If I Only Had a Heart

by LunartheDragon

Summary

Being born quirkless wasn’t a curse, Midoriya Izuku refused to believe that, and he would show the world through astonishing intellect, bravery, and a heart that feels for all paths he crosses that this is true. Even when damaged, ridiculed, and put down, he will be strong, for all these things are a challenge. A challenge from the very universe to become something great and change the foundation of society as he knows it.

Notes

I've seen some stories where Izuku is quirkless but becomes powerful through his own
training like Saitama, but I thought maybe he could be a bit more like Genos/Cyborg with a sprinkling of Tony Stark instead. First few chapters will be the outcome of his change and path towards UA, laying out this butterfly effect.
The Beginning

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Little Izuku! Always so nice to see you here.”

A messy puff of green hair bobbed over towards the counter, the most blinding of grins just beneath. The young boy has a backpack too big for himself on his back and his arms are full with an assortment of books that he struggles to push up onto the counter but the older woman behind it helps pull them up.

“I didn’t see you come in. How long have you been here?” the woman continues. On her breast pocket sits a nametag referring to her as the librarian and with just the name “Chichi” handwritten underneath.

“Hi Chichi-san!” Izuku singsongs up at her and grins a little bigger before pouting his lips in thought, swaying back and forth a little while Chichi waits patiently. “I’ve been here… since… school got out?” Chichi frowns.

“That’s almost three hours, dear, does your mother know where you are?”

“Yes ma’am!” Izuku quickly brightens, “I came straight from home.” It wasn’t uncommon to see the young boy at the library. In fact, it was more uncommon if he wasn’t there at all, and he’d quickly won over the hearts of the staff within the first few days of his regular visits.

Chichi chuckles and nods – she trusted Midoriya Inko and her son not to do anything reckless – and begins looking through the books Izuku wanted to check out. The top few were comic books, of course, centering around All Might, and Chichi’s smile turns strained. “Still studying to be a hero, I see,” she begins slowly, looking over at the little boy, who nods excitedly. She hated telling young children what they couldn’t do with their future, but she also would hate to send them off with false hope. “Well, good luck and be careful, young man,” she says, forcing some lightness into her voice.

It doesn’t seem to fool Izuku, however, and now it’s his turn to strain a smile. He’s a smart boy, smarter than Chichi, and he can tell what she’s thinking. Someone who is quirkless should avoid such dangerous lifestyles, no matter how brilliant. All he says, however, is a quiet, “Yes ma’am.”

The next books in the stack are also expected but no matter send Chichi and the other librarians for a loop every time. “Little Izuku… You’re sure you don’t want to get something a little… closer to your age demographic?”

Midoriya Izuku was a young boy of five, soon to be six in a few days, and he was one of the smartest people Chichi had ever known. Innocent, certainly, but smart.

Izuku pouts immediately, no strained smiles with this. “Those are all boring, though,” he mumbles, ducking his head and hiding his face behind his curls. Chichi sighs but finally smiles and nods.

“Okay, dear, you know I always want to check,” she says and scans all the books into the computer before handing them over to the giddy boy. Izuku takes a second to adjust them in his small arms before grinning again up at Chichi.

“Thank you, Chichi-san!” he exclaims a bit too loudly for the library but Chichi lets it slide. He looks far too happy for her to try to silence him, and he walks out of the library with his comic books, two
high school level books on math and science, and five books on robotic engineering.

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“Izu! Sweetie! Come wash your hands before dinner!”

Izuku’s head pops up from where it had been buried in one of his books, the massive thing looking comical in his small grasp. He had run straight home after his stay at the library and hunkered down in his room with his new treasure. He had had every intention of tinkering with a few of his little gadgets on his work bench, which was really just a second desk covered in metal and tools, but he had been enamored with one of his books when it had begun talking about shock absorbing materials and how certain ones were crafted. If he could make his own, or get his hands on some, he could make much sturdier gadgets.

Izuku glances at his workbench. Of course, he didn’t really need sturdy for a bot that helped tie shoes or a glove that clipped your nails, because those were the ones he was working on, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t start working on something that needed to absorb more impact force.

“Izuku!”

Oh, that was his mom’s warning tone. The young boy frantically looks for a bookmark and when he doesn’t find one he just rushes out of his room with book in hand. He sets the open book on the table and as he’s hurrying to the sink to wash his hands his mom looks up and sighs.

“Izu, you know the rule about books on the table,” Inko warns, though she’s smiling just a little. Izuku is scrubbing his little hands, standing on a stool to reach the sink, and nods a little abashedly.

“Yes ma’am, but I couldn’t find a bookmark and it was a really good part and do you think I should make a bookmark robot? That’d be cool! I could make you one too and it can be purple because you like purple and—“ Inko steps over and sets her hands on Izuku’s shoulders, smiling brightly and laughing.

“Izu, breath. I think a little bookmark robot would be adorable,” she says and presses a kiss to her son’s cheek that has him giggling. “But first, dinner.” Izuku finishes up and begins helping set the table. He needs to move the stepping stool over to the right cabinet first and he pulls a lever on it to raise it up, one of his own inventions, and cranks it again to lower it and head towards the table. He has to move the book to the couch, finally finding one of his All Might bookmarks on the coffee table, then finally hunkers down for food.

A few minutes into dinner, after Inko asks about school and Izuku’s trip to the nearby library, she decides to ask, “So what was so interesting in that book of yours?”

She loves how her son immediately brightens, almost as much as he would if he were asked about heroics, and Izuku loves that Inko asks at all. His mother is a lot more accepting of his love for electronics. Not to say she doesn’t approve of his love for heroes, but he isn’t a fool. He can see the sad look in her eyes when he talks about it. Can see she wants to protect him because he’s quirkless. Can see it easily because nearly every adult treats him that way, while the kids his own age are just outright cruel. With science, however, Inko is more open and eager to encourage Izuku. It isn’t perfect, but Izuku takes what he can.

“Do you know what a polyurethane is?” Izuku begins, his mouth stuffed with rice.

“Swallow, Izu, and no, I do not. Can I guess?” Inko smiles as Izuku nods. She makes a show of thinking, humming and tapping her chin, before offering, “Is it a chemical?” Izuku giggles and
shakes his head.

“No! It’s a material that, well, they use it for shock absorbing materials, mostly. But there was this one that was cool, it was a viscoelastic urethane that—“

“Oh? But you just called it polyurethane, now it’s just urethane? What is the difference?”

“Urethane is just a simpler way of saying polyurethane… Though ethyl carbamate’s also called urethane…”

“Oh dear, that must be confusing!”

“Not really!” Inko tries hard not to laugh at Izuku’s bright and blunt response. It reminded her of how young he really was, but how humorous that it was being applied to such an advanced topic. “Anyway, viscoelastic means…”

They go on like this for a while. Izuku going into great depth about his research and how it works and his new plans for his robotics, with Inko listening as best she can, not understanding the majority of it, but still so happy to see her son excited and happy. Eventually the conversation changes to Izuku’s other research on heroes. He has a notebook he’s been keeping on heroes and their quirks. Well, actually now he has three. Five if you include the two filled with ideas on machines that could improve these heroes. He calls them support tools and always gets an adorably disgruntled look on his face when he says he’s surprised no one else has tried to make some of these things before.

While they are cleaning up after dinner Inko hums to get her son’s attention. He has raised his stool and is leaning over the sink scrubbing at the dishes, a long scrubber in hand with a spinning head, like a toothbrush. Yet another of Izuku’s inventions. “Your birthday is coming up, Izu. What are you looking forward to getting?” Inko asks.

Izuku quickly looks up at her with big eyes before taking a breath and letting out a long string of words. “Oh oh! There’s a new All Might action figure that came out that’s limited edition – limited edition, mom! – that has a button you press and it goes ‘I am here!’” Inko smacks a hand to her mouth to keep from laughing at her son’s near perfect impression of the number one hero. “And there’s this cool new All Might watch Kacchan got that I really, really want. It lights up blue and red and you can set different alarms with different chimes of All Might talking!”

He continues listing off all kinds of All Might related gifts, a few scientific kits sprinkled in here and there, while Inko nods and smiles, thinking that this really was a good life she had here with her son.

Izuku loved his birthday. The kids at school mostly left him alone – at least having the common decency to not treated him too bad on his special day – he got awesome presents, usually All Might or hero related, a few science kits, a few gadgets, and even a call from his dad. At least, that last one was supposed to happen. Last year’s unfortunately hadn’t and the year before that had been a few days late, but Izuku held out hope.

So yes, Izuku loved his birthday, but this years was just a tad more strained than usual. He had found himself after school sitting on the floor of the Bakugou’s living room while his mother sat and spoke with Bakugou Mitsuki on the couch nearby. Izuku was silent as he eyed his closest friend, who was just as silent, eying him back. Were they even still friends? Izuku thought so, at least a little. More of a friend than anyone else in the class, which even Izuku knew was a little sad. And while in the past this was not an uncommon occurrence, it now felt stilted and forced.
Despite that they found themselves on play dates every now and again, and while, yes, they were more difficult now and made Izuku anxious the better part of the time, it wasn’t really that bad. Some days it was even a little nice.

When the other kids were around, singing Katsuki’s praise, Katsuki was crueler, calling Izuku cruel things, claiming things about Izuku that made him want to cry and lash out at the same time. No matter where they were Izuku was Deku to Katsuki, but with the other kids that was something bad. He was shitty nerd Deku – and really where had he learned that language? – but when they were alone it was just Deku. Not friendly, but not cruel either.

Izuku didn’t know what that meant, he hoped it was something good, but really the best parts of these visits was that Katsuki would help him with some of his experiments. Katsuki didn’t like anyone else knowing about that, and made Izuku swear to never say, but Izuku didn’t really mind. Not when, in these fleeting moments, they were the best of friends again. Not when, when an experiment succeeded, they both were elated and happy. Even when something failed it was awesome. It was either something simple and when both of them brainstormed together it was easy to find a solution, or it was spectacular and they ended up laughing on the ground until they couldn’t breath.

“I brought something,” Izuku finally says, “I think you’d like it.” His voice is low, not yet his mutter but close. Despite having so much fun during their experiments the lead up was still difficult. Nerve-racking really.

Katsuki crosses his little arms and glares, waiting, before snapping, “Well? What is it already?” Izuku blinks before looking over to their mothers. He knew that tone. It was Katsuki’s ‘I’m a tough guy and am trying to sound tough but actually I’m excited and impatient.’

“Auntie? Can we go in the backyard?” he asks instead of answering Katsuki directly and Mitsuki looks over, smiling brightly.

“Of course, Izu-chan! Be good!” she says sweetly then turns to her own son and says a little more hotly, “Don’t you dare burn anything down, this time.”

Katsuki looks immediately affronted and exclaims, “What the hell?? He could burn something down too, the psycho! Why only me??” Izuku tries not to laugh when Katsuki is ignored. The blonde growls and instead gets up and stomps towards his backyard, dragging along Izuku. When they make it outside Izuku plops onto the ground and starts shuffling through his backpack while Katsuki stands with his arms crossed, glaring at him as he waits. He doesn’t have to wait long, however, as Izuku pulls out two pairs of child sized bracers. They appear to be encircled my multiple canisters, not very large, each a different color. He hands them to his friend.

“What the hell are these?” Katsuki snaps despite slipping on the bracers and examining them. The canisters appear to be able to move around the wrist, one clicking into place with a tiny valve on each wrist that points directly at the blonde’s palms.

Izuku is grinning excitedly, a slightly manic look in his eyes that he gets when he’s experimenting with his devices, when Katsuki looks up at him. “I call them firework flashers! Go ahead! Pick a canister!” Katsuki does so. He begins moving the canisters, the bracers clicking with each change, and decides to go with green on one hand and blue on the other. “Okay, now flex your hand like this,” Izuku shows his own hand and flexes his fingers back towards himself, palm out. Katsuki does so with both. He’s oddly accepting of being told what to do when it comes to these experiments, but that was only because no one else was around and sometimes, only sometimes, the nerd came up with something even he had to admit was cool. It also helped it was his birthday. “Okay, now, explosion!”
Katsuki makes both his palms explode and immediately the fiery blasts turn into a blue and purple display. Katsuki blinks in surprise while Izuku whoops excitedly and goes to grab his notes. As nervous as Katsuki made him, nowadays, nothing could keep him from getting excited over a good experiment. Izuku writes down his observations while Katsuki fiddles with the canisters. He sets off two bright red explosions and begins to grin. Next a pink and a yellow and he’s beginning to cackle. Soon he’s setting off a rainbow of explosions around him, laughing his own manic laugh while Izuku isn’t far behind. They’ll find out later that their mothers were filming them from the sliding back door.

These moments are rare and far between nowadays for Izuku, where he and his maybe-friend get to actually just be friends again, but they are always so wonderful and worth the wait.

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Izuku sat anxiously in front of the computer, staring hard at the video conference application and his father’s name in the list of contacts. It was a short list. It was his own account so it had his mother, his father, auntie and uncle Bakugou, Katsuki himself, a local computer programmer the Midoriya’s knew that was always happy to give Izuku programming tips, and one of their neighbors as an emergency contact.

Inko stood off to the side, arms crossed. Izuku could see her expression in the reflection of the darker parts of the screen. He was worried, and the thing that worried him most was that she hardly had an expression at all. It was just a void as she too stared at the screen.

They had been like this for the last two hours since returning home from the Bakugou household.

Izuku patted his hands against the edge of the desk a few times, still staring. He was smart. He could piece together a lot of things. That did not necessarily mean he wanted to accept them. He thinks maybe he had figured it out last year but had simply decided it had to be an anomaly. A single incident. But now…

“He isn’t going to call, is he?” he suddenly says, his voice quiet as he slowly lowers his head. He doesn’t see if his mother’s expression changes but he hears her step a little closer, hesitant.

“I wouldn’t say…” she begins but seems to think better of herself before sighing and trying again. She sounds sad too. “No, sweetie… I don’t think he is.”

That’s all Izuku needs to hear for the floodgates to open. The affirmative from someone else, telling him his guess, and his fears, are true, has the fat, ugly tears rolling. He hiccups loudly and a soft whine escapes him, his tiny hands clutching at his shirt, not really sure what to do with them. In a heartbeat his mother is there, wrapping her arms around him, her own tears wetting his hair. The situation seems familiar, Izuku crying in the computer chair with his mother holding him tight, like she’s trying to hold him together.

This time, however, her apologies don’t feel like a nail in the coffin, like his world is beating him up with all the people he cares about. This time it feels like someone really does care about him and will stay with him through all of his pain and grief.

He reaches up and hugs his mother right back, wailing into her hair.

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A week later a package in the mail arrives from Midoriya Hisashi. Izuku, when he slips out of his room for dinner, finds his mother glaring at it after she had put it on the kitchen table. Izuku’s mother
only glares when something deserves it and suddenly he is wary. When she spots her son her expression softens some, but there is still an obvious edge to it.

“It’s from your father,” she says as he looks at the postage. There’s a long pause and she adds, “You don’t have to open it. We could send it right back.” Izuku wonders if that’s what his mom wants to do, but Izuku is curious. He doesn’t feel angry or upset or sad or happy. There is an odd disjointed feeling towards the whole situation that he feels won’t last long, but he may as well see what his father sent him.

They open the box and pull out what appears to be a camera. Izuku turns over the box and reads what features the camera has, his expression and feelings still not really present. After a while, Inko staring at Izuku carefully, waiting for a response, the six-year-old boy says, “Think he knows I could probably build this with a toaster?” It’s obviously not true, he would need plenty more components than a toaster has to offer to build a camera, but it would still be easy.

And besides, the surprised, delighted sound that comes from his mother followed by her bright laughter finally has Izuku smiling and laughing as well.

They set the camera by the front door. Izuku decides he will sell it at a nearby pawn shop he’s been going to to get a lot of his gadget parts. May as well put it to some kind of use.

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Izuku takes the camera to the pawnshop the next Saturday. It isn’t far and he decides to browse a little bit. He has a little bit of birthday money with him and he purchases a broken radio, a pair of walkie-talkies, and a Walkman. He hasn’t made too many machines that have anything to do with audio and he thinks he should give it a shot and challenge himself. If an issue arises he can’t immediately logic himself out of or experiment a bit to find the solution, he can always run back by the library and grab a book on audio devices.

The man that works at the pawnshop recognizes Izuku immediately, smiling big around a lollipop he claims keeps him from craving a cigarette, and checks Izuku out, giving the kid a family discount. He’s a man of few words, however, and soon Izuku is out and walking, purchases in his work backpack. It’s made of leather and he specifically uses it when he is going out getting supplies for his builds or bringing experiments around.

Down the street is an art store he goes to for scrap metal. It isn’t actually sold there, but the owner is a sculptor that works heavily with metals. It had been a stroke of luck that Inko had met her while out getting groceries and had begged to know where a good place to get scrap was, her son the only thing on her mind. The location was a little far out for their liking, however, but the store was not, and so every weekend Izuku or Inko would drop by to grab a bag full of scrap metal from the woman.

Inko tried to pay the sculptor but the woman had simply shook her head and said it was worth helping a kid out with their dreams.

As Izuku enters he is almost immediately spotted by a glowing pair of green eyes. He yelps, he can’t help himself, as the tall, burly woman comes rushing over. She’s grinning brightly and wearing a tank top that shows off her elegant sleeve tattoos, her pink hair cut short, and her eyes still glowing a faint green. Izuku always thought she was pretty cool, if not a little intimidating.

“Izuku-chan! So good to see you so bright and early!” she says with a laugh. It always seemed like the artist was laughing.
“H-hi Hatsume-san,” Izuku raises a sheepish hand in greeting. He really should be used to the woman by now, but it was difficult. She was just so… much.

“Aw! Can’t you call me Āto by now?” she pouts before immediately brushing it off and turning around, already over it. Izuku never was sure if she was serious or not. “I have your scrap for you over behind the counter,” she sing songs as they walk through the aisles of the little art store. Apparently it was actually Hatsume’s husband’s store and this was how they had originally met, but no one would guess that with how she ran the place. “Oh! And my dear sweet daughter is here! Did you want to say hi?”

Izuku’s eyes widen in sudden panic. Hatsume Mei was a terrifying little gremlin and no one could convince Izuku otherwise. And by the way her mother was smirking back at him made him know she knew that too. He shakes his head frantically for good measure, however, and she laughs brightly.

It turns out his opinion really doesn’t matter, however, as sitting on a stool at one end of the corner is the pink-haired beast herself, scribbling frantically at a piece of paper in front of her. At their approach she looks up, zeroes in on Izuku, and her eyes narrow darkly.

Usually that look means something cruel. The kids at school shoot it at him all the time, seeing him as worthless and nothing and pathetic. It’s cruel, but he is used to it. It makes him sad, but he knows how to keep pushing onward.

From Mei it is not cruel, but it is absolutely terrifying.

“My rival,” she hisses viciously and Izuku gulps, stepping away from her as he begins to shake. Suddenly her eyes seem to shift and change as she zooms in on him and he gulps, shifting as if to cover himself up, like she has x-ray vision instead of built in binoculars.

“P-please stop,” he mumbles, peaking up at her through his curls and her eyes narrow a bit more before she huffs and goes back to whatever she’s scribbling.

“Fine. But only ‘cause you said ‘please’ and mama says that a boy that says please is rare,” Mei says and her mother chortles loudly at that, nodding, calling her daughter a good girl as she brings the scrap metal around to Izuku.

“Fresh metal!” she says brightly, “Well, not really, but who cares. What are you planning on building next, anyway?” At that question Izuku notices Mei peak up again, more discreet this time, but Izuku is too excited now to care.

