you know him, does he know you're here? How could it be possible that he sent you here?"

"Hey, let go, no, he didn't send me, let go of me!"

He rubs his arm and looks at Hitoshi who gives him back an anxious expression.

"I'll tell you the truth if you promise to give me the maps and help me send the message."

"If you really know Aizawa, I will help you in any way I can."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want you to stay here tomorrow."

"What? No, Neito will be punished if I miss work."

"You won't miss it, I need you to let me take your place."
Chapter End Notes

A plotwist huh? *Bet'cha didn't see it coming tho* (☞ﾟヮﾟ☜)

Good News: We finally know where the prince is.
Bad News: They won't let him go away.

Good News: We've got out Kirikami.
Bad News: Denki has admirers wherever he goes and its driving Eijirou crazyy.

Good News: Izuku is a bright kid and has the ability to gather information and make conclusions at the speed of light.
Bad News: Now that he has decided to play Sherlock Holmes, what could go wrong?

*(Oh my god I was planning to congratulate mothers for their day earlier rather than later but the irony with today's chapter made me think otherwise.... I'm so sorry aaghh)*

Next Chapter on May 19th.

"Ouji"

End Notes

Do you want to know more about the story? Check out Roquel's *Flower Archive* where she has extra tidbits about her world and characters [here](#)!

Works inspired by this one

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!