“Oh! Well, I’m working on this little bot that is just this ring, but then can roll out into a bookmark since I keep losing mine. And now I have some audio equipment so I was going to see what I could do with that. I was thinking—“

Izuku is suddenly cut off as Āto’s phone suddenly begins blasting an alarm. It is as loud and obnoxious as she is, really, and that seems fitting, but the sudden concerned look on her face as she looks at her screen isn’t. She looks around, as if listening for something, and Izuku does the same. He isn’t sure but he thinks he hears some kind of crash in the distance. Of what and how far, he doesn’t know.

Āto claps her hands, getting his attention again, and begins speaking loud enough for store customers to hear her as well. “I’m sure you all also just got one, but it looks like we have a villain alert in the area.” Izuku suddenly perks up, eyes widening and he steps closer.

“Don’t know, a giant class, and yes,” Āto answers the questions in order then begins addressing everyone again, beginning to look a little worried which only makes her agitated. “You read the notice! We’re in the path and we gotta get out of it. Everyone make your way out and East towards —“ Suddenly a loud bang makes the building shake violently, lights flickering, trying desperately to stay on, but ultimately failing. The few customers present shriek in surprise, Mei letting out a whimper and crawling off her stool.

“Shit,” Hatsume Āto curses under her breath and now her tone turns much more frantic. “Everybody move! Get out now! You kids, come on,” she looks back at her daughter, who nods jerkingly, and Izuku. Izuku is suddenly very quiet and bug-eyed. He numbly drops his work backpack and his scrap metal when Hatsume tells him, too dangerous to carry around in an emergency, and begins following her.

Midoriya Izuku adores heroes and their fights with villains. Any time he sees a crowd watching a fight from a distance he feels he has to rush to catch a glimpse, pulling out his notebooks and muttering the whole while. But that had always been from a distance, from the outside. He had never actually been a part of a villain attack, or in one’s path as this one seemed to be. He didn’t even know which hero was fighting this apparent giant, and in this moment he suddenly couldn’t bring himself to care.

His hands were shaking and tears were beginning to pool in his eyes. He was whimpering but no one could hear it over the frantic voices filling the air, and he had never heard such fearful voices. From anyone, but certainly never tough as nails Hatsume Āto. Mei was stumbling along as well, looking terrified, and when she looked back at him he realized that he was terrified too. He was scared.

Another bang and quake, so close and violent it made Izuku stumble and only begin to cry harder. He was so scared. He didn’t want to be here. He wanted to be home. He wanted his mom. He wanted—

The next crash makes the world shake and suddenly pieces of the building are crumbling and tumbling and falling. A light swings down and explodes right in their path, separating Izuku from Hatsume. He can hear Āto screaming from the other side of the wall of dust, but a falling piece of aisle stops them from getting back to each other. Izuku freezes for a moment then wipes frantically at his face, dirt and tears smearing, and calls out for someone, anyone, to come get him, to get a hero or just to tell him where to go, but more trembling roars drown him out.

Maybe if he stands still they’ll be able to find him, but that doesn’t seem like a good idea. Smoke and clouds of debris are everywhere and he thinks he can smell a fire somewhere. He hiccups and chokes on his tears but forces himself to try to find a way out. Only when he turns, however, does he see Mei a few feet away, sitting on the ground, crying her eyes out, wheezing and sobbing, shaking just like Izuku. He hadn’t realized she had been separated with him.

The sight does something to the young boy. Something he has felt before when he jumps between some kid and Katsuki without thinking, and while he’s still crying thick tears, he manages with a bit more ease to walk forward and extend his hand.

“Hey!” Izuku has to raise his voice over the rumbling. Another crash and shake has both children squeezing their eyes closed and whimpering, but as it subsides they look at each other. Mei blinks at Izuku like it’s the first time seeing him and he swallows. “W-w-we can m-make it out, but we have to b-be smart. You’re smart, right?”
Mei’s jaw clenches, as if even in the most terrifying of circumstances she must show off and defend her intellect.

She nods.

“A-and I’m smart. So if w-we’re both smart t-together, we should be able to get out.”

Mei stares at him hard for a few moments, both of them terrified and shaking and crying but both of them brilliant and stubborn as hell, and she reaches up to take his hand and stand. “Okay, but you’re still my rival,” the pink-haired girl says, her voice wobbly, and they set off. Both of them are shaking and have been scared weak, but holding each other’s hands, forcing themselves forward for each other’s sake makes it a little easier. Every time the building shakes they both stop and scream, holding just a bit tighter, but soon are pushing forward, tears running down both of their faces.

They hear what they assume is the villain screaming as they both crawl under a fallen vent and see the street just out front of the store. Āto is there, being held back by two civilians as she fights tooth and nail to get back into her store. “Let me go!” she’s screaming, and she must be loud because they can hear her over the crashing and rumbling, “I have to get my kids!”

Mei is quick to yell out. Letting go of Izuku’s hand to sprint forward, her terror being replaced by adrenaline fueled relief at the sight of her mother. Āto seems to freeze and quickly crouches down when she’s released to scoop Mei up when she gets there.

Izuku isn’t far behind, yelling out in relief as well, but Āto is not his mother. He is beyond relieved, but he does not have to same boost of energy Mei had, as well as just the natural speed as the girl, and when Āto looks up towards him, her eyes widen in horror, flicking upwards towards something Izuku can’t see. She begins screaming again, now frantic, but not even she can yell over the rolling wave of noise that hits Izuku as the ground shakes and a great, titanic smash is heard above him. He’s foolish and stops to look up, but he doubts he could have made it if he’d kept running anyway.

Like in slow motion the roof comes plummeting down towards Izuku. All at once he feels everything, and then nothing, the world gone black.

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The world isn’t full. Isn't right.

It comes in and out in pieces.

Black then red then grey then black again.

There’s a haze everywhere, in the world or in his head he isn’t sure.

He moves but he can’t. He thinks he should but something is holding him down.

He tries to blink some of the haze away but only one side works. The other is frozen or not there, he isn’t sure.

His legs are tingly. Should they hurt? He tries to look down but everything swims.

Grey red black.

The world is swimming. It’s grey again, shades of it, he can see a little but it hurts. Why does it hurt?

It’s so dark.
There’s something beside him. Something big and grey and heavy. How does he know it’s heavy?

He tries to turn his head. Focus focus focus.

His face hurts. Why does it hurt? His legs don’t.

There’s a boulder beside him. He thinks it’s a boulder. It came from the building. The bottom is red.

Why is it red? He tries to look.

He should have an arm there. He should have an arm where the boulder and the red start. The red.

The blood.

The pain starts then, lances through him, through something mangled and not right underneath the boulder. Through his face. His legs don’t hurt.

Izuku screams.

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He blacked out, he knows he did because nothing was moving a moment ago. Now the building above him shifts. Pieces of roof and metal and wall are moving like they’re alive. The grey and shadows are speared by rays of light. The pain is still there but it hurts to scream. It feels kind of numb anyway.

There’s a new shadow and the edge of the raised building pieces. Then another. And another. They look like people. Are they people? Izuku hopes they’re people.

Someone slides in, someone in a lot of white. They clank when they move. That’s weird. Izuku just stares, numb in body and mind.

The clanking person hisses as if in pain but then speaks. It sounds kind, the tone, but Izuku can’t hear the words.

There’s flashing lights outside the building. He can pick up on them as more of the pieces are moved. A hand on his shoulder makes him look back to the clanking man.

He tries to talk, but it’s hard. Nothing comes out, like when he cries so hard his throat closes up. Was he crying? He thinks he is, but there are only tears on one side of his face. It hurts. It hurts. It hurts.

“It hurts,” he somehow miraculously manages. His brain won’t do what he tells it to and some weird part of him finds that to be the most frustrating part of the whole thing, but at least his beginning to see. To hear. To speak. To feel the pain, pain, pain.

“It hurts,” he somehow miraculously manages. His brain won’t do what he tells it to and some weird part of him finds that to be the most frustrating part of the whole thing, but at least his beginning to see. To hear. To speak. To feel the pain, pain, pain.

“I know, I know, buddy,” says the clanking man and Izuku was right, he has a very nice voice. Strong and confident, yet soft and kind and reassuring. “You’re being so brave, you know that? So brave. And we’re going to get you out of here.”

Izuku just stares at him. He’s beginning to make out the lines of what looks like a helmet, but something is wrong. It’s almost like he can’t quite tell how close he is. How far away. Something’s wrong. Something’s wrong and why can’t he figure out what it is?

More of the building is moving.

“I need you to be brave for me a little bit longer, okay?” the clanking man continues. “Can you do that? What’s your name?”
“No… stranger…” Izuku croaks and some part of him later will find it funny he was still worried about strangers like his mom told him to be. The clanking man chuckles and moves to take off his helmet, kind red eyes looking back at Izuku now.

“Good kid. But I’m not a stranger. My name is Ingenium and I’m a hero. Me and my team are going to help you.”

Ingenium… Izuku knows that name anywhere, even in his blurry, creaking mind. “Izuku…” he finally offers, weak and tired and scared but hopeful.

“Nice to meet you Izuku, now just stay—wait, no no no, don’t fall asleep. Stay awake, okay? Stay with me. Come on, Izuku, it’s okay, please don’t fall—“

Izuku falls away from the world once more, wishing he could apologize for causing the frantic sound in the hero’s voice.

Chapter End Notes

Coming back and adding some chapter songs! Hope you guys enjoy!

Chapter Song: Todrick Hall - No Place Like Home
Izuku didn’t wake all at once. The first time was in a cacophony of noise and too bright lights. The next was in a haze of white noise and blurred figures. The third and final time was when things slowly began to make sense.

Pieces of his environment were slowly making themselves known. He was lying down and the world was white. He focused on the whiteness and slowly began to pick out shadows. Grey, sharp blurs of corners and objects. He could hear a repetitive, high pitched noise that grated painfully at his ear drums. The sheets weren’t soft, but they weren’t uncomfortable. A heavy blanket lay over him. Something was stuck in his inner elbow of his left arm and… Something was missing. Things were missing, plural. What were they though?

He felt groggy in a way he’d never felt before, like something was keeping his brain from making the correct connections and observations. It felt terrible, like his mind was being held hostage by an unknown force.

A shadow came into view suddenly followed by garbled noise that sounded like it could be a voice, but he isn’t sure. After a while of staring and struggling to fire the right neurons the shadow does begin to look humanoid. The garble is beginning to sound more like a voice, a man, he thinks, and he can pick up a few words. “Can,” and “hear,” are being said over and over. Izuku stares, unblinking.

“Can you hear me, Midoriya?” Finally it makes sense, but still it takes Izuku a long while to actually understand what those words mean. He swallows. His throat hurts terribly. He isn’t sure he could speak, either from soreness or just from how he isn’t sure he could form words right, but he tries anyway.

A ragged, terribly sounding, wavering “yes” comes out. It hardly sounds like a word but the person seems pleased.

“Can you nod and shake your head?” the person, he’s wearing scrubs and a white jacket, Izuku finally notices and he’s almost happy he can tell that means this is a doctor, his brain finally beginning to work the way he wants, if still slowly.

He very gingerly nods. With his new awareness he feels a great, heavy weight of pain and weakness over his body. Well, almost his whole body. Some parts aren’t really hurting.

“Is your name Midoriya Izuku?” the doctor asks and Izuku nods. He was half listening. What wasn’t hurting and why? What was so wrong? Why couldn’t he figure it out? It felt like it shouldn’t be this difficult.
“Do you remember what happened?” Izuku pauses, brow furrowing, and oh that sent a bad lance of pain down the left side of his face. He shakes his head. No, he didn’t remember. Last he remembers he was at the Hatsume art store getting scrap metal. The doctor sighs and leans back. “Okay, give yourself a moment. You’ve been through a lot of trauma. Don’t try and force anything but see if you can remember.” Izuku takes a while to nod. He keeps staring up, confused and lost and he can feel the panic building. What was going on? Why was he here? What had happened? Why did he hurt everywhere except…

Izuku seizes as the realization hits him like a wave. With thunder in his ears he turns to look to the right. His right arm doesn’t hurt, not one bit, but it doesn’t feel fine either. Not hot or cold or anything because… because…

Izuku wheezes on sudden tears when he doesn’t see his right arm at all. He feels bile in his throat and coughs and gasps for air. Tears are running down his face. Tears are running down one side of his face. His eyes – no his EYE – widens. He doesn’t just not feel his right arm. His left eye, there’s nothing there. Nothing at all. He can feel himself moving his right eye, moving his gaze frantically around the room, but the depth is gone and his left eye isn’t moving because there’s nothing to move.

And his legs, oh god his legs. They don’t feel right, like they’re asleep but in the most excruciating way, and somehow that’s almost worse. He knows what the issue is with his eye and arm. They’re GONE. But his legs… he doesn’t know what’s wrong with his legs. Something is wrong and he doesn’t know what and he needs to know what’s wrong.

Two hands find their way onto his shoulders, squeezing them tightly, and the doctor is back in his space, saying something, something kind and reassuring but assertive, Izuku doesn’t know. There are waves in his ears and the world is tilting and he’s so scared. He’s so scared and he doesn’t know what to do and he feels alone and he doesn’t want to be.

“I want my mom!” he finally wails, squeezing his eye shut as tears roll down his cheek, struggling to breath with every inhale and exhale. Everything was wrong and he didn’t like it and he wanted his mom to come and fix it because even though she didn’t build things like Izuku she could fix everything.

The doctor is saying something else, voice soft, trying to calm Izuku down some, but it isn’t working. Izuku shrieks and wails, unable to form any more words. He can’t be sure if a few moments pass or an hour but suddenly the doctor is retreating and Izuku didn’t realize how much just having another person present actually was helping because now he really does feel alone and scared and—

Thin but strong arms encircle his shoulders and someone climbs into the bed with him, holding him as tight as possible. He hears her voice first, soothing and loving and so so sad but brave for him, only for him.

Izuku’s wails become louder as he clings to his mother, his one, tiny hand clutching desperately at her dress. He can smell her hair as she curls over him, squeezing him, trying to put him back together again, whispering into his hair how he was so brave and so beautiful and she would never let anything ever happen to him ever again.

Izuku cried himself back to sleep like that, curled in his mother’s arms, scared but never alone.

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The next time he woke Izuku was much quicker at grasping at his surroundings and holding on. He drowsily looked around, taking in the hospital room and all the devices he was currently strapped up
to. The high pitched beeping he had only half noticed before is a heart monitor to his right and he’s covered in a blue hospital gown and a thick All Might blanket from home.

He stares numbly at it, surprised to see it. He thinks he should be happy to see a familiar thing but, while his awareness seems to be returning, his emotions don’t seem to be fully present. He seems aware of what he should be feeling, but nothing is coming out. Then he sees the telling absence beside the right side of his body and he knows he should be upset, but it doesn’t come. He just stares.

He sees now his whole torso is swathed with bandages, covering up other wounds, but mostly covering up the barely there stump at his shoulder. Really, all he seems to have left is the shoulder. He isn’t sure what his face must look like, but now he feels the bandages, itchy and tight against his face. His legs are still tingling and he feels a lingering pain in his back.

Still, nothing comes. No reaction this time around, and Izuku isn’t sure what that means. Shock, his brain supplies, but it feels somehow worse than that. Deeper and more lasting.

Izuku looks away from his right side and only then does he see the chairs by his bed. His mother sits in the closest one, leaning her head against the edge of the bed. She looks exhausted, her hair a mess, dark bags under her red rimmed eyes, her clothes wrinkled. She smells different, like soap but not like hers. In the chair beside her, just a little back, sits Bakugou Matsuki, her arms crossed and head fallen back as she too slumbers. She doesn’t look as haggard as Inko, but there are still bags under her eyes and her hair is a mess. Just behind them is a window and Izuku realizes it’s nighttime.

He thinks maybe he should let his mom sleep, that she looks so exhausted and tired and she probably needs it, but Izuku, with the first spike of emotion he’s felt since waking up, feels a suffocating pang of loneliness and fear at being awake alone and he reaches out with his left hand to pat at her cheek. He notices the IV tube as he moves and does his best to ignore it.

As soon as Izuku touches Inko she’s rocketing up with a start, sitting up straight, hair everywhere, eyes droopy but awake. She yelps at her sudden motion and Mitsuki, startled by the motion, also suddenly awakens and nearly falls out of her chair.

Izuku can’t find it in him to find it humorous. Really he just feels more anxious now, eyes widening at the quick, startling movements, and he pulls his hand close to his chest. He thinks he’s shaking.

“Izu…?” Inko begins, blinking a few times at her son, before her eyes widen and she’s standing and leaning towards her son. “Oh, Izuku! Thank goodness you’re awake!” she cries, tears brimming her eyes. Izuku flinches at the volume, and he isn’t sure why, but it has his mother hiccupping and trying to calm down. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you, baby,” she says more quietly, voice wobbling as she tries to keep it together.

Mitsuki has stood up by now as well and looking around Inko at Izuku, trying to really get a good look at him, before nodding and saying, “I’ll grab somebody,” and quickly excusing herself from the room, leaving Izuku and Inko alone for a bit.

“Mom…” Izuku whispers. His throat hurts so much. His mother leans in immediately, listening to whatever it is her son has to say. “W-what happened…?”

Inko covers her mouth to keep a sob contained and has to take a moment to compose herself before she says anything. “W-well… sweetie… there was an accident. A hero was fighting a giant villain and… and Hatsume’s art shop?” Inko waits for Izuku to at least nod to show he at least remembered that. “Well… it was in the path of the fight and… and…” Inko scrubs at her face, tears streaming down her cheeks yet she keeps her voice as together as she can. “Baby, you were in the building when it came down and… and they found you…”
“You were pinned down, kid.” Inko whimpers and covers her face as Mitsuki returns. His Auntie looks haunted but not angry and something about that look terrifies Izuku. She makes her way over to Inko and pushes her down to sit before turning back to Izuku and taking hold of his hand, squeezing it tight enough to sting. “You were stuck under a lot of debris and had been hit in the face with something. They… they were able to save you, but not your arm or your eye or… Well, you got hit in the spine too, kid. They say you won’t be paralyzed, okay?” Matsuki leans in to catch Izuku’s eye when he begins breathing a little heavier. “You got some damage, but you’ll be able to walk with some help.”

“You were so brave, Izuku,” Inko says, her crying under enough control. She reaches out and takes her son’s hand from Mitsuki, who steps back. “You were so brave and strong. They said you just refused to give up.”

It’s a lot to take in. Too much to take in. It feels like a dream, like it can’t be real. This was something you heard about on the news when a terrible event takes place, of the mangled survivors. This wasn’t something that actually happened to him. It wasn’t.

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It is.

It is real and it is happening to Izuku.

The tiny six-year-old stares down at his lap, hand curling and uncurling in the fabric of his blanket. The doctor, a tall, sturdy man in black scrubs, a doctor’s coat, short brown hair, and four eyes, is blunt and straight to the point, but not in an unkind way.

His name was Dr. Kenta and he had come in shortly after Izuku had woken up, standing at the foot of the bed and giving them all a run down on the situation.

Izuku had, of course, lost his left eye and right arm. They could fashion him with a prosthetic, but not much could be done about the eye. He would be getting an eye patch it would seem. As for his back, that had been the damage the surgeons had immediately focused on when he came in. There was no saving the arm or the eye, but the back could be fixed up if they were quick and careful. If they’d waited any longer, Dr. Kenta says, Izuku may have ended up paralyzed from the waist down. Now, his spine was damaged, but they said, with extensive physical therapy, he could walk again. It wouldn’t be the same as it once was, and he would likely always have some kind of limp and unable to properly run, but it was better than losing three of his limbs instead of just one.

He had apparently also been in a medically induced coma for the last two weeks. The first time he had awoken properly had been when he had broken down. They had asked Inko to wait outside during the event, but she had been quickly ushered back in to calm her frantic son.

Now, however, he was doing better. He was on heavy painkillers and antibiotics, a slew of vitamins and probiotics, and they planned to keep him here at the hospital for an unknown extended period of time. Inko had looked pained at that last one. She had no intention of leaving her son here alone, but sometimes she had to go make some trips, even with the Bakugou’s help in the matter, and she just… She hated seeing her little boy surrounded by all this sterile white and machines.

Izuku didn’t like it either.

“You’re healing very quickly, Midoriya, which is a good sign. One of the perks of being young, I suppose. So for now you’ll continue to rest, but we should be able to begin moving you around and getting you settled with some of your new gear,” the doctor says and a bad taste fills Izuku’s mouth.
New gear? He had his own gear. He could make whatever he needed, he told himself, he just wanted to go home and pretend this had never happened. Go to sleep and wake up tomorrow whole and normal.

“I actually need to talk to your mother about some of what you’ll need in the future real quick. While I do, someone came by to see how you were doing,” Dr Kenta says and jerks his head towards the door when he catches Inko’s eye. Inko hesitates, looking almost panicked to being pulled away from Izuku, but Mitsuki lays a hand on her shoulder and helps her stand.

“Okay… Okay, Izuku, I’ll be right back, I promise,” she says and Izuku doesn’t reply, just keeps staring at his lap. Mitsuki leads Inko out of the room before she can get too weepy again.

For a while the room is silent save for the machines hooked up to Izuku like he’s a robot and the nurse currently looking around at their readings. It feels cold and empty and Izuku wonders if that’s because that’s how he feels or if that’s just the way it is.

The wait isn’t really that long, but everything feels like slow motion. Disjointed and taking its time, but still the door opens and in comes a tall man with dark, short hair, red eyes, arrow shaped eyebrows, a kind smile, and a face Izuku thinks he recognizes. The man steps over to the bed, making sure to come around to Izuku’s left side and leaning just enough over so Izuku doesn’t have to strain to see.

“Hey there, buddy,” he says, his voice gentle and quiet like he doesn’t want to spook Izuku. Izuku stares up at him blankly for a long, long moment, not a word passing between them.

“I know you…” the child finally rasps, eye narrowing in confusion. The man smiles a little wider, patiently waiting for Izuku to piece his memory together. He could figure it had something to do with the incident, but his memory was blotchy with that, like his brain refused to supply the right resources to remember. This man, however, seems familiar and important. “You’re… Ingenium… right? You saved me?”

The man, Ingenium, chuckles and nods. “Yeah, I’m Ingenium. It’s nice to meet you under better circumstances, Midoriya Izuku.” Normally Izuku would be scrambling for an autograph, asking question after question about Ingenium’s quirk and suit mechanics, his tactics and experiences as a hero, but right now Izuku is just so bone tired he can’t manage to dig up the energy.

“Thank you…” Izuku tries for. The right emotions still aren’t forming and so he settles on just staring, blank and tired. Ingenium doesn’t seem to mind.

“Are you kidding? Of course! If anything, we couldn’t have done it if you hadn’t been so tough and brave,” the elder man replies brightly, reaching down to very gently squeeze Izuku’s bicep then let go.

Izuku stares for just a few more minutes before a sudden wash of shame makes him duck down. “I wasn’t brave…” he chokes back a new wave of tears. Everyone kept calling him brave. Why were they doing that? Even if it were true, what did it matter? He was still… incomplete now. “I was scared…”

Ingenium hums, oddly calm in the face of Izuku’s mounting distress. “I don’t know. Don’t you think that you can only be brave if you were scared first?” he asks, his voice quiet, just over the sound of the heart monitor. Izuku squeezes his eye shut and reaches up to wipe furiously at his tears.

“But I didn’t DO anything,” he tries to argue, his voice hiccapping and desperate.
“You held on,” Ingenium counters, still gentle, and he crouches down a little beside the bed. A big hand reaches out and begins very carefully combing over Izuku’s curls, trying to help him calm. Oddly, it seems to work a little, and the air begins filling Izuku’s lungs more easily. “And I heard you and another little girl helped each other get to the entrance. That’s pretty brave, too.”

Izuku’s head suddenly snaps up towards Ingenium. It sends a sharp wave of pain through his head, neck, and shoulders, and he whimpers. “Whoa, slow down there, buddy,” Ingenium tries to get him to relax but now Izuku’s is fully aware and worried.

“Hatsume Mei! Is she and her mom okay?” he asks frantically. He can’t remember exactly what had happened to them but he remembers they had been there.

Ingenium keeps combing through Izuku’s hair, avoiding any bandages, until the young boy begins calming down again. He seems almost like an expert with kids. “They’re fine,” he whispers, “Spoke to them myself once you were in the ambulance. They were real worried about you, buddy, I’m sure they’ll be coming by for a visit soon.”

Izuku nods slowly and settles back down some. It was good to hear they were okay. He wasn’t sure how he felt about a visit because, hospital or not, the Hatsume family was positively terrifying, but he was glad they were okay.

Ingenium lets out a relieved breath when Izuku calms and he takes his hand back, standing up straight again. “It really is good to see you awake and aware, Midoriya. You… scared a lot of people. Including me and my team. We were real worried about you…”

“I’m sorry,” Izuku whispers and now Ingenium reaches out to ruffle his hair, smiling sadly. “For what? You didn’t do anything wrong!” Izuku peaks up at Ingenium through his bangs, gaze wavering and uncertain. The hero sighs, resigned, and pulls back his hand so he can kneel down by the bed again. “You did not do anything wrong,” he repeats, more firmly, eyes locked on Izuku. Slowly, after Izuku realizes Ingenium is waiting for some kind of response, he nods. Ingenium immediately is back to smiling and stands up straight. He has a kind, sweet face that, despite the terrible knot that’s been in Izuku’s chest since he woke up, puts him at some kind of ease.

“You know…” Ingenium begins and Izuku looks up at him, tilting his head to show he’s listening. “I actually have a little brother about your age. How old were you exactly?”

Izuku hesitates before replying quietly, “I… I just turned six.”

Apparently that answer is perfect and has Ingenium’s eyes lighting up. “Really? My brother is going to be six in a few weeks! I think you two would like each other. He’s a good kid, like you. Really smart, and I hear you’re a little genius!”

Izuku’s cheeks heat up suddenly at that, his eye widening, and he ducks his head. “I-I’m not a g-g-genius!” he tries to protest but he hears Ingenium laugh brightly before he begins talking about his own little brother and how, apparently, he and Izuku would surely get along. Oddly enough, Izuku can’t help the tiny smile on his face. It feels so nice to just have someone talk to him so kindly and so openly.

He makes a mental note to add a few extra pages for Ingenium in both his hero and support tool notebooks.

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around her shoulders. It’s good to have the other woman here, offering her support, because lord knows she would have broken down if it weren’t for her.

The doctor waits patiently for Inko to calm down, his expression sympathetic. The bad news didn’t even have anything to do with Izuku directly. No, instead it came down to Inko’s husband and how expensive a lot of this was going to be. Hisashi sent back plenty of money for Inko to not need to get a job. Sure, they didn’t live lavishly, but it was still comfortable.

This, however, was a new monster they had never had to deal with. Izuku’s stay in the hospital itself was expensive already, but it could be managed. They could probably even manage purchasing the prosthetic and a motorized wheelchair. It was the extended stay in the hospital from here on out and the necessary doctor’s visits and sessions in the future that was going to be a problem.

Evidently Hisashi’s medical insurance was not as good as he had claimed it was, and didn’t that make Inko’s blood boil viciously. Not only because he had not been entirely truthful with Inko, but because now it was causing her issues with making sure her baby boy got the best treatment possible.

“We’ll help out,” Mitsuki whispers, her strong hands tightening on Inko’s shoulders. Inko startles. For moment, wrapped up in her own anguish and anger she had forgotten her dear friend was still there. She turns wide, wet eyes to Mitsuki. Apparently she hadn’t noticed she’d been crying either, but the tall blond doesn’t make comment of it. “We can help with some of the necessary purchases,” she says and Inko understands the silent message from “necessary purchases.” Mitsuki had a kid and family of her own, and while they could help with some of the finances, it would hardly be perfect.

“I’m going to have to get a job,” Inko whispers, almost in horror, her head dropping. She had realized it as soon as the numbers started being read to her, but saying it out loud suddenly made her exhausted. She felt a bit ashamed, too. She had prided herself on being a stay at home mom and being there for Izuku whenever he may need her, but now that wasn’t an option, and if she did get a job than that would mean she would have to be away from her baby when he needed her most.

“We’ll help with that, too. Izuku can stay at our house whenever you need someone to look after him,” Mitsuki doesn’t miss a beat. Inko smiles a little to herself, a small and sad expression that quickly fades, but she truly is grateful.

Dr. Kenta smiles at the two women as they seem to be calming down. He has his clipboard under his arm as he says, “I’m sorry about all this. If I could change it, and trust me I’ve tried, I would, but I don’t get to pick the final fees.” Inko nods. She doesn’t want to seem rude but she just doesn’t have the energy to smile at him.

“You…” she takes a breath when her voice wavers, “You said you wanted to tell us about your plan for my Izuku?”

“Yes,” Dr. Kenta pulls his clipboard back into his hands, his tone back to business and Inko finds she appreciates that. “We want to go ahead and get him into a wheelchair and moving around. He really is healing quickly, I’m very pleased with that. Now, until we’ve had more time to see how he’s doing emotionally he’ll mostly be staying in his own room, but we’d like to move him into the children’s ward soon so he can be in a more social environment.” The doctor looks up at Inko with a meaningful look. “We do not want him to feel isolated when he’s like this, but in the end we want your okay on the matter.”

Inko hesitates. She’s moved her hands in front of her and is wringing them anxiously. Mitsuki seems to catch on to what her friend is concerned with and goes ahead and asks the question while Inko frets. “Are the kids nice?”
The doctor smiles kindly, an understanding glint in his eyes. “Very,” he says in such a way it would be impossible not to believe him. “A lot of them are in similar situations to Midoriya and would never make fun of him or be unnecessarily cruel. If anything they’ll welcome him with open arms.”

“What about because he’s quirkless,” Inko nearly snaps and regrets her tone soon after. She hadn’t meant it to come out that way, but Izuku needed to be safe. Her little boy was not going to be teased and humiliated while he was supposed to be healing.

“They won’t,” Dr. Kenta says surprisingly firmly, making both Inko and Mitsuki raise their brows. He takes a breath and suddenly looks sad as he explains, “Majority of the kids in there for injuries outside of how they were born are actually quirkless.” Before either mother can question why that would be he continues. It seems he’s had this conversation before. “It isn’t because they’re targeted, not… usually, but because they simply can’t defend themselves. They’re great kids and they’d simply see your boy as one of their own.”

Inko nods slowly, head bowed as she thinks.

“We were thinking he could go and visit the ward throughout the day for now. Get to meet the kids and nurses, see some of the volunteers as well. Perhaps you’d like us to do that first and then see how you feel?”

Inko looks back up at Dr. Kenta and finally manages a grateful smile. She didn’t know what she did right for them to get such a kind, understanding doctor, but she was grateful for him nonetheless.

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The first time Izuku went to the children’s ward was a few days later. He had been in and out of consciousness, completely exhausted from just about everything that had happened to him, but also had been prepping and trying to get out of the bed to get into wheelchairs. His nurse, who everyone called Sunny because she was evidently the grumpiest person alive, was always there, hand supporting Izuku as he sat up and tried to swing his legs off the bed, his mom nearby, advised to avoid touching for the time being. The first few attempts he’d been able to do nothing, quickly falling into tears, legs useless, but recently he’d been able to shimmy his legs and hips just a little bit closer. His back ached afterwards and Inko had happily congratulated Izuku on his progress as Sunny easily lifted him up and set him in the wheelchair himself.

He didn’t feel accomplished. If anything he felt somehow like a failure, but Sunny, straight to business as usual, had been soon pushing him around the hospital, Inko by his side, just wanting to get him out of the room a bit the first few times. They told him he’d be getting a motorized wheelchair when he got out so he could control it himself, but that didn’t make him feel very good either. Part of him was upset about needing a wheelchair at all, while the other, progressively smaller part of him whispered he could build one himself.

Those thoughts, the thoughts to build things and create and problem solve, were getting quieter and quieter and farther away, and part of Izuku was afraid of what that meant. He loved building and thinking and science. He loved how metal and circuits just made sense to him like a sixth sense. Like he was part of the build. But with this heaviness that followed him now his excitement had waned and he was scared he would never get it back.

Sunny is wheeling him down the hall as he thinks. His mother isn’t here this go round, had said she had to take care of a few important things, but that she would be back in a few hours. Izuku would admit tears were shed. He felt fragile without her and he was scared and she didn’t want to leave him, but after a time they had been able to calm down.
Izuku finds himself absently running his fingers over the spine of the college level robotic engineering book in his hand, slightly vacant. It, along with a whole stack of scientific books and his notebooks, had been a gift from the Hatsumes when they had made their visit. Mei had been relentless in demanding Izuku stay her rival and that he better not fall behind, her mother and father laughing brightly, but even then Izuku could see the hesitation. He could see how Mei wouldn’t touch him. Logic said out of fear, his anxious heart said it was out of disgust.

He had been, for the most part, silent.

He still held onto the books, though. He hadn’t cracked one open, which Inko asked about once before only to have Izuku begin silently tearing up and she didn’t bring it up again. Now, with his first visit to the children’s ward, Dr. Kenta had suggested Izuku bring one. It could interest the other kids, and if Izuku wanted to be left alone, he would have something to read. Sunny had silently watched behind him, Izuku had noted, a blank look on her usually grouchy face.

“So robotics, huh?” Speak of the devil. Izuku nearly jumps out of his skin at the deep voice of his nurse and looks back up at her. She’s a large woman with an incredibly long, brown braid in her hair and tan skin, her eyes a sharp green. She’s not looking down at him and instead ahead as she navigates. Izuku hesitates then looks forward as well, small fingers curling a little tighter on the edge of his book.

“Yes ma’am,” he replies quietly, suddenly nervous.

“Pretty cool. Why don’t I hear you talk about it much?” the nurse asks as they turn a corner. They’ve slowed down a little, Izuku notices, since she’s begun talking. “Unless it’s not your favorite topic, I guess.”

“N-no! No, it is!” Izuku is quick to counter, as if on autopilot, but then falls silent, biting the inside of his mouth to keep from saying anything else. He hadn’t talked about it, Sunny was right. He didn’t want to talk about it, he tries to convince himself, and if he opened his mouth again he was going to start talking and a nervous, almost frightened feeling bubbles up at the idea and he just doesn’t know why.

Sunny seems to pick up on his distress and is mercifully silent for a while, but not entirely. After a wait where Izuku calms himself down, she offers, “You’re allowed to be scared.” Izuku doesn’t reply for a moment, not fully processing what she’s said, and when it does he also realizes that now they’re stopped and Sunny is stepping around to kneel in front of him.

“W-what are you… talking about?” he tries, voice wobbling.

“I’m saying you’ve heard so many people tell you how brave you’ve been, how brave you are, and you don’t believe them, but you don’t want to disappoint them either.” Sunny blinks slow, watching Izuku meaningfully, arms resting on her knees where she crouches. Izuku stares back at her, confused and emotional and wanting to say she’s wrong but unable to. “You know why so many perfectionists turn out to be procrastinators?”

It’s such a seemingly random change of subject it turns Izuku on his head, but he still manages to answer. “Because they feel if they can’t make it perfect they don’t want to start it, avoiding it.” Sunny arches a brow and Izuku’s cheeks pink a little. “I-I read it in a m-m-magazine while my mom was shopping…”

“Of course you did,” Sunny smirks at him a little playfully before going on. “I think, stop me if I’m wrong, that’s what’s happening with you,” she points at the college level book, “here. You feel you need to be perfect, need to be BRAVE, and it’s coming up in unexpected places and you’re avoiding
something that you at least recognize and see. What do you think?”

For a while they just stare at each other, Sunny steadfast and Izuku shocked silent, until he bites his lip and ducks his head. No one, especially an adult, had ever spoken to him like he wasn’t a child, like he was someone who could handle it. It didn’t feel good, but it didn’t feel bad either. It felt like it belonged and Izuku is surprised that he wishes more people would talk to him like that.

“I’m scared,” Izuku’s squeaks, voice cracking and tears beginning to form in his eyes and Sunny shuffles closer. The honesty of his nurse, her need to be blunt and not skirt around the issue like everyone else, makes it easier for him to admit it, but it still hurts for it to come out. “I’m s-scared… b-but I don’t know w-why…”

“That’s fine,” Sunny says simply, tone normal and not at all pitying Izuku. She does, however, reach out and place her big hand over Izuku’s little one on the book. “Because, Midoriya Izuku, you are allowed to be scared, you are allowed not to be perfect, and you don’t need a reason why beyond being human.”

Izuku wheezes a little on his tears and cries. Sunny doesn’t move, just keeps holding Izuku’s hand, watching as he finally begins coming to terms with what she’s said. It isn’t the wailing sobs he’s had before, and he thinks that there will be plenty more to come in the future, but for now what comes out are silent wheezes and huffs, tears dripping down.

When he’s finally begun to calm down, Sunny asks, “Do you need a hug?” Izuku hesitates before shaking his head. No, he was okay. He was sad and SCARED and upset. He was broken and hurt and wasn’t even whole anymore. He was just a little kid, but he was okay. Or, at least, he was going to be.

Sunny lets out an almost relieved huff and begins standing up. “Oh thank god, I hate hugs. Terrible at them, too. Never figured out why I’m usually stuck with you brats,” she says, her grouchy tone of voice fully back in swing, but as she circles around the wheelchair she reaches out and tussles Izuku’s hair too affectionately to allow any bite to remain in her words. Izuku looks back at her, eye wide, and sees her usual pouty scowl, and the whole scene, her words, and everything they just talked about has him cracking a smile and letting out a giggle that turns into happy, high pitched laughter.

When he isn’t looking Sunny smiles too.

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The children’s ward was… colorful. Izuku really wasn’t sure of a better word to fully encompass the feel of the place. He was brought into a long room lined with hospital beds with brightly painted walls covered in children’s art and posters with positive phrases and photos printed on them. The place isn’t chaotic, but it is certainly louder than what Izuku had been expecting, kids talking and laughing and enjoying themselves. It reminds Izuku a little bit of school, but there the teachers are trying to quiet everyone down, here the nurses and volunteers are almost encouraging the behavior.

It makes sense, Izuku decides as he’s wheeled over to the side. These kids have been hurt, that’s why they’re here, of course the adults would want them to act as children as much as possible.

Sunny settles Izuku down on the outskirts of the kids, letting the young boy look over them and get accustomed to the noise, and another nurse comes trotting over, all smiles and coloring changing hair. He approaches Sunny first and begins talking to her in a more hushed tone, and as they talk Izuku tries to take in the individual children present.
He sees a child also in a wheelchair who is talking excitedly to a little girl with bandages over her eyes and a boy with a prosthetic leg and arm. Over on one of the beds a group of kids are sitting with what looks like action figures and dolls, playing. A table is set up where two children, one who looks like a near skeleton and the other who’s swaying as if dancing without music, are sitting and coloring. There’s—

Before Izuku can look around anymore, from the bed nearest him, appears a little girl with wide, dark eyes, long, long dark hair, pale skin, and a big grin. Izuku nearly jumps out of his skin when her head popped into his line of sight. She doesn’t seem fazed that she scared him, if anything she almost looks pleased.

When she doesn’t say anything, just keeps grinning and staring, Izuku swallows and raises his hand hesitantly, waving a little. “H-hello…” He mumbles and she smiles a little bigger, but doesn’t say anything. More silence, and really, what was Izuku supposed to do with that? “My n-name is M-Midoriya…” He tries again.

The girl just keeps grinning and staring. Out of ideas on what to say or try Izuku begins tapping his book anxiously, watching the girl like she is a wild animal. Despite the awkwardness of the situation, however, he does slowly begin to calm down, the beating in his chest from the earlier fright subsiding. That may be why, when suddenly her skin begins to melt, he’s all the more unprepared.

Izuku shrieks, he can’t help it, as the little girl’s skin seemingly begins to melt right before him, like goopy wax plopping off of her face and onto the floor.

“Rei!” The little girl straightens up, skin going in reverse, pulling back together, and solidifying, looks up at Sunny’s voice. Sunny steps around Izuku’s wheelchair towards the girl, Rei, waving her finger, and Rei springs up and takes off running, grinning wickedly, moving more like a wild girl than anything. Sunny groans and the other nurse also circles around to stand by Izuku.

“Ah geez, sorry there Midoriya,” he offers, crouching down and looking sheepish. Izuku is still wide-eyed, breathing a little heavy, leaning as far back in his chair as he can. “That was Rei, she’s here at the children’s ward, too. She likes using her quirk to spook people.” Spook was an understatement, Izuku thinks. What kind of quirk was face melting, anyway?? He supposed there was a possibility for any kind of quirk, but still.

“How about we get you in with some of the other kids?” Sunny suggests, turning around, head tilting and arms crossed as she regards Izuku. “If you’re up to it, that is. If you’d prefer to head back to your room after that we’d understand.”

Izuku looks up at Sunny now, his wide eye turning thoughtful. No, he didn’t think he needed to go back to his room. He’d been frightened, certainly, but oddly enough, now that it was over, it wasn’t all that bad. After everything he had been through recently, all the shock and nightmares and memories slowly piecing themselves back together in his mind, Rei’s melting act was oddly tame and almost like breaking the ice, in a weird kind of way.

“I’m okay. Promise,” Izuku says, tacking on the last bit at Sunny’s suspicious gaze. His nurse stares at him a few more moments, double checking he was fine, before shrugging and stepping aside to allow the children’s ward nurses to take over.

Which is how Izuku ends up wheeled right into the middle of the hoard of kids, some his age, some older, some younger. Eyes turn to stare at him, big and curious, which only makes Izuku antsy.

“Everyone, this is Midoriya Izuku. He’ll be joining us today so please be friendly,” says the nurse with the color changing hair. Nurse Heairo, was what he had finally introduced himself as.
Izuku knows he should probably offer a greeting, it is the polite thing to do, but he’s so nervous and some of the kids are already looking away and before he can say a thing the boy with the prosthetic arm and leg is up and marching towards him, eyes a sparkling blue. “Hello!” he yells loudly in English before speaking once more in Japanese. “I’m Kyou!”

Izuku blinks his one eye at him, startled by the volume and forwardness of the boy, but still manages a nod in greeting. Behind the boy his two friends, the other boy in the wheelchair and the girl with bandaged eyes, scoot a little closer, curious but not quite as frank as Kyou. The sight eases Izuku’s nerves, however, seeing other kids just as nervous as he is.

“Saw Rei get you good, huh?” Kyou continues and Izuku flinches. Oh, had everyone seen that? He certainly hoped not.

“It… It wasn’t that scary,” Izuku mumbles, ducking his head, and Kyou immediately makes a noise of confusion.

“Well, yeah, it ain’t supposed to be!” the boy says and Izuku flicks his head up in surprise, brow furrowed in confusion. It wasn’t? Kyou snorts and gives a lopsided smile. “Well, yeah! She just likes getting us to loosen up sometimes! Right, Shun?” Kyou looks back at the boy in the wheelchair. Now that he and the girl have gotten even closer Izuku can see that the boy, Shun, doesn’t need a wheelchair because his legs don’t work like Izuku’s, but rather because he doesn’t have legs there to begin with.

Izuku cringes, his left hand curling a little tighter around the edge of his book nervously, but Shun doesn’t seem to notice. “Yeah,” he says and his voice comes out more like a wheeze than anything.

“Shun is the only one ‘round here who knows sign other than Rei. She doesn’t talk any,” Kyou explains and Izuku is only half listening now, his eye flicking around at the kids again, really taking them in and processing what it all means.

These are kids his age with parts missing, just like Izuku, or lasting damage he can’t see or issues from birth that leave them in need of extra help. These kids are suffering, he thinks, just like him, but are handling it like it’s nothing. Kyou is just standing there like it’s normal for half of him to be balanced on a fake leg, his fake arm moving around just as much as his real one. Izuku isn’t sure how they can be so chipper and okay.

“So what’s that?” Kyou had probably been talking while Izuku had been thinking, but now he’s leaning over into his space, too close for comfort, pointing at the book in his lap. Izuku’s cheeks suddenly warm up in embarrassment.

His talk with Sunny had been relieving. He hadn’t even realized he had needed it, but he supposed his nurse had probably dealt with people going through similar issues before. She probably knew what to look out for, and it had been exactly what he needed then.

That didn’t mean he was entirely better. He was more aware of the issue, sure, but he couldn’t just brush it off. He couldn’t just be better just like that, and he knew there was more to it than just being afraid.

So he shrinks away, frightened and nervous. “It’s a book…” he whispers which has Kyou pouting and putting his real hand on his hip.

“I know that…” the boy whines and the little girl giggles, raising a hand to her mouth as a half toothless grin takes over her face. Kyou pouts bigger and looks back at her. “It’s not funny, Yasu!” The girl only giggles harder.
“What is it about?” Shun wheezes, eyes tired but curious, hands folding now in his lap. Izuku chews on his lip, staring down at the cover of his book, fingers tapping a nonsense tune.

“Robotics…” he whispers. It’s a tiny bit easier to reply to Shun, the boy a bit more of a calming presence, but still it takes time to build up the right courage. He hates he has to build up courage for this at all, he should be excited like he always was, but it won’t come. Now, sure, he recognizes that he’s frightened and he tells himself to accept it, but still that does not rid him of the anxiety.

“Like gundams?” the girl, Yasu, asks. Her voice is quiet and sweet with energy closer to Kyou’s, but a calmness about her he lacks.

“N-no…” Izuku sighs. He wasn’t getting out of this, was he? “Like… building them.”

The three children are quick to explode with a simultaneous, excited, “WHAT??” Izuku flinches away and the children instinctively calm down when they at least see that, but still they are now entirely invested in the green-haired boy. Some of the other kids as well are looking over, curious about the explosion of noise. A few of the nurses at least hush them.

“You build robots?” Shun asks, still quiet, but now a lot more interested. He’s leaning forward in his wheelchair, hands gripping his armrests.

“Y-yes and no,” Izuku slowly begins. He still was anxious to talk about science like this, but he didn’t want the others to have any kind of false pretense on what he did. “A robot is a machine that… well it can do things on its own after you’ve programmed it. I build mostly tools and machines… w-which are broader subjects, but more appropriate for what I do.”

The other kids are staring at him like he’s speaking another language, yet still somehow incredibly intrigued. He notes the other children that had begun looking over are listening in now, scooting closer to get better seats.

“B-but you COULD build a robot??” Kyou seems to have a moment of difficulty getting out what he wants to say, like he’s too excited to form everything in time, but he doesn’t seem to care and is back in Izuku’s space, bouncing up and down in excitement.

Izuku stares at him wide-eyed for a moment, an unintelligent “uh” being the only noise to escape him, before he snaps his mouth shut and looks away. “Theoretically… I guess…”

“What does ‘theoretically’ mean?” calls a kid from Izuku’s right and he looks over and shrinks. He can’t pinpoint who had asked the question because now all eyes really are on him.

“I-it means… it means something that is more about the theory, or idea, I guess, of something instead of the… the practice…” Izuku’s voice is slowly lowering and lowering, head falling and fingers curling into a tiny fist. For a moment there is silence and Izuku wonders if everyone has gotten bored already. He knew he was weird about his loves, he knew other kids had a tough time with it sometimes, so he wouldn’t be surprised, but then Shun speaks up again.

“Rei asks if you don’t like this stuff.”

Izuku looks up in surprise, first at Shun, then over to where Shun is looking. Sitting atop a hospital bed by her lonesome but in perfect view of Izuku is Rei, her face thoughtful and curious. Izuku stares at her for a long while and she stares back and he doesn’t stop watching as he answers, “N-no, I… I do love it… I always have, but…”

“Too normal?” Kyou asks in the calmest voice he’s used since speaking with Izuku. They look to each other and Kyou shrugs at Izuku’s startled expression. “Y’know, like… after everything, it
doesn’t feel right to do something so… normal.”

“Like you should somehow be in a new life!” adds on a girl with long ears that are currently perked upwards, her expression understanding. Actually, most of the kids have an understanding expression now, and Izuku doesn’t know how to handle it or what they’re saying. “Like… a bunch feels so different and it’s weird and jarring and throws you on your head!”

“Yeah! So either you go really hard into the stuff you’re familiar with to avoid that, or you avoid the stuff you’re familiar with because it doesn’t feel like it belongs,” Kyou continues. Izuku eyes him now, confused and amazed. They were making sense in a way he hadn’t expected, putting things into words he hadn’t been able to and in a way Sunny wouldn’t have been able to get to him.

“You guys… have felt that?” he whispers, eye wide and for some reason beginning to water. This feeling was dreadful, soul crushing and heart wrenching, and the idea that others had to go through this ever made him want to weep.

“Oh of course we have,” Yasu says, head tilting as she faces Izuku’s general direction. “We’re all here for a reason.” That part her voice does turn solemn in a way no little girl should be able to and it scares Izuku. Scares him more than he ever wants to admit and he quickly looks away.

“What… what made you guys feel better…?” he whispers, eye low and beginning to blur from tears. A voice in his head reminds him of how odd it is to be surrounded by kids his age that aren’t teasing him about being a crybaby.

Suddenly the room around him erupts with answers. “Just doing it worked for me!” “I waited until I felt ready!” “I did some other stuff!” “I got other people to do it with me!” “I talked about it!” “I’m still waiting!” Suddenly Izuku doesn’t feel so alone. Certainly he could see that these children had been through a lot as well, but it was all so different and their own that to have this one, constant thing really hammered it home that there were others suffering and healing just as he was, and that was okay.

Rei is popping into his view again, not smiling, just looking at him, and she begins to sign. When Izuku is silent and just keeps staring at her, confused, she huffs and shoots a dirty look back at Shun, who eeps and gives a sorry before translating for her.

“This is not what decides your life,” Rei motions to Izuku’s injuries, “You are. You haven’t entered into a new life, you just have a few new aspects of the one you already had.”

Izuku stares up at her, his tears pausing as he considers her and her words. She stares back. It was… a lot to take in. These kids were so much wiser than what Izuku was used to from his peers, but it was fitting and refreshing and good. He felt something in his chest, the thing Sunny had made him aware of, suddenly begin to feel lighter. Not gone, but lighter.

He smiles sheepishly up at Rei. She grins back.

Then she begins to melt again and Izuku shrieks.

Chapter End Notes

Tell me what you thought! Next chapter may not be so long, though...
Chapter Song: *Oh Wonder - All We Do*
The Changes

Chapter Notes

Before beginning, I would like to go ahead and make clear that the Katsuki and Izuku relationship is still quite complicated, but it will be a different kind of complicated later on, and right now they’re still young. In case anyone was curious...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So is a jetpack even a possible invention?”

Izuku taps at his mouth with his pencil as he looks down at a new sketchbook, the question from one of the other kids in the children’s ward making him pause. The sketchbook is already filled with new blueprint ideas, albeit ugly as all get out since he wasn’t originally left handed.

Beside him on his right is a group of kids that liked watching him work and asking questions. Kyou, Yasu, and Shun had always been part of it until Yasu was released. Then it was Kyou and Shun who were always there. To his left sat one of the volunteers Izuku had grown accustomed to seeing, a man with a wide, toothy mouth, short hair, glasses, and prosthetic legs. He came in often to volunteer all over the hospital, wanting to show that you could succeed even with prosthetics and injuries, and had introduced himself as Kuroun.

Izuku liked him a lot. He was kind to all the kids and never treated them with pity. An added bonus was that he was apparent whiz at math and had taken an interest to Izuku when he’d begun trying to revisit his love for science and building. That, having an adult invested in it as much as all the other kids, who sat and could help him do calculations and offer logical suggestions, had made it all the easier to finally get back into his groove.

Now Izuku has crawled up into a hospital bed, which was comfier on his back for his extended visits to the children’s ward, and Kuroun sat in a chair beside it to his left, one of Izuku’s new notebooks and a pencil in his hand, smiling fondly. This wasn’t uncommon. While Izuku scribbled and sketched, Kuroun would help and write down some of his ideas, and the other kids’, no matter how ridiculous. He would add in his own thoughts on a few of them, maybe some possible solutions, and by this point the notebook was just as full with his handwriting as it was Izuku’s.

“In the past, maybe not. We’re talking a small device on your back capable of lifted a variety of weights with ease and propelling us around without the use of stabilizers or causing any kinds of damage. They had some where you had to jump out of a plane first, but that defeats the purpose and they were expensive,” Izuku finally supplies then goes back to trying to sketch what appears to be some kind of robotic spine. It looks terrible, and the notes he’s written coming off of it are ugly and really aren’t as scientific as he’d like, but he figures he could start high and work down.

“But what about noooooooooo??” Kyou whines, leaning forward to look directly into Izuku’s eye, drawing his attention away from his blueprints. Izuku pouts and reaches up to push him away.

Two months he had been in the hospital. Two months of recovering and visiting the children’s ward. He had learned the best way to deal with a lot of the kids still here. He had been able to offer his own comfort when a new child came in. He had been able to recover and nourish his love for invention and had already filled five new notebooks with ideas, some a little too ambitious. He had begun
some physical therapy and had been fitted for a prosthetic, which he should get in soon. He was doing better. A Lot better.

He still wasn’t entirely okay, though. He had his bad days more often than not. He’d wake from nightmares wailing and crying, either his mother or nurse Sunny soon rushing to his side to calm him down. He would feel horrible screams of pain some days that left him in bed, motionless and wallowing. He felt sometimes the ache of an arm that wasn’t there anymore.

Some days he woke up and the world just felt grey and bland and his energy would be sapped and gone. Those days he wasn’t entirely aware of everything around him, but for the most part he was left alone, with someone always in the room, until he was ready to talk. Usually it was his mother, but on an occasion or two he ended up confiding in Sunny or Dr. Kenta.

“Well, now there are quirks that utilize abilities we could not previously comprehend or make or anything!” Izuku says a bit hopefully as he gets back to sketching. Today was a good day, however, and he was full of energy and ideas.

Today was the day he finally got to leave the hospital and go home. It was a little bittersweet, because despite how much he wanted to leave and get back into the groove of normal life, he also was going to miss all the doctors, nurses, volunteers, and kids here at the hospital. They had been such a huge help for him in handling the changes in his life and had been nothing but inspiring and encouraging.

“But… we don’t have quirks?” says Shun sheepishly, hands curling in his lap as he says it and the majority of the kids present take on an uncertain expression. It was true, the majority of the kids here were also quirkless, mostly present due to a lack of protective abilities or, in the few and awful cases, hurt purely because of the confines of their birth.

Izuku hesitates in his own sketching, staring at the blueprint for a long while, before looking up at Shun, his eye intense. “Yes, but don’t you think we should be able to work side by side with those with quirks to create the most successful solutions?” Izuku had had plenty of time in his silent moments to think about his quirklessness. It had been devastating when he was four and the doctor had said he was just physically incapable of having a quirk. Sometimes it still felt that way, but over time, as he read and built and researched, he had begun to realize something. A fatal flaw with quirks.

“When you don’t have a quirk, you don’t have as many expectations. Some people just stop, think that this means that they have no future, but I think that just means that our future is all the more open to our molding,” Izuku nods to himself, certain of what he’s saying, then looks around at the confused expressions around him, smiling big and toothy. “When you have a quirk people assume what you’ll be because of it, right? If you don’t become aware of that what you can become a slave to those expectations, thusly limiting your imagination. You don’t have that issue if you don’t have a quirk.” Somehow Izuku’s grin grows even bigger. He doesn’t seem to notice the baffled looks of the children and volunteers and nurses around him, too wrapped up in his own excited explanation.

“When you’re quirkless the possibilities are endless!!” Izuku throws out his arm, pencil going flying by mistake.

The clatter of his writing utensil hitting the floor seems to jar him out of his spiel and he startles, shrinking in and eye widening in surprise at himself. He looks around at the gawking faces of children. Behind them are a few nurses and volunteers, mostly surprised as well, but he can see a few sad, sympathetic expressions in the crowd. Those shoot a pang of something nasty through his heart and he shrinks even more, ducking his head.

The silence is deafening. He had been so excited, so eager to share his thoughts with people that
were in a similar place to him, he hadn’t even thought to control himself. He had never really been
good at reading the room, but this was a new low.

That is until Kyou calls, “I don’t know what you said half of the time... but I liked it!” And like that
the room erupts into excited laughter and yells of, “I can do anything!” and “My world is limitless!”
and things to that affect. Izuku looks up and around as the other kids run around the room, laughing
and loud and full of energy. He’s surprised by the response but doesn’t have a moment to fully
comprehend the meaning behind it all when his pencil appears in his view. He takes it carefully and
looks up to a pleasantly smiling Kuroun.

“That’s a nice way of looking at things. The world would do better if more people thought like that,”
he says, his voice having a tiny bit of a hiss on the edges. Suddenly Izuku feels defensive instead of
relieved, however.

“It isn’t just a way of thinking. It is a scientific theory based on professional and personal observation
and facts,” he says as firmly as a six-year-old can, thinking Kuroun’s being pitying towards him, but
Kuroun just keeps smiling.

“I understand, but that does not mean people think that way, even if it is scientifically sound. People
are complex. Society is complex,” the volunteer agrees, nodding, and Izuku’s raised hackles shrink
and he wipes at the frustrated tears that had begun to form in his eye, now his full, excited attention
on the man with the two prosthetic legs.

“But... you know what I mean, right?” he asks eagerly, beginning to bounce up and down.

Kuroun looks down and rubs at his chin, thoughtful. “I believe so. You are saying if someone were
born, say, with a super strength quirk society would tell them they are best fit for hero work,
therefore influencing their desires, while someone who is quirkless will not have those influences and
can therefore make their own, entirely personal decision on their futures. Correct?”

Izuku nods vigorously and he’s so happy sharp head movements don’t hurt his face anymore, but
then he pauses. The way Kuroun worded it was so much better than Izuku’s, but in turn it also
brought up one issue in his theory. “But we do have influencers...” he mumbles, looking down at his
hand. People, mostly kids, always told him he was worthless and couldn’t amount to anything. Even
the adults, in their pitying and disgusted gazes, said it. Quirkless kids did have influencers, just not
positive ones.

“Society is complex,” Kuroun repeats, now sounding solemn, “and sometimes society is wrong.”

Before the two can talk much more about philosophy and the state of the world in accordance to
quirks and quirkless – because what else could be more normal than a grown man and a six-year-old
doing that? – Sunny appears in the doorway and catches his eye. She looks apologetic for her as she
enters and comes over, hands on her hips.

“It’s time to go,” she says simply and suddenly a wave of emotion overtakes Izuku. This was the last
time he would get to be here in the children’s ward and his time was now up. He had been having so
much fun, high on excitement at being around them all, and now it was time to say good-bye once
and for all.

Some of the nearby kids hear and spread the news like a wave and soon the room has quieted down
and everyone is rushing back towards Izuku. For a while they just stare up at him, lost and sad, Izuku
staring back with a similar expression, until Kyou calls out, “We’re gonna miss you, Midoriya!!” The
other kids take that as cue to begin calling out as well, wishing him luck and good-bye.
Izuku tries to remember how upset he and everyone had been when they wished Yasu, or any of their friends, away and he tries to stay strong for them, but it doesn’t last and soon he’s a crying mess along with them, tears streaking down the one side of his face.

At some point Sunny has to intervene to get them moving, being gentle with the kids despite her grouchy expression, and gently helps Izuku down and into his wheelchair. He was a lot better at standing for a bit now, but it helped to have someone nearby to help.

He calls back good-byes of his own as he’s wheeled out and is still crying when he sees his mother down the hall, who comes rushing over immediately. She wraps him in a hug instantly, telling him how good he is and just trying to calm him down until Sunny reaches over and lays a hand on Inko’s shoulder. They make eye contact and Sunny smirks.

“He’s fine, just missing his new friends already,” she explains and Inko nods but still doesn’t let go of Izuku until he’s just sniffling a little.

“You going to be okay sweetie?” Inko whispers and Izuku nods. He takes a shaking breath and nods a second time, a bit more certain.

“Yes ma’am, I just… I’m ready to go home now.”

Inko smiles down at him in understanding. “I am too, Izuku. I am too.”

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The first time Katsuki saw Izuku after the incident had been while he was still unconscious in the hospital bed, wrapped up like a mummy, missing and entire limb. Missing a few things, but the limb was what Katsuki had zeroed in on.

His parents had tried to deny him from coming along, but he had refused to be held back. He was going to see that nerd Deku and understand what on earth was going on.

He had fallen deathly silent when he and his parents had finally been allowed into the room. He knows his Aunt Inko had been there, of course she had been, but he doesn’t remember what she looked like. Doesn’t remember what anyone said. Just remembers a white noise in his ears as he stares at his childhood friend, unconscious, broken, never to be the same again.

The first thought to come to him was something along the lines of “Of course someone as worthless as him would end up like this. At least now he can’t keep taunting me.” His second thought isn’t really a thought but more of a body crushing nausea at the fact he had even had the first thought to begin with.

He hated Deku, he thought, hated how such a worthless, quirkless kid could ever think he could amount to what Katsuki strove to be. Hated how Izuku seemed to challenge him with his very existence as they both aimed for the pro hero leagues. Hated Izuku’s boundless intellect and determination and refusal to just accept he would never be a hero.

Hated how despite all this he still ended up enjoying working with Izuku on his stupid experiments. Hated how he liked the idea of Izuku building him things. Hated that he enjoyed brainstorming crazy ideas only two six-year-olds could compose with Izuku.

Katsuki was supposed to be above Izuku, everyone told him so. All of the facts told him so. It made sense. Yet no matter what happened, when Izuku actually got involved, Katsuki didn’t feel so high and mighty, whether through his challenges or through his intellect, Katsuki felt like he was struggling and he HATED IT.
He had hated that moment, standing, looking at Izuku’s broken body, so much more. He felt weak and useless and cruel and he couldn’t yell at Izuku. Couldn’t blame him. He wasn’t heartless, he was just a six-year-old molded by a broken society, and while he didn’t realize that fully, in that moment that was just what he felt like. Like he had no control and he wanted his childhood friend to wake up, bring him a new experiment, challenge him even, but mostly to just not be broken anymore.

He had left crying tears he hadn’t realized he’d been crying, his father finally just picking him up and holding him close as they walked back out to the car, letting Katsuki shake and quietly sob.

The next time he saw Izuku was nearly three weeks later. Mitsuki had been offering Inko a lot of support, but now it was time for Katsuki to do the same for Izuku. At least, that’s what his mom said he was doing. So he came over carrying folders and books from school. Make up work that he knew Izuku would be a nerd about and actually be excited to do.

That’s what should have happened, anyway, but instead when Katsuki had dropped it all in Izuku’s lap, forcing himself to look up at him, the green-haired boy had just stared at it numbly with his only eye. He hadn’t looked excited or angry or sad. He just stared at it, and that was worse.

Katsuki kept staring at Izuku, however, until the boy finally picked up a pencil and quietly tried to work, both of their parents watching a bit behind them. Katsuki had no intention of leaving until Izuku was done, which he knew he could do quickly, even when it was multiple days work. It was work for normal elementary school kids after all and Izuku was reading stuff for high school and college. He should have no trouble.

It takes him nearly two hours and Katsuki has had to sit down by now, still watching and waiting for some kind of response, but only gets Izuku gathering up the work and then falling back against his pillows, looking exhausted instead of invigorated. The explosive boy wants to scream at him, tell him to stop acting weird. It was bad enough he was all broken and beaten up, Katsuki didn’t want him acting weird too.

No words come out. Instead Masaru gathers up the schoolwork and his son and they leave. Katsuki feels angrier and sicker than ever before, but he does not cry. He refuses to cry.

He doesn’t visit Izuku in the hospital again. Too upsetting, his father determined, and Katsuki didn’t agree with the reason, but he didn’t fight with the solution. Not this time. Because he didn’t like seeing Izuku like he was. Like he… wasn’t Izuku. He was still kept in the loop, however, which is why he knows to be prepared for Izuku when he comes over to his house a few days after his release from the hospital.

Katsuki stands by his father, refuses to hide behind his leg, and watches as his mother helps Inko push Izuku’s wheelchair into the house. Katsuki’s eye catches on the empty space on Izuku’s right and the black eye patch that covers half his face.

Masaru taps the back of his hand to the side of Katsuki’s head and hisses down to him, “Don’t stare.” He was a lot gentler than Mitsuki, but when he gave an order, which was rare, Katsuki would do good to listen to him.

So he huffs and crosses his arms and looks down, mumbling, “Whatever.” He didn’t want to do this, but his parents had said they had to. That a lot was changing in the Midoriyas’ lives and the least they could do was to offer to look after Izuku while his mother was at her new job, and wasn’t that an odd thought. All his life Katsuki knew Inko to always be at her home, always available and present, and the thought of her going off to work just felt wrong.

“Katsuki, go grab Izuku and you a snack,” Mitsuki orders once Izuku is fully in the house and being
wheeled over towards the living room. Katsuki refuses to look over at him and turns quickly to rush to the kitchen, for once not putting up a fuss just so he can get out of there for a moment.

He takes his time when he gets to the kitchen, standing there in silence as he stares at the fridge. He doesn’t want this. He doesn’t want that quirkless Deku here, especially while he’s being wheeled around like an invalid, broken and not complete anymore. He doesn’t want to see that and he doesn’t want to deal with the terrible silent treatment he’d gotten last time.

Katsuki grabs some apple slices, biting his lip hard as he takes a deep breath. What was he doing, acting like a scared baby? If Izuku wanted to wallow than that wasn’t his problem. He could just deal. So he marches back out, glare intense and stubborn, and freezes at the entrance to the living room.

Inside Izuku had been brought over to the couch, but he isn’t in his wheelchair. Inko is hovering nearby, looking frantic and worried, but not touching Izuku as he stands there, legs quaking miserably, and wobbling towards the couch himself. His one arm is out for balance or to catch himself if he falls and when he finally reaches his destination he forces himself to slowly get onto the cushions instead of just flopping down. Izuku is breathing heavy as he tries to compose himself but once he finally relaxes he offers up a bright smile to his mother.

Katsuki remembered his parents telling him Izuku would be able to walk again, if not as well as other people, so he was not too surprised to see his childhood friend moving around at least a little. What gets him had been the determined look on his face and the bright, proud smile when he had completed his task. Those looks were familiar and he had not been close to using them last time Katsuki had seen him.

Slowly the blond boy steps closer, peering around the parents at Izuku, trying to get a new read on him. He didn’t look like he was wallowing. He looked near normal in his seat as Inko takes a few books and notebooks out from a pouch on the wheelchair and sets them in her son’s lap. Wait… books and notebooks? Those didn’t look like schoolwork.

Katsuki hates the sudden bloom of excitement in his chest, the one he always got when he was given a new build or experiment. He would never admit the feeling to anyone, ever. It was his secret and his alone, and by all that is holy in the world had he missed it these last two months.

“Kacchan!” Izuku calls loudly and Katsuki hasn’t heard him that loud in a while, even before the accident. “I had SO many ideas in the hospital! I need you to look over some of them and tell me what you think!” And wasn’t that the best way to get to Katsuki? Tell him his help was needed.

Slowly, like it hasn’t been on his face in a while, Katsuki smirks and scoffs. “Of course you do, Deku! You’re smart to not try anything else without MY opinion,” he says smugly, ignoring the happy feeling in his chest that grows and grows as he saunters over, not noticing their parents’ smiles, and hops onto the couch, setting the apple slices between them, takes the notebook Izuku offers him, and begins brainstorming.

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Izuku was distracting himself. He knew he was. The moment he had access to his workbench and Katsuki again he had completely filled his time with builds. He was back in school again, still in his own grade thanks to his ability to keep up with schoolwork with ease and his general intellect that the school didn’t want to give up.

Izuku also once fixed their air conditioning, which had been on the fritz for years, in the span of two days, so maybe they liked having him around for stuff like that too.
Nonetheless, Izuku was distracting himself. He even tried to distract himself with his physical therapy, which was painful and awful and stressful, but it was work and the way his physicians and his mother always looked so proud afterwards made him feel accomplished. He was given exercises for home he did constantly, especially when he hit a roadblock with his builds.

Still, despite it all being good for him or made him happy, it was all just to keep him from thinking about the changes that didn’t feel that big but felt like so much more.

His mother had a job, now. She described it as being something like a secretary for an immediate care medical facility, which apparently Dr. Kenta had let her know about the opening, and she was gone every single weekday from nine to six, and occasionally on Sundays as well. Izuku, in turn, unless Inko was allowed to leave early or something happened, went to the Bakugou house after school, and any Sunday Inko had to work, she would bring him to the Bakugous again.

He knew why it had to be done. His mother had explained it as gently as she could and he understood, but it still felt like his world was turning. Not the fact he was terrible at writing with one hand, not that he couldn’t tell how far away things were anymore, not that he had to be wheeled around in a wheelchair – not motorized yet – most of the time, but that his mother was no longer a stay at home mom.

He knew he should feel bad for her, that she was giving up her comfy life for him, but a selfish part of him took hold. When he got out of the hospital life was supposed to go back to normal. Yeah, things would be different, and he would have to grow accustomed to so many changes with himself on a physical level, but he had just wanted things to be normal somewhere. His mother was supposed to be the consistent factor, and he knew logically that was ridiculous. She was doing everything in her power to make sure he got what he needed. But it hurt. It hurt more than he realized it would and he didn’t like that it hurt. It made him feel like a bad person.

He just wanted things to be normal, though, and for some reason this didn’t feel final. It felt like just one of many more things to come.

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Izuku got his prosthetic arm in the middle of October. He had seen all kinds of advanced versions that moved just like an actually arm and hand with only a few limiting factors, but those were expensive and difficult to craft, especially when he was still a young, growing boy.

What Izuku got was an arm-shaped, skin-colored device that had straps over his chest to hold it in place, the elbow having limited motion, and a metal, rounded hook at the end with a wrist that moved just slightly.

Izuku had been doing well in his physical therapy visits and exercises and now they would be adding practice with his new arm to the mix. With how walking was progressing and getting just a bit easier over time the arm felt like it was exponentially harder and a few times he had grown so frustrated he had taken the arm off and threw it onto a table.

Which is why he was glaring daggers at his removed prosthetic while sitting on the Bakugou’s living room couch, Katsuki beside him, glaring at it too. He never thought he would be in a place where he and Katsuki would actually be angry over the same thing, if maybe for different reasons.

“It’s so ugly,” Katsuki comments. Izuku had been in the middle of doing a few exercises with the arm while he had been there after school, homework laid around the two boys, when he had finally just grunted in frustration and tossed it onto the coffee table.
“I hate it,” Izuku grumbles back, sinking into the couch and pouting.

“We should just go ahead and upgrade it,” Katsuki snaps, looking to Izuku like it was the most obvious thing on earth, not believing they hadn’t already done that yet. Izuku had had the arm for nearly two weeks now, why hadn’t they done anything?

“Can’t,” Izuku shakes his head and finally his glare falls. He could never stay truly angry for too long. Plus, crinkling his brows like that began to give him a headache over time. He wasn’t sure how Katsuki managed it. “I have to get used to it first. Learn the mechanics and become familiar with them so then I can alter them and adjust them the way I want. For now I’m stuck with this thing.”

Katsuki looks back at the arm, grumbles something highly inappropriate, and then sinks back into the couch as well. “It’s still stupid looking.”

“Yeah…” Izuku agrees dejectedly, looking at the thing. It really wasn’t that bad looking. All things considered it was amazing that such a device existed, helping so many people in situations like Izuku’s, but with everything going on Izuku just found everything about the prosthetic to be frustrating. Katsuki evidently wasn’t far behind, but he could get angry at just about anything if given enough time.

“We should paint it.”

It takes Izuku a moment to realize Katsuki said something, then another moment to put together what he said and what he means. Slowly Izuku turns his head to look at him, expression not changing as he says, deadly serious, “That is the best idea I have ever heard, ever.”

Katsuki smirks widely, a dangerous and superior look in his eye. “Fuck yeah it is!”

“Please stop swearing.”

“Fuck you.”

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Inko had been feeling like her stomach was doing somersaults the last few days. She stood in the train on her way to pick up her Izuku after work, the trip long and exhausting, but she had always said it was worth it. It was worth getting the necessary finances for her baby. However, things were not turning out the way they were supposed to.

She had begun to worry around the end of September, but when Izuku had begun making leaps and bounds in his walking, and he had gone ahead and just built a motorized wheelchair himself, things had gotten a little easier. One less thing to worry about. One less thing to buy.

It hadn’t lasted.

Now it was the end of October and that fear was rearing its ugly head again. In a quiet moment at her work – which really was a lovely place with wonderful coworkers, a bit of a silly boss, and the only main thing to worry about rude, impatient customers – Inko had looked over her finances and the necessary money they would need to make ends meet and… and it wasn’t enough. She tried to do some math in her head and had taken a page out of her son’s book and began writing down notes on some receipt paper she pulled out of the machine.

All medical finances needed to be paid and she could not give them up. Hisashi’s money was helping with that now, which meant Inko had to focus more on the finances at home. Bills, groceries, that kind of thing. Perhaps she could cut down on the cable? She knew Izuku would have a cow,
though, if he couldn’t get to the news, the science channels, or the hero channels, but he may just have to accept that.

Inko deflated, hand curling a little tighter on the grip in the train. She didn’t want to take anything else away from Izuku, though. Maybe internet? He mostly relied on books for his research, and Inko hardly used it, so that could help, but it still wasn’t enough. Groceries couldn’t be changed, but maybe there was a cheaper place to go?

Inko chews on her lip to keep from crying in the middle of a public space, but a few tears do flow loose. She didn’t want to say it, didn’t want to think it, but even if she cut back on a lot of things it wouldn’t help in the long run. The biggest thing Hisashi’s money had been covering, which he couldn’t cover now that he was focusing mostly on medical, was what was putting Inko into a bind.

They didn’t live in a fancy neighborhood, but it was by no means run down or poor. Inko swallows, tears flowing at what this meant.

There was no way they would be able to afford living where they were for much longer.

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When Inko showed up to the Bakugou’s she was surprised to have Mitsuki answer the door looking disheveled, a little manic, and with… was that paint smears on her clothes? Oh dear.

“What happened??” Inko asked, concerned, hands coming up to cover her mouth in surprise, and Mitsuki begins to laugh something that really didn’t sound sane.

“Our boys decided that it was a good idea to get paint just about everywhere in the living room, is what happened!” the tall woman says, a very obvious forced cheerfulness in her voice.

“I suggested we go outside!” Inko hears her son’s voice call immediately followed by what sounds like a crash and Katsuki screeching.

“The hell, Deku?? You did not! What the fuck are you doing??”

Misuki turns around, giving Inko space to step in, if a bit nervously, and screeches back, “Bakugou Katsuki! You watch your fucking language!!”

“Whatever, old hag!”

Inko quietly closes the door behind her as Mitsuki goes marching towards the living room, a fire in her eyes. This felt so normal that it lets Inko forget the terrible realization she had had on her way over, if only for a bit. It’s enough, and soon she’s smiling fondly as she also makes her way to the living room.

Her smile fades as she sees the mess. The coffee table is just about covered with splatters of paint. It looks cheap, and then she sees the small paint tubes on the floor that would belong in a child’s art stash. Which means it must be washable. Thank god.

Paint has dripped onto the rug beneath the table and at least it isn’t on the couch, but it’s close. Mitsuki is standing by the table, holding her son’s ear, berating him with a raised voice that he matches. Inko had never been sure how she felt about how Mitsuki disciplined her child, but with the way he snapped back and they went back and forth it didn’t feel as bad as it probably looked.

Then she sees her son, standing up on wobbly, but much steadier legs, his prosthetic strapped on, but over his shirt now. He must have taken it off and put it back on at some point. He limps as best he
can over to his mother and Inko is blown away by the sheer power of his smile. He hadn’t smiled like that in so long. Certainly he smiled, but since the incident it just hadn’t been this bright.

“Mom! Look what Kacchan did!” Izuku says and Inko frowns in confusion. Usually those words proceeded the showing of a bruise or small burn with a steady stream of tears. This time Izuku is the happiest he’s been in months, raising his prosthetic to show the fleshy colored, hard surfaces are now painted in one of the most intricate and well done All Might designs Inko has ever seen.

She kneels down in front of her son, staring in baffled amazement at the prosthetic. Izuku keeps grinning as she reaches out and takes the hook-hand gently in her palm, lifting it up, turning the forearm, and looking at it from every angle. Its bright reds, blues, yellows, and whites are so All Might, and by extension so Izuku’s, she’s amazed she hadn’t thought to do something like this before. She looks up at her son. His legs are shaking a little but he doesn’t seem to care. She smiles.

“It’s perfect, Izuku,” she says lovingly and feels her heart fill as her son smiles even brighter, chest puffing out.

Dinner is strained that night. Inko, once she comes down from her high of seeing her son so happy, remembers her realization previously and begins to fret. As she gets cooking she munches on a bag of chips to her side, stress eating as she considers how to break it to her son. She still isn’t sure what they are going to do, but she knows Izuku wouldn’t appreciate being in the dark until the last minute. He would probably figure out there was an issue on his own in the meantime anyway.

She knows that the best way to address her son is with honesty and respect. That was what he needed, what he deserved, but Inko fretted over the best way to get the conversation started.

So dinner was mostly quiet as they ate, Izuku actually trying to maneuver his now All Might themed prosthetic with hardly any mumbled complaints. He still had some work to do figuring it out, but he was a persistent boy, if seeing how he had improved his walking so quickly said anything. Inko eats quickly, her nerves getting the best of her.

It turns out she need not worry about how to start the conversation because her son was one step ahead of her. “Mom? Is everything okay?” he mumbles and Inko looks up. She hadn’t realized she’d ducked her head and now she sees her son’s worried expression. He had probably been watching her for a while now. He wasn’t the most observant of boys when it came to the atmosphere, no, but anyone could tell how distressed Inko was in that moment.

The small woman opens her mouth the say everything is fine on reflex, but quickly snaps it closed when she realizes she shouldn’t do that. She instead takes a deep breath and raises a hand to rub at her eyes. She felt so exhausted all of a sudden.

“You don’t have anything you need to worry about, sweetie, it’s just…” Inko pauses, trying to think of the best way to put this. She had been thinking all day about her words, yet still it was a strain to pull the right ones out. “There are probably going to be a few more changes in our lives, soon, I’m afraid,” she finally admits and she’s proud at how steady her voice comes out, even if her very soul is shaking.

“W-what?” Izuku’s eye turns panicked immediately, wide and fearful, and Inko hates herself for being the reason that expression is there and she is up and rushing over to her son in a blink, wrapping him up in a hug.

“No, sweetie, it’s okay, it’s nothing bad,” she assures frantically, tears beginning to form in her eyes,
“It’ll just be… different.”

“B-b-but…” Izuku says into her shirt and she can feel the tears soaking in there, can feel him shaking. What he says next, however, has her heart shattering. “Everything is already different!” He spits out the word “different” like it’s a poison and she can’t blame him. Not after everything. “E-e-everyone at school is e-either too nice or too mean. I can’t write normal anymore. I h-h-have to get around in a w-wheelchair most of the time,” he lists off in a blur of words, frantic and upset and his voice breaking. “A-and n-now you have to w-work b-b-because of me and I bet this will be b-b-because of me too!”

Inko freezes in shock, looking down at the top of her son’s head, her own tears grinding to a halt. Slowly, carefully slowly, she pushes Izuku back by his shoulders then kneels down to now look up at him in his dining chair. “Izuku… You don’t believe this is your fault, do you?” Izuku looks away, tears streaming down the right side of his face, lip quivering.

Inko stares at him, mouth slightly hanging open as if stuck on a word she hasn’t said, then reaches up to lay her hand on her son’s left cheek, the side that has the thick, black eye patch resting above it, covering up the healed, but empty, socket. Izuku flinches but Inko is stubborn now and keeps her hand there, gentle and loving, until Izuku looks down at her.

“Izuku, sweetie, none of this is your fault,” Inko whispers into the fragile air and Izuku wheezes on a sob, closing his eye.

“Yes it is—“

“No. It isn’t,” Inko says sharply, her expression hard, and Izuku looks at her in surprise. “It was not your fault that someone else did those bad things, that there was a villain in a place you knew to be safe. You are not at fault for any of this.” Inko looks over her son, at the eye patch, the prosthetic, his back and legs. “A bad thing happened to you, out of your control, and honestly… If you hadn’t been there…” Inko hesitates, not sure if she should say this. “If you hadn’t been there to help Hatsume-chan, she may not have made it out at all.”

Inko looks her son in the eye, intense and sure of herself now. “You were a hero, Izuku.”

Izuku hiccups and begins crying again, but now just to let everything out. He scoots out of his seat and joins his mother on the ground, where he hugs her tightly and weeps. She cries as well, holding her son tightly. Everything was going to be okay, even if it was different, because they had each other and nothing could take that away.

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**Meichine: that is really far away**

**AllRightAllMight01001001: I know.**

Izuku sat in the computer room, staring sadly at the chatroom in front of him. He hadn’t seen much of the Hatumes since the incident, but he had at least managed to get Mei’s contact information so they could chat when they had the chance. It was probably better this way, anyway. He knew they didn’t mean to be rude, but whenever he saw them they were always staring and avoiding. It didn’t make him feel any better, to say the least.

It was the middle of November and Inko had finally approached Izuku, eyes sad, with the information on their future apartment. It had taken a lot of research and planning, Izuku helping out a lot with the numbers, but they finally were able to narrow down their choices.
It wasn’t ideal, and Izuku had cried along with his mother, but it would work. They weren’t planning on moving out, either, until after Izuku finished this grade, so they had a little time. They would just be without cable – Izuku had nearly thrown his first ever temper tantrum when he found out about it but he had swallowed the desire down as best he could and just cried – and food would have to be a tiny bit more bland, but it would be okay.

AllRightAllMight01001001: I don’t want to leave, but I have to.

AllRightAllMight01001001: We can’t afford to stay where we are.

AllRightAllMight01001001: And didn’t your mom say the scrapyard she uses is actually pretty close to it?

Meichine: so what that doesnt matter

Meichine: lemme sell some of my babies I bet I could get you more money

AllRightAllMight01001001: We both know you would never do that.

AllRightAllMight01001001: Who would ever sell their babies, anyway? So cruel.

AllRightAllMight01001001: You’re a bad mother.

Meichine: you hush I need my rival to stay nearby so I can keep tabs on him

Meichine: why don’t you sell some of your stuff then

Meichine: ???

Izuku looks away from the computer to look around the room. He had a few builds connected to the computer, helping it run better, and a few useless prototypes sitting on the shelf his mother had said were amazing and had wanted to show off.

He had thought about that, had thought of doing that long before the incident as well, thinking maybe to make money for other builds, but something about it felt wrong.

Not to take Mei’s word, but these were his babies. They, he and Mei, built entirely different things, hers more crude and chunky, Izuku a bit more refined, but their builds meant so much to them, they couldn’t just sell them. And it wasn’t like they could get jobs building or fixing things, they were only six, and while the fantasy of providing money for his mother and helping her out sounded so good in his head, he knew he, and Mei, were in no place to do so. The plan was set and they would just have to deal.

AllRightAllMight01001001: I’m a good father. I would never sell MY babies.

Izuku smiles despite himself. He lowers his hand from typing. It takes him a while to type now with only one hand, but he is finally in the process of improving his cruddy prosthetic that, hopefully, he will be able to use it in more intricate tasks soon.

Nowadays his fake arm still has the same bicep and forearm pieces, painted with more permanent paint now to keep the All Might theme, but the hook is gone. Instead he has two finger-like extensions and a thumb. It still works off of how he flexes and moves his muscles, but he has begun to get a lot better using it. He can grip handles now, even utensils if he’s really careful, and he has begun moving it a bit more like an arm like Kyou had done with his own back in the children’s ward, but it has a long way to go until it gets to some of Izuku’s more detailed arm plans.
The computer dings and Izuku looks up, but it isn’t from Mei. He has another chatroom open as well. Another one he had sent a link to on his new apartment information.

KingKill: The hell???

AllRightAllMight01001001: That’s where mom and me are going to go to after this school year is up.

There is a long pause. Katsuki was always terrible at chatrooms. Izuku and Mei sass each other back and forth while he waits, then goes back when he suddenly hears a long series of dings, one right after the other.

KingKill: F

KingKill: U

KingKill: C

KingKill: K

KingKill: N

KingKill: O

AllRightAllMight01001001: We don’t have a choice, Kacchan.

KingKill: Don’t care, it’s stupid.

AllRightAllMight01001001: It’s logical.

KingKill: HOW IS THAT LOGICAL??

KingKill: Who’s gonna look after you when your mom is working??

AllRightAllMight01001001: With some of the money we’re saving we will be able to hire someone from the doctors to basically play nanny.

KingKill: AND YOU WANT THAT???

AllRightAllMight01001001: Of course not!

AllRightAllMight01001001: It is the best we can do, though.

KingKill: BULLSHIT! Just ask my shitty parents! They’d bend over fucking backwards for you and your mom!

AllRightAllMight01001001: Do you really think my mother and I living at your house would actually work out? Really?

There is a long period where Katsuki doesn’t answer, longer than usual, and Izuku knows that’s a sign he’s probably fuming about being faced with logic that beats his temper tantrum. Izuku and Mei sass back and forth again as he waits for Katsuki to come back and continue.

KingKill: Okay, FINE, then how do you intend to make it to school on time from there?? You can’t walk from there! Stupid Deku!

Ah, there it was. The part Izuku had really been dreading. The new location was far away. A lot
farther than they had really wanted, but it was a doable price, was two levels with the first level plenty easy to manage in a wheelchair, had room for two people, and was closer to Inko’s work and Izuku’s physical therapists as well. It was perfect for their situation, except they knew there would be things they would have to sacrifice.

_AllRightAllMight01001001_: I won’t be going to the same school after I move.

The silence this time is painful and Izuku can’t even find it in himself to play back and forth with Mei as he waits this time. He just stares at his and Katsuki’s chat, waiting.

Finally a ding.

_KingKill_: What?

Izuku hated that he couldn’t hear tone of voice through chat, so in his panic he does what he does best. He rambles.

_AllRightAllMight01001001_: The school district is different where I will be going.

_AllRightAllMight01001001_: And the school will also be cheaper, which helps out a lot.

_AllRightAllMight01001001_: But it would still be possible to travel between our homes on weekends. Our parents would probably have to come with us, though.

_AllRightAllMight01001001_: The new apartment has a bit of a courtyard, too. The building is a big circle and the balconies and porches go out to it.

_AllRightAllMight01001001_: So we can do a lot more experiments out there now.

_AllRightAllMight01001001_: We just won’t see each other every weekday anymore.

_AllRightAllMight01001001_: But we can keep chatting like we are now.

Izuku is in the middle of typing the next line, eye wide and tears beginning to form, when there’s a ding and he snaps his head up, looking for the message.

_KingKill has gone offline._

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It’s awkward at the Bakugou household for a while. Despite the strain now on the two young boys, Izuku still goes there for after school supervision. Katsuki won’t talk to him, will hardly look at him, so Izuku dejectedly does his homework in silence and sometimes even alone. There are no experiments, but Izuku does at least sketch out a few new ideas and blueprints. A few times he finds himself in with his auntie or uncle, just trying to find company, but also mildly interested.

He and Mitsuki have become fervent fans of a soap opera she is always watching, both being quite vocal whenever something foolish or surprising happens. Izuku refuses to admit this to anyone but Mitsuki has no shame and immediately tells his mother. It’s embarrassing.

He and Masaru don’t do anything like that, nothing nearly as loud and vocal, Izuku just likes to watch him sketch out fashion ideas at his drawing table. He even gave Izuku some professional drawing paper at one point, with a sketched out model on it, and let him try to design anything he wanted, giving Izuku pointers whenever he asked. It had been fun, even though Izuku’s All Might dress ended up looking positively dreadful.
It was hardly the same though. Certainly he had found he enjoyed being around the Bakugou parents, Katsuki was meant to be his friend in this. Or something like a friend. He still wasn’t sure, even after all this. Katsuki was still distant and sometimes cruel to him at school, after all.

It wasn’t until early December that they spoke again. There was no build up, no preparation or awkward beginnings, it was just Katsuki apparently deciding he was done with his silent treatment and approaching him, snapping, “So how big is this courtyard, anyway, huh?”

Izuku had grinned brightly, to which Katsuki had told him to stop since he was still grouchy and not happy but they were talking and that was what mattered.

The restart of their tedious friendship was also the beginning of the end of their parents’ sanity. They had until March before Izuku would leave and their meet ups would very quickly dwindle. Four months. So they went into overdrive, planning, building, and experimenting with all of their might. Some of Izuku’s builds were already scattered around the Bakugou household, but suddenly they just about littered the place as badly as they did Izuku’s own home. Experiments, prototypes, failures, and a few successes covered the living room, the front porch, the backyard, and Katsuki’s room.

Hatsume Āto had indeed told Izuku that his new apartment would be a lot closer to the scrapyard she went to – and that the woman who owned it had a daughter about his age, which she had added on with a wink and a loud cackle – but for now she was back to bringing Izuku a steady supply. Usually she dropped them off at his apartment or Inko would run out to grab it as quickly as she could on weekends.

Now Izuku brought the majority of the scrap metal here to the Bakugou’s so he and Katsuki could build and immediately test and make necessary adjustments. When March finally comes around, and Izuku and Katsuki are forced to finally clean the house, they have successfully built a series of inventions.

Katsuki’s Firework Flasher gauntlets get upgraded to hold more chemicals and resist more of his explosions.

Katsuki also suggested, and got, gloves that magnified his explosions and gave his wrists more support. He had realized very early on in his quirk usage that overuse made his hands and wrists hurt something fierce.

They built a little rover-like bot that would roll around and bring them tools or snacks, mostly just built for when they didn’t want to get off the couch.

Izuku, when he got frustrated trying to get research since he had more difficulty getting to books now, went ahead and built himself a laptop. It wasn’t the best, and he knew that, but he didn’t need it to be. He just needed access to the internet more quickly.

Izuku made thank you gifts for the Bakugou parents too, Misuki getting a ring that had a holographic display along its length that she could use to set alerts and reminders, which she mostly used for her shows, and Masaru getting a mechanical pencil that, through chemical fusions and alterations in its grip, could change between red, blue, and grey, making his starting sketches easier.

The three biggest builds, however, were the ones that took up most of their time. Izuku had made all kinds of plans and blueprints while in the hospital, and while they did vary, his focus had been on something more hopeful. He hadn’t told anyone yet, but he still intended to be a hero, which would be so much harder now with his handicaps on top of being quirkless. It wasn’t going to stop him.

So when Izuku is taking his inventions back home from the Bakugou’s one day in March, letting
Katsuki at least keep the Firework Flashers – the gloves still needed a lot more work – the day of his departure on the horizon, in the largest of his bags sat prototypes of an arm, an eye, and a spine.

Chapter End Notes

Me last chapter: Hey guys next chapter may not be so long!
Me this chapter: *writes chapter with 2000 more words
Me: *sweats
Uh, hope y'all enjoy?
Chapter Song: Imagine Dragons - Thunder
The Apartment

Chapter Notes

Listen, I am not going to be releasing this many chapters so consistently in the future, I'm just really excited y'all! This is fun! Hope y'all like this one!

I used this floor plan as a very loose idea of the Midoriya's new apartment. Just shrink it down some and alter a couple walls, really.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Mom, really, it’s fine,” Izuku tries to assure for what felt like the thousandth time, his mother hugging the near life out of him. Oh, the irony, survive a building collapse, but fall the constriction of a worried mother.

“Are you sure? I’m sure we could find someone to come and sit with you. Maybe Mitsuki wouldn’t mind riding down to keep you company. I could call in, even! Just for the day!” Inko said frantically, rubbing her face into her son’s hair and Izuku can’t help but giggle at the ticklish feeling.

“Mooooom,” he whines and his mother finally releases him, wiping at her face before deflating with a sigh, looking twenty years older.

“Okay. Okay, sweetie, I trust you,” she finally says and offers a small, tired smile to her son, and Izuku offers one back. He follows her on wobbly but much more trustworthy legs to the front door.

“She’s wearing her scrubs, looking worriedly over her son, but he just waves her on.

“Mom, it’ll be okay. I won’t be going anywhere. Just going to work on some of my ideas,” he reassures and Inko nods, pats down her hair a little, then leans down and plants a loud kiss to Izuku’s forehead that he whines about.

“I love you, sweetie,” she says and he smiles up at her.

“Love you too, mom,” he replies and she finally turns to head to work.

They had been adjusting to their new apartment the last week with Inko getting a few days off from work so she and Izuku can focus on that. It was a tiny place in a building that looked run down and drab with chipping paint, torn wallpaper, and antisocial neighbors. The apartments were small, but not as bad as they could have been.

The entrance hall immediately had a door to the right to one of the two bedrooms, a cramped little room that really only had room for the essentials with a bed, closet, bookshelf, and desk all shoved inside. That was Inko’s room now. Across from that was a hall closet and further down hall, to the left, was an American style bathroom, built that way to save space.

The hall moves into a larger living space just at the bathroom door with the glass sliding doors that lead to the back porch at the back. They have set up their television in the back right corner with the couch against the right wall and a coffee table in front of it. Around the hall corner to the right as soon as one enters the living space is an empty doormframe that leads into their itty bitty kitchen and they’ve set up their kitchen table in the space in front of the wall there.
Finally to the left of the main room is the last door to Izuku’s bedroom. It’s a bit larger than Inko’s to accommodate his wheelchair and his workbench, but essentially it is the same save for a smaller, glass sliding door, like the one in the living room, that also leads out to the back porch.

It is a lot smaller than the last apartment, rooms smaller and more tightly packed together, but Izuku wouldn’t call it bad. He’s a little excited about the courtyard, which is covered in dead or dying grass, surrounded by the apartment building on all sides, and that was about it, but to Izuku all he sees is a huge, empty space for bigger experiments.

Today, however, was Inko’s first day back to work and since school had yet to begin again Izuku would be left home alone, which had led to Inko’s momentary panic. Izuku couldn’t blame her. Since the incident he had always been around someone, always had company, heck even before that his mother was always home with him, and this would be the first time in his life that he would be home entirely alone.

A babysitter had been mentioned and considered, but that just wasn’t a logical solution. They had a caregiver now paid and scheduled to walk Izuku home from school, check over him, and make sure he’s okay, but they would not be staying with him, they decided. With the way Izuku was progressing so quickly and positively, and with their limitations on money, that seemed like the best choice.

Now, with Izuku not needing to go anywhere, and Inko needing to get back to work lest she get in trouble, he was left alone in his new home.

Izuku moves carefully to the couch and sits down. He felt tired, but not as exhausted as he had when he had first started learning to walk again. It was a lot of improving, but he still had a ways to go, especially with what he had planned.

Izuku opens up his large sketchbook and corresponding notebook and begins going over some of his recent notes and ideas. While he had the very crude prototypes of a new arm, eye, and spine built and in his room, they were still just that; prototypes. There were all kinds of mechanics he needed to build, perfect, and just about invent to get them working for him and in shape for a hero’s work.

The biggest issue he currently had was how to actually connect them to himself. Though he had upgraded his prosthetic a few times now, it was not at all what he needed. Not even the highest tech prosthetics were what he was going to need. While there were hero’s that did where prosthetics, usually they could only get away with it because their quirk helped cover any new weaknesses the handicaps created. Izuku did not have a quirk, however, so he was going to have to really think.

He ends up pulling out his handmade laptop at some point trying to do research on how other prosthetics worked, but in the end he just felt frustrated and incompetent. He tried to tell himself that, despite all things, he was a six-year-old trying to invent a new technology that could, once perfected, change the course of medical history, but still he felt like a failure.

He’s laying there, wallowing, staring out at the courtyard but not really staring, when suddenly a cat appears on his porch, or whatever one would call a flat slab of concrete.

Izuku blinks in surprise as the cat, an orange tabby with stumpy legs, trots leisurely across his porch then disappears off to the right. Izuku blinks again then is scrambling to get up without hurting himself and wobbling over to the sliding doors.

A cat like that, with stumpy legs and a rounded belly, couldn’t possibly be a stray, could it? If it wasn’t though, he would hate for someone to have lost their cat, so he slides open the door and pokes his head out. On the porch to his right, his neighbor’s porch, he sees a number of mismatched
bowls filled with cat food or water. The cat is sitting there, munching at some of the food, and Izuku feels relieved.

The cat is absolutely adorable, he thinks as he wobbles carefully out and towards the cat. He isn’t a stealthy person, not before the incident and certainly not now, and the cat’s ears flick back towards him before it’s head looks back too. It has pretty blue eyes, and it really doesn’t look like a stray, and it stares suspiciously at Izuku for a long moment before standing. The boy holds his breath, curious what the cat is doing, when it walks straight at him and rubs pointedly at his leg. Didn’t act like a stray, either it seemed.

Izuku tries hard not to coo loudly and carefully sits down in the grass between the two porches. The tabby walks around him a few times, sniffs at his prosthetic, but eventually just settles for sitting in front of him and accepting his pets happily. Izuku feels suddenly like he may be in heaven when he hears a meow that doesn’t come from the orange tabby. It seems more hesitant than the tabby’s shameless desire for love, but it doesn’t seem afraid of Izuku either, sniffing at him before finally plopping down by his side where Izuku can gently scratch at its side with his prosthetic fingers.

Then, suddenly there’s another, a pure brown cat with a stump tail and mint eyes that curls up in Izuku’s lap, and a black cat with brown eyes that rolls on its back and actually lets Izuku scratch its belly, and a filthy probably white one with folded over ears that rubs at Izuku’s back, and Izuku may be dying from how unexpected this adorable turn of events is.

He’s just about ready to just lay back and let the cats crawl on him, his smile wide, when he spots one more cat slinking out of the shadows and he pauses. This one is a long-haired tortoiseshell with very obvious battle scars and matted fur. It’s big and muscular and glaring at Izuku with gold eyes and it is positively beautiful despite how scary it looks.

Izuku hesitates with this one but he still puts out his real hand, top of hand out, to let the cat sniff if it wants. He yanks his hand back when it hisses, which makes a lot of the other cats hop up and dart away. The tortoiseshell’s fur is standing on end, tail swishing back and forth, and very slowly Izuku tries to scoot away. When he is back on his own porch the cat finally seems to relax then goes to one of the many bowls of cat food to eat. None of the other cats approach.

Izuku breathes a sigh of relief and finally tries to stand, back aching viciously, but he fights through the pain until he’s up. He probably should do some of his exercises now, he figures, then glances again at the big, scary cat. Maybe if he did them outside, kept his distance but also was present, the cat could warm up to him. All the others had been so kind, maybe this one was just frightened.

He figures that that isn’t true, just by looking at all the scars on the stray. This is probably just a full wild cat that knows it can get free food from this place and would never actually approach a human, but it could be worth a shot.

Which is how Izuku finds himself out in the dead, crunching grass, doing his stretches and exercises, often looking around for the feral cat. For a while it stays by the food, swatting at any other cat that comes near save for the orange tabby, oddly enough. Then it is over in one of the pathways between two apartments that leads directly out of the courtyard and to the front of the complex. Then, quite suddenly, it’s just gone.

Izuku pouts as he sits again on the ground and stretches. Maybe he should just start coming outside for his exercises now? Win the cat’s trust? It was also very nice outside in the fresh air. He probably needed more fresh air.
Suddenly, as he is bending over his legs to the best of his ability with his tight back, a weight suddenly lands between his shoulder blades and he looks back as best he can. Laying there, with its stumpy legs folded under it so it looks like a pumpkin, is the orange tabby, looking around like this is entirely normal. Izuku smiles.

“Yeah, you? You’re definitely my favorite.”

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Izuku tries to get in as much tinkering as he can before he has to go back to school. School was easy from an intellectual point of view for him; easy to get through and do his work, but the sheer amount of time he was away at classes and the emotional strain of other kids usually cut down on his build time.

While he was trying to focus on his robotic builds for his arm, eye, and spine, he also knew that if he focused only on them he would go crazy. Lack of inspiration would be an issue, and sometimes stepping away and working on something else was the perfect way to find a solution to a problem.

In addition, if he had any intention to become a hero with these replacements, it made sense to give them some forms of weaponry. Nothing lethal, never lethal, but he would need some kind of advantage. An advantage most people had through their quirks, but Izuku would need to build.

He decided the best place to start was simple self-defense tools. He had gone onto sites that sold all kinds of weapons, mostly decorative, but also with a lot of ones with practical uses. This was his inspiration that would lead to his research.

The most effective one, but also complicated, for himself was a taser. He wasn’t sure how he would implement it into his hand, he just knew it would need to be there. Not like a taser eye or spine made any sense. He would need to figure out how to get it to the specific charge and voltage of a professional level taser and figure how to make sure it didn’t do damage to any other parts of his builds. It was a lot of variables to consider if he also thought of how far he still needed to go with the arm itself, but if he started early and worked hard he was sure he could do it.

At the current moment he was working on trying to recreate the exact charge he would need for the taser. Professional tasers, on a basic level, momentarily severed the brain’s signals to the muscles, causing contractions, pain, and momentary paralysis, which usually caused them to collapse. It was the more intense option, and Izuku intended to also make a stun gun option, something less painful and more localized, but he needed to move one step at a time.

Izuku is leaning in close to a small box he has made, working inside of it with a soldering iron, protective goggles in place, his prosthetic holding down the machine while his left very slowly and carefully works on the circuits. Two prongs stand atop the box, a crude build for him, but good enough for the time being.

The prongs suddenly spark and Izuku looks up, moving his tools away. Oh, he didn’t want that right now. He moves and turns a small dial on the box then goes back to work, his iron just making contact with a circuit, when…

Izuku yelps and falls out of his chair and under his desk when the box sparks even more brightly and the light above Izuku’s station suddenly explodes. Izuku uses his prosthetic to pull the power cord for the box out of his wall and then sits there, under his desk, back aching and he just stares bug-eyed out into his room.

“Izuku??” he hears his mother call from outside his room followed by footsteps and he immediately
calls back on instinct.

“I’m fine!” Izuku takes a deep breath. It looked like there was a lot more work to do.

----------

Izuku had been fine when he and his mother moved into the new apartment. Had been fine having to say good-bye to the Bakugous and the Hatsumes. Was fine every day he went out to do his exercises and that tortoiseshell ignored him or hissed at him. It was all sad and bittersweet, but he had been fine.

The first day in a new school, however, had him positively terrified. His mother had walked him to school early, him wheeling himself around in his motorized wheelchair. He had cleaned up the motor a little and it hardly made any noise save for a small squeak on turns while not moving forward.

While he was better at walking he had been advised to use the wheelchair still until he was entirely confident in his abilities. He really, really did not like it at all. These kids were going to already judge him on the arm and the eye and eventually on his quirkless nature once they found out, he hated having another thing to draw attention to him.

Add on he knew how the kids at his old school treated him. He knew their habits and which places to avoid and what not to talk about to avoid excess ridicule, but he didn’t know these kids and that scared him. It scared him a lot.

The principal was at least a lot friendlier than his old one. A tiny man with a mane of fur running down his back and onto a tail that was so long he just flopped it over his shoulder. His teacher seemed the same as his old one, unfortunately, giving Izuku pitying looks and speaking to him like he was a baby. Izuku did not care for him.

When he was finally led to his room for class he thought, “This is it,” as he stared at the classroom door. It was closed and the principal, who had been walking with him since he got there, opens the door for him, and lets Izuku wheel himself in. An immediate hush falls over the classroom. Izuku doesn’t even know how loud it had been a moment ago, but he knows this silence is deafening.

He realizes he’s shaking and quickly ducks his head, ears ringing. He can’t hear what his teacher and the principal are saying anymore, but he figures it must be introductions of some kind. This is the first day of school, there’s sure to be other students that weren’t here the year before, but he gets treated differently because they think he needs the help. Because he’s handicapped. He feels sick.

Izuku swallows and jumps in surprise when a hand touches his shoulder, he looks over to the principal, who is smiling kindly and bit apologetically, and Izuku appreciates that, but then he notices one of the students coming over to them.

“Midoriya, this is Haganehato Mashi. She will be here to help you on anything you may need as you get accustomed to our school,” the principal says. Izuku feels like he’s being treated like a new student in the middle of the year, and he knows they’re just trying to help, but he still hates it.

He looks again to Haganehato, which sounds oddly familiar, and looks her over. She’s short and scrappy with dark skin, green eyes, and a mess of blood red hair tied terribly up into mismatched pigtails. She looks like she doesn’t want to be here either, helping out Izuku, and doesn’t that just make him feel worse.

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“Call me Mashi. It’s better,” she says in a grumpy voice and Izuku thinks of Katsuki and his eye falls, suddenly sad. He hadn’t felt truly homesick until this very moment, missing his childhood
friend.

The class itself goes by normally if Izuku ignores the stares from the other kids. He doesn’t like where he sits, now, but it makes sense. He was used to sitting in the back, where he could get all his work done then begin writing in his notebooks and muttering in peace. Well, until someone would hush him, anyway. Now he sits in the desk closest to the door right beside a kid with blue scales covering their body and tentacles for hair.

For the most part Izuku does a great job ignoring everyone during the classes, but then it comes time for lunch. Mashi helps grab his bento from the pouch on the back of his wheelchair and he gets to eating, hoping that if he doesn’t make eye contact with anyone no one will talk to him. All he has to do is get through lunch with no issue… For the rest of his elementary school and junior high life.

“Hey, Midoriya!” Yep, he should have suspected that it wasn’t going to last, but he had really been hoping he could get away with at least a few days. Or minutes.

Izuku shrinks into his chair then slowly looks up. One of his classmates has pulled a chair up to the front of his desk and is sitting down. He hasn’t brought over his food, but he’s smiling friendly enough. He had no physical differences to him thanks to any quirk as far as Izuku could tell; his blond hair is in a bowl cut, the sides of which curling up from needing to be cut. Behind him are three more students, looking excited and curious.

“I’m Kaito,” the boy in front of him says, bouncing slightly in his seat, looking every bit like an innocent looking kid. After all of the cruelty Izuku has dealt with, however, he knows that that could very easily be a ruse.

“H-hi…” Izuku greets slowly, ducking his head and glancing up at Kaito through his bangs. The boy doesn’t seem too bothered, which Izuku really hopes is a good sign.

“So… we wanted to ask you how you like it here?” Asks one of the kids behind Kaito, a tiny boy with a baldhead covered in dark red spikes. A few of the kids nod in awkward agreement. Izuku swallows. Okay, at least they were being polite so far.

“It’s normal,” he says honestly, nodding, keeping his head and his voice down. “Nothing too different.”

“You’re the only new kid in our grade this year,” says Kaito, cheerful and a little too much energy for Izuku. The green-haired boy looks around, trying to find something else to focus on. Anything, really. Anything at all.

He spots Mashi obviously watching him and the group of kids, not at all trying to be sneaky, and wonders what she knows that he doesn’t. What are these kids like? Should Izuku be worried or not?

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“So, yeah…” Kaito draws back his attention, tapping at the desk, looking up and around for a second, before, very suddenly, leaning forward across the desk, childish grin big, eyes twinkling as they meet Izuku’s. “What happened to you, anyway?” he asks and Izuku sees the other kids smiling, excited and curious and with some kind of knowing look Izuku doesn’t understand.

Izuku still shrinks back, opening his mouth to say that it didn’t matter and he really just wanted to eat, but suddenly his mouth is moving like he can’t control it. “A hero fight collapsed a building I was in, crushing my arm, destroying my eye, and causing severe damage to my spinal cord.” The kids “oooh” in intrigue while Kaito nods, looking pleased and a little smug while Izuku’s eye widens in horror and he raises his flesh hand to cover his mouth.
“Oh, sorry about that, I just wanted to know,” Kaito apologizes too cheerfully for it to be real. The other kids don’t look sorry either.

“Kaito’s quirk makes it so if you make eye contact with him when he asks a question you have to answer it truthfully,” says one of the kids, a girl with nails that are sparkling like crystal. Izuku can feel himself shaking, can feel the tears building as he stares in disbelief. What? Had he really just forced that information out of him? He felt like he was going to be sick, disbelief and disgust flooding his system.

Kaito evidently doesn’t have any issue taking advantage of Izuku looking at him and catches his eye again as he asks, “That’s my quirk, what’s yours?”

Izuku’s eye widens in even further horror, trying desperately to hold his hand in place, but an invisible pull makes it lower. He spots movement to his side, something red, as he opens his mouth. He sees Mashi marching past him towards Kaito as he says, without his control, “I don’t have one.” The kids don’t have the chance to react to that, however, as Mashi reels back her arm and smashes her tiny fist into Kaito’s face.

Izuku watches in open shock as Kaito falls out of his chair, hands clasped over his face, and the other kids jump back, looking at Mashi like she’s a wild animal, and she may as well be with the way she bares her teeth.

“Go away you assholes!” Oh wow, she really was reminding Izuku of Katsuki if she cursed like that. “Leave him the hell alone or you deal with me! Got it???” she roars. Kaito scrambles to get up, looking furious at Mashi, opening his mouth to retort, but immediately the little girl jerks towards him, like she’s going to lunge, and he squeaks and bolts away with his friends in tow, probably going to get a teacher.

Izuku watches in open shock as Kaito falls out of his chair, hands clasped over his face, and the other kids jump back, looking at Mashi like she’s a wild animal, and she may as well be with the way she bares her teeth.

“I get why they made me look after you now!” she says in loud cheerfulness, nearly going a full 180, and it sends Izuku on edge. What was wrong with this girl? What could possibly be going through her head to think punching another kid was a good idea?

“Hey, hey, why are you scared? He was messin’ with ya so I got him good!” she continues, stepping closer, grinning in a way that reminds Izuku oddly of a crocodile.

Yep, this woman was crazy and she needed to get away from him asap. He was already still emotionally fragile from what Kaito had done to him, still upset and broken and wanting to go home. He really didn’t need this. He didn’t need to be dealing with so much insanity. He had known he would have to be around new people at his new school but this was just too much.

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“Haganehato Mashi to the principal’s office. Haganehato Mashi to the principal’s office,” came the call over the intercom suddenly and Izuku wants to melt from relief. The girl looks up calmly, like it doesn’t matter even though everyone knows why she’s been called.

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“Hi, hey, why are you scared? He was messin’ with ya so I got him good!” she says thoughtfully then turns to give Izuku another frightening grin, “That’s a new record!” Izuku wants to yell that that should never be something to be proud of, but he’s scared she’ll turn on him and deck him too, even if he is in a wheelchair.
“Aye, stop bein’ all jumpy and shit,” she says cheerfully as she walks to the door and Izuku just wants her to stop talking to him and go already. Then she calls over her shoulder and Izuku freezes, eye wide, “Me and you are gonna look out for each other! Us quirkless folk gotta stick together!”

To Izuku’s relief Mashi doesn’t show back up to class for the rest of the day. He’s certainly more curious of the evidently quirkless girl that has no issue reacting violently as if she had a quirk, but after everything, after Kaito and the staring and HER, he just wants to be left alone and get home.

The woman sent to pick him up and bring him home is waiting for him by the front gates when he gets out. He knows she’s there for him thanks to the scrubs and the nametag on her breast pocket. It says her given name is Leanne and Izuku assumes she must be a foreigner, but when she speaks she doesn’t sound like she has any form of accent.

“Hello there, Midoriya Izuku,” Leanne greets as he rolls up to her. She’s a tiny, pudgy, black woman with long hair tied up in a pony tail, straight cut bangs stopping just above her big, green eyes. “My name is Yu Leanne. I’ll be the one looking after you from here on out.”

“I really hope we get along. I have heard so many good things about you!” she goes on and Izuku can feel a blush coming on and he raises his prosthetic to shield his face in embarrassment.

“My mom was talking about me??” he asks, baffled, but then Leanne giggles cutely and is shaking her head.

“She did say you were a sweet boy, but no. My little sister actually was talking about you and suggested to everyone I look after you. You would know her as Sunny?”

Izuku blanches, mouth falling open and both arms falling limp. Sunny?? As in the mountain of a woman, the gruffest human alive, his nurse, was this tiny, sweet woman’s LITTLE sister. Before Izuku can ask what was going on or how this was true, Leanne raises both hands, staving off any questions, looking a little frazzled herself all of a sudden. “Oh dear, sorry, sorry, I should explain! She and I were adopted! Goodness, how embarrassing of me, just getting ahead of myself! I do apologize,” she flails her hands for a moment before bowing a few times and, despite himself, Izuku is reminded of his mom.

And soon he finds himself smiling, some of his nerves from the past day releasing as he and the sweet woman go back to his apartment.

She lets him in first and comes in too. Technically her job is done now that they are here and Izuku is safe, but it seems she refuses to leave him just like that and wants to at least make him an after school snack to help stimulate healthy brain growth. Izuku sits down at the couch, trying to get a peak of Leanne through the kitchen doorway as she rummages about, but he ends up just giving up and getting to work on his homework. Only a few minutes pass when she returns with a plate of small crackers covered in different kinds of sliced fruits or vegetables, most of which have been designed to look like little animal faces or flowers. Izuku stares in awe at them, amazed that such a simple thing can look so yummy and cute, and Leanne finally decides to bid Izuku good-bye after she’s assured he’s okay, telling him to eat up.

Izuku does eat up, munching on the snack and finding it all so refreshing and flavorful. He is a tad
confused about some of the slices, however, because he was pretty sure they didn’t have some of these fruits and vegetables, but he wasn’t going to complain. He would just have to ask his mother when she came home.

As he’s finishing up on his homework, not taking long at all, he spots a shot of orange fur and looks up. After so many days the stray tabby had taken to waiting outside Izuku’s back door for him to come out and pet him before it went to get its food. The young boy smiles, finishes up, and slowly stands and makes his way out.

After loving on the friendly herd of cats he goes further out to do his usual exercises, looking out for the angry tortoiseshell. As usual he does spot it, and as usual it avoids him like the plague. Izuku sighs. Oh well. Maybe one of these days…

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AllRightAllMight01001001: I met your female clone, today.

Izuku had later that day settled down in his bed, his laptop in his lap, chatroom up on the screen. It had taken a while to configure the computer to actually do other normal computer things, like download applications and run them, but it had eventually started working, much to Izuku’s joy and pride.

Now he waits, the last of Leanne’s snacks sitting on a plate to his left within reach, looking at the screen and waiting for the usual ding.

KingKill: THE FUCK??

KingKill: Nobody’s like me, you hear?? NOBODY!

Izuku smiles at the expected response, munching on a cracker covered in apples and a little cinnamon, trying not to laugh as he just waits a little more, offering no reply.

KingKill: THE HELL’S SHE LIKE, THEN???

KingKill: What makes you think she could ever be like me??

AllRightAllMight01001001: Well, she does yell a lot.

Izuku has to wait a little extra long and he tries not to laugh, imagining Katsuki replying in all caps, realizing what he was doing, and forcing himself to delete it all and retype his reply.

KingKill: I don’t yell that much.

AllRightAllMight01001001: I’m sorry to break this to you, Kacchan, but you yell SO. MUCH.

KingKill: Shitty nerd Deku come say that to my face.

Ah, that was probably supposed to be in all caps, too. Izuku does giggle this go round, but decides to cut Katsuki some slack and goes ahead onto the next subject.

AllRightAllMight01001001: Hey, I wanted to ask your opinion on the robotic prosthetics.

KingKill: Of course you do.

Izuku ignores the obvious sass and condescending tone behind the silent word and continues.
AllRightAllMight01001001: I’m focusing on the arm right now, it will most likely be easiest to manage, but I need to find a way to control it more easily.

There is a long, long stretch of silence. Izuku isn’t surprised. He is just as stumped as anyone would be. They had talked about the issue a little bit back before March, but did not go into too much detail. It was an issue for another day, and honestly, it still was, but Izuku was impatient and he wanted to get ahead already. It was illogical as well as dangerous to think like that, he knew that, but he just couldn’t help himself.

KingKill: You ever seen those weird board games where you wear a brain scanner and make a ball float with your mind?

AllRightAllMight01001001: No, but it sounds kind of silly.

KingKill: Stupid. It sounds stupid.

KingKill: BUT LIKE HELL ARE WE STUPID!!

AllRightAllMight01001001: Are you suggesting I create some kind of brain scanner to connect my brain to the arm?

KingKill: What else did you think I was saying???

Izuku leans back in his bed and looks up at the ceiling. A brain scanner could work, but not as a final product. He needed to use as few pieces as possible, and he couldn’t imagine making one brain scanner for all the pieces he intended to use. He supposes he could try, but it would be too easy for a villain to break it or take it.

AllRightAllMight01001001: It’s a good start, I certainly didn’t think of it, and I’ll look into it.

KingKill: I sense a but. THE F*** IS WRONG WITH MY IDEA?? ITS BRILLIANT!!

AllRightAllMight01001001: *it’s

KingKill: SCREW YOU!

AllRightAllMight01001001: And it is brilliant, just not the scanner part.

AllRightAllMight01001001: I need to focus on the “connect to brain” part. That’s the ticket. I just need to figure out how.

It took a little time, but soon he had multiple books, theories, and research papers on an assortment of neuroscience studies on his computer. He looks over them, organizing them on his screen, and with a deep breath he gets to work.

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Mashi is waiting for Izuku the next day at school out in front and Izuku does not know how to feel about that. Inko kisses his cheek good-bye and they share I love you’s and then he is all alone to deal with the demon girl.

He needs to go to class, however, he can’t just skip the second day of school, he can’t just run, so he forces himself forward and makes note to upgrade the wheelchair to have a turbo boost. It looks as if he won’t be getting out of this meeting, despite his prayers she would just turn around, despite him keeping his face down, and it frustrates him and brings up the stress and panic from yesterday at
“Midoriya, hey!” she calls and Izuku feels the sudden urge to curse and blames Katsuki for such an impulse, but he’s trapped and he sees her sneakers as she gets up to him, his head still low. “Hey… you alright? What’s up?” she questions, energy still high and loud despite also sounding concerned. They’re both a little early to class so they do have time to talk, Izuku just doesn’t want to.

“I’m fine,” he mumbles, looking to the side, and he knows he doesn’t sound fine. He knows he sounds defensive and frightened, but he can’t bring it in himself to care.

“No you aren’t,” Mashi says bluntly and Izuku flinches away from her, which she evidently notices. He sees her sneakers take a step back. “Are you mad with me?” She asks and finally her voice has lowered and she has the decency to sound hesitant.

“No,” Izuku replies honestly, because he isn’t. He doesn’t think he’s ever been mad with anyone before, not truly. Frustrated, certainly, but never mad.

“Are you scared of me?” and the way she says it has Izuku looking up curiously, like she almost expected it and the lack of hesitation in the way she asks makes it seem like she has asked the question before. She’s looking at Izuku sadly and slowly, feeling suddenly vulnerable in a mutual kind of way, he nods. Mashi nods back at him, taking that in, and scratching at the top of her head, her pigtails in better shape today.

“I’m sorry,” she says honestly and with a strong enough push that Izuku thinks she’s trying extra hard to make him believe her. His brow furrows and his eye narrows suspiciously. “I was on my way to make ‘em stop anyway, ’cause they were assholes, but when I heard you say you were quirkless, like me, I got really excited!” Her voice is raising with excitement and her eyes are twinkling as she looks at Izuku, fists up and out to her sides like she’s ready to fight, but then she deflates. “I didn’t mean to scare you, or make ass—uh… assoo, er… ascensions?”

“Assumptions,” Izuku offers instinctively and Mashi nods, pointing at him for a moment.

“Yeah, that. I’ve been kinda on my own at this school my whole life. Only quirkless one in our grade, and all the kids are so mean and call me worthless or, or, or… useless! OR! Or…” Mashi trails off, obviously frustrated, and Izuku stares at her, feeling a familiar, painful pang in his chest at what she’s describing. He takes a breath and looks at her more closely, sizing her up and trying to put these new pieces into the puzzle he was building of this new school.

Mashi was loud and swore and was ready to fight at the drop of a hat from the looks of yesterday, but she was also quirkless, like Izuku, and was alone, like Izuku, and was ridiculed and treated as nothing better than the gum under someone’s boot, like Izuku. He stares at her for a long, long moment, just listening and thinking as she fumes. He wasn’t sure that they would be the best of friends, he didn’t think, with her attitude, that it was possible, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t be friends at all and look after each other.

He sighs and nods partially to himself, looking down at his lap, his flesh hand tapping on his armrest. He was going to do this. He was going to make a friend with yet another crazy person. What the hell was wrong with him?

“Hey, Haganehato-chan?” He cuts her off, and apparently she at least is listening because he doesn’t have to repeat himself.

She looks at him with wide, surprised eyes and just instinctively says, “Use Mashi, it’s better…”
Izuku nods absently and slightly apologetically. “Right, Mashi-chan—”

“No honorific please.” Izuku gives her an exasperated look and she straightens, shoulders rising in embarrassment and she mumbles, “Sorry. Go on?”

“Mashi… Do you want to be my friend?” he finally asks, summoning all his courage to say it with a straight, confident tone and expression. Mashi’s eyes light up immediately, but then she deflates, looking down and away, her emotions changing in blinks.

“I don’t want you to feel obligated just because I gave you my sob story,” she grumbles, seeming more irritated with herself than with Izuku, but Izuku is already shaking his head and waving her off.

“I heard plenty of sob stories in the hospital. Yours has no sway on me,” he half jokes, although he isn’t exactly lying. He really had heard a lot of kids’ sad, terrible tales, but he had learned quickly not to allow them to use them to get something from him, because some of them were more than happy to try.

It seems to ease some of Mashi’s fears, but she still tilts her head and asks, “Aren’t you scared of me, though?”

“Absolutely terrified,” he says immediately, bluntly, and it’s such a surprise it makes both of them snort, “but you should have seen my best friend at my old school, or my rival in inventions. Being terrified usually isn’t a great deterrent for me making friends.” Had he just called Katsuki his best friend? He doesn’t think they are anymore, but he was the closest thing Izuku had, and he didn’t have time to explain the tentative parts of his relationship with his childhood friend.

Mashi is grinning, her energy coming back, and Izuku is happy he could do that, make someone, anyone, happier. “I would love to be your friend, then, Midoriya-kun!” she booms, hands on her hips, feet out in a solid stance, grin on her face. Izuku chuckles nervously, scratching at his cheek.

“That’s deterrent…”

“Oh, cool, thanks!”

Lord, what had he gotten himself into now?

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Three weeks later finds Izuku sitting at his work bench, protective goggles on, his door shut with the “warning, dangerous tools at play” sign up, and his welding pen, a small invention he made a few years back, zapping and crackling in front of him as he pieced together a new build.

He had decided he would be focusing on the arm invention first and had gotten to work on the next prototype, focusing on durability while also keeping the delicate pieces intact within. A blueprint of a headpiece also sits above his head on his hanging board, a few other blueprints and ideas tacked on around it. He would be getting to that next, to at least get a prototype going.

He had been studying neuroscience as often as he could these past three weeks. It was new to him, however, and complex in ways he had not anticipated. He knew hardware and machines. The human brain and nervous system seemed to be its own monster.

It would take time, how much he wasn’t sure, but he would get it eventually. He just needed to work on it and not let up.
He sets down his welder pen and leans back in his chair, letting out a long, tired sigh. He had been working on the same build for weeks now, but there were so many pieces that he knew little about that could have an outcome he knew nothing about or how to pinpoint and fix. It was tedious work to say the least.

Outside there is a boom of thunder, making Izuku jump suddenly and look behind him at his own sliding door, eye wide. When had it begun to rain? When had it gotten so dark? Izuku glances at his clock and cringes. Oh, he had been in here for hours without noticing. That wasn’t good.

Izuku sighs and begins putting up his things as best he can. It was probably a good idea to stop anyway and try to get some sleep, but a flash and another crack of thunder has him dropping some of his tools and cringing. He shakes for a moment, breathing the way his mother had shown him, before he can shakily lean down and pick up the tools.

Ever since the incident Izuku has not done well with thunderstorms. He doesn’t know why, or maybe he does and he doesn’t like to think about it, but he doesn’t like them at all and each one was its own nightmare.

Another flash and boom and thankfully Izuku isn’t carrying anything this time, deciding he’s done with his tools, and is just about ready to go climb into bed with his mother when he hears a yowl from outside. He looks back to his door and spots it, the orange tabby sitting on his back porch, looking shaken and pathetic as it paws at the glass. Izuku shifts closer, hesitant, looking down at the cat’s pleading eyes. When the thunder comes the next time Izuku does jump and whimper, but he also sees that the tabby seems to puff up in fright as well.

He can’t help it. He opens the sliding door. The tabby doesn’t bolt in like he expected but instead is slow and hesitant, unsure of the new environment, but okay with being out of the rain. “You don’t like thunder and lightning either?” Izuku whispers, leaning down to pet the tabby, and he smirks a little, trying to calm his own nerves. “You aren’t a very good stray, are you?” The tabby’s tail flicks as if irritated but nothing more.

It seemed he would be harboring a cat tonight. He supposed if he woke up early and let it out before his mom came in to get him it would all be okay. Just tonight. So he goes to close the sliding door, just looking outside for a moment, when he spots it. The tortoiseshell sitting over on the porch with the cat food, just sitting and shaking and there’s a small smear of red on the concrete beneath it that suddenly has Izuku’s heart racing and he rushes to his closet to get an umbrella.

He hardly notices the next clap of thunder and lightning, reflexively flinching, but keeps moving back outside and over to the other porch, legs extra wobbly from fright, but working fine with his sudden adrenaline, everything moving so quickly.

He stops just shy of the cat, umbrella raised, and suddenly at a loss on what to do. The cat would never let him near it before, why would it now? From where he is standing the tortoiseshell is just sitting there, breathing heavy, like it’s waiting for something, a gash on its right hind leg, shaking. It looks sharply back at Izuku as he approaches, gold eyes like fire, and hisses.

What was Izuku thinking? He couldn’t help the poor thing if it never let him near it.

But something in him, something instinctive and loud and impossible to ignore, told him to try. That if he could do anything he should. So he tries, and he’s slow, but he still moves forward, gentle and patient, his prosthetic hand raised as the flesh one holds the umbrella.

The cat hisses again and Izuku pauses. “It’s okay,” he whispers, gentle and just loud enough over the rain. More thunder and lightning has him flinching, but with every last nerve in his body he tries to
control himself and focus again on the cat. “You know me. You judge my exercises and me every day. You know I would never hurt you.”

Another step forward, another hiss, but the cat isn’t moving away. The paw it had raised to attack a moment ago has lowered. Okay, good, that was good. This was working. He just had to keep going.

“Yeah, see? I’m Izuku. It’s nice to meet you properly Mr. Tortoiseshell. I’m going to help you, don’t worry,” he’s begun muttering instead of actually speaking, but it still seems to put the cat at some kind of ease and soon Izuku finds himself on his knees beside the hurt cat, umbrella now balanced against his right shoulder. It has its ears back still, glaring back at Izuku, but there is no more hissing. Izuku reaches out tentatively, palm out, when thunder, distant thankfully, has him flinch up and freeze, hand curling up.

He takes a few steadying breaths, feeling shaky and ready to cry, when something bumps his hand. He looks down and sees the tortoiseshell staring back at him, looking impatient, before it reaches its head up again and bumps it to Izuku’s hand. Izuku hiccups, smiling despite his mounting tears, and after a few gentle pets, he slowly stands.

“Izuku is so shocked that he doesn’t even notice the boom of thunder.

The person there is older than him, taller, but still a young man, even if he looks scruffy, medical supplies in hand. He has bags beneath his eyes, his long, black hair a tangled mess, a deep frown on his face, a black one piece uniform, and one of the most bizarre scarves Izuku has ever seen in his life, the thin, white thing wrapping dozens of times around his neighbor’s neck.

The man tilts his head down, his dark eyes narrowing as he glares at Izuku. When he opens his mouth a deep, exhausted voice comes out.

“What the hell are you doing on my porch in the middle of a thunderstorm?”

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Song: Owl City - When Can I See You Again
Izuku drops his umbrella.

He can’t even say anything, his eye bug-eyed, everything just freezing inside of him. He had been so caught up with helping out the cat he had forgotten someone actually had to live here and feed these cats. Someone he had never seen before up until this point and he really isn’t sure how that happened. He had been living here for over a month now, and he thinks he would have noticed such an intimidating man, but apparently not.

“Oi,” the man calls, reaching out and giving a not too gentle poke to Izuku’s forehead, which jars him enough that he scrambles to pick up his umbrella, soaked to the bone now, and begins frantically apologizing.

“I am so sorry! I was being totally inconsiderate! I just was letting one of the strays stay the night in my bedroom when I saw this one bleeding so I came over to see if I could help but it took a while and I didn’t even notice you were there and I am so, so sorry! Really and truly! If there is anything I —“

“Stop,” the man grounds out, looking irritated and tired as he reaches up to pinch the bridge of his nose, his medical tools balanced in the other hand. “Just stop.” Izuku snaps his mouth shut, looking fearfully up at the exhausted looking man, and he really did look exhausted. Despite his frightening expression he just looked like a mess, ready to lie down, or collapse, at any second.

“Dapple let you pet her,” the man says after a while of just breathing and Izuku blinks his big eye once in confusion and the man groans. “The cat, kid. The cat.”

“Oh!” Izuku yelps and looks down at the tortoiseshell in realization. “So you’re name is Dapple?” he asks the cat like it can answer, and he makes a note that it is actually a she, then looks up at the man, who is still staring at him. “Uh, yeah, she let me pet her.”

One of the man’s brows rises up in consideration, before he shrugs and steps back further into his own apartment. “Alright, bring her out of the rain, at least.”

Izuku blanches in surprise before he shakes his head out of it. What on earth was going on? “Huh?” he asks oh so eloquently and the man groans, shoulders slumping, then raising his head momentarily as if asking some holy force for strength.

“I always have to wrangle her when she gets hurt, even though she comes here for help to begin with,” that last part the man grumbles, partially to himself, before waving a lazy hand at Izuku, “But you could get her at least out of the rain for me so I can help her.”

Realization hits Izuku quickly after that and he moves as gently as he can towards Dapple. He knows he would never be able to pick her up, but he can maybe at least nudge her out of the rain. He carefully pets her head and then nudges her side. Dapple’s hackles rise, and she hisses once, but Izuku finally manages to get her to limp into his neighbor’s apartment, just by the door, but at least out of the rain.

Dapple is looking around, ears still back, anxious, but Izuku carefully sits down right where she won’t be able to bolt out the door before he can catch her.
“She would never let anyone take her to the vet,” his neighbor says as he crouches down and very carefully dabs a cotton swab of alcohol on the cat’s cut. Dapple hisses viciously, and tries to lean away, but Izku lays his flesh hand against her other side, just lays it there, to keep her from moving and to hopefully reassure her. “I usually just have to treat her outside.”

“So she gets hurt a lot?” Izku asks quietly, still nervous about the man. Now that they were inside out of the rain and they were helping the stray, the man didn’t seem quite as scary. Just tired, with a softer look in his eyes as he deals with the cat.

His neighbor grunts an affirmative but offers nothing else. They continue on in silence, the man finally wrapping the cat’s leg to the best of his ability while it tried to wiggle away. Sometimes there would be a flash of lightning and boom of thunder and Izku would seize up, breathing heavy until he calmed down, and he’d see the man looking up at him through his hair, expression unchanging, before he went back to work.

When they’re done Dapple seems exhausted and lets Izuku pet her a little more. “She’s behaved pretty well, all things considered,” he says, head tilting as he smiles at the tortoiseshell. “Should we reward her? Give her some milk or something?”

“No.” The sternness of the man’s tone has Izuku jump in surprise and look up. “Cat’s are lactose intolerant when they grow up. It isn’t healthy.”

Izuku blinks his eye then nods shakily. “O-okay… I’ll keep that in mind.” The man nods, seeming to accept Izuku’s answer just fine, then just keeps watching him, which is unnerving as all hell. Izuku tries to focus on Dapple, scratching her cheek and enjoying the fact she isn’t running away, but the silence is driving him up the wall.

“I-I’m Midoriya Izuku,” he tries to offer, hoping it will help break the frightening spell.

“Aizawa,” is all the man offers and dang it, that didn’t help at all. At least he had a name now, though. A name and that was it. Why was this man so intimidating? He just looked so exhausted, and not even that old, really. Maybe early twenties?

“Do…” Izuku hesitates. He hated this silence and he wasn’t sure why the man hadn’t just asked him to leave, yet. “Do all the cats have names?” The boy glances up at Aizawa, actually curious, but mostly just wanting to get the man talking. His expression doesn’t change.

“Yes.” Darn it, that didn’t help him at all. Now Izuku was actually beginning to feel a little irritated.

“The… the orange one with the stumpy legs, sweetest and…” Izuku didn’t want to say ‘stupid,’ “the more intellectually challenged of the strays… what’s their name?”

Finally a reaction. Aizawa shifts a little where he sits and reaches up to scratch under an eye. “He’s a munchkin cat. His name is Pumpkin and he’s dumb as bricks,” he says bluntly and the word choice is enough of a surprise to the tense boy that it has him snorting a laugh and covering his mouth.

“Yeah… he is,” he agrees, looking down at Dapple. “He’s the one that wanted in from the rain. That’s when I saw—“ a lightning bolt and an immediate thunder clap shake the building and Izuku yelps in terror, flinging a hand above his head as he cringes. Those were the worst ones, the ones that made the building rattle and quake, terrible visions always forming behind his eyelid.

He wheezes and breathes deeply and he thinks he hears his neighbor hum and stand up. Izuku doesn’t pay him any mind now, just trying to calm down and get his breathing under control and to please not start crying while he’s in someone else’s home. He’s breathing a little more evenly when
he hears approaching footsteps again, hears Aizawa grunt as he sits back down, and suddenly something is thrust into his face.

Izuku leans back and blinks away some of his mounting tears as he focuses on what looks like a jelly pack being offered to him. Slowly he reaches up and takes it gingerly into his flesh hand, looking up at Aizawa in confusion. He looks no different than before. “W-what…?”

“You’re scared of thunderstorms, but you still went out in one. Why?” the man asks simply and the young boy is confused for a second, brow furrowing.

He looks down at Dapple, who has been staring hard at him since he had frozen up, and then back up at Aizawa, like it should be obvious. “To help her.” The man arches a brow, looking mildly surprised, but it’s gone quickly.

“How did you know you could help her?” Aizawa continues his series of questions and Izuku just gives a small shrug.

“I figured I’d try to calm her down so I could get my mom and we could bring her to a vet…” Izuku mumbles around the jelly pack, than slurps up some more. He felt tired all of a sudden.

Aizawa seems to finally be satisfied with his string of questions on Izuku’s motives, but now he tilts his head and narrows his eyes. “Why are you awake this late? Surely Pumpkin couldn’t have woken you up.”

Izuku pauses, taps his fingers on the jelly pack, then raises up his prosthetic to scratch at the back of his neck. “Oh… Well, I was working on my new arm prototype and I must have lost track of time…” he admits, which has his neighbor arching his brow again, arms crossed.

“A臂… prototype?”

“I like to build stuff,” Izuku shrugs sheepishly, the ends of his ears pinking. It was so difficult to explain to new people, especially adults, what his “hobbies” were. He really hoped, just because he was so tired now, that Aizawa wouldn’t press the issue. “Why were you awake?” he asks instead, plowing forward to maybe keep the man from asking much more.

“Work at night, storm was so bad all the ‘nonessential’ people got sent home,” Aizawa actually makes finger quotes around ‘nonessential’ and sneers a little, which looks kind of funny on his face.

A few pieces click together in Izuku’s head with the new information. “Oh! You work at night. That must be why I never see you? You sleep during the day?” he says, looking up and smiling expectantly to have the man confirm this, but Aizawa just shrugs.
“Who knows. Don’t really sleep much during the day either,” he says, sounding bored and now his whole exhausted aura made a lot more sense. Izuku’s brow furrows.

“That isn’t very healthy…”

Aizawa blinks very slowly at him, just staring, but it doesn’t deter Izuku this time, for whatever reason. Maybe because they’ve been talking long enough now. When he realizes his not-glare glare isn’t working Aizawa sighs and reaches up to rub at his eyes. “You remind me of someone obnoxious I know.”

It’s said fondly enough that Izuku can’t help but smile, feeling oddly proud of himself, when a boom of thunder has him flinching violently and cowering where he sits and Aizawa lets out a deep sigh. “Head back home, kid, I’ll look after Dapple from here,” he says and honestly, with how tired and frightened Izuku feels he can’t really argue.

He shakes and wobbles as he gets up, Aizawa giving him space, and picks up his umbrella. “Sorry for intruding,” he says as he steps towards the door, then hesitates and looks at where he had been sitting, “and for… getting your floor wet…”

Aizawa shrugs. “Doesn’t matter. Just go get some sleep,” he says and nearly shoves Izuku out the door. The glass pane is slid shut behind him, Izuku standing there, startled at the sudden movement, and he looks back. Aizawa is still standing there on the other side of his door, and Izuku raises his prosthetic to at least wave good-bye, when he slides the floor to ceiling curtains closed.

Izuku stares, umbrella up, bug-eyed as when he’d first seen his neighbor standing there. What an… odd man. Odd, tired, and surprisingly kind, Izuku reminds himself when he remembers the jelly pack.

He doesn’t have time to consider the man, however, since it is still raining and a distant thunder clap has him flinching before scurrying back to his own apartment next door and into his room, shutting the door and his own curtains tight. In his bed Pumpkin is curled up into a ball that actually makes him look like a pumpkin and Izuku smiles at him.

“You were no help, were you?” he says and Pumpkin hardly moves, just happy to be inside, warm, and on something soft.

After a short period of time getting ready for bed Izuku finally climbs in next to the cat, setting his prosthetic on his bedside table, and he curls up not unlike the cat. He can’t help as his mind occasionally goes back to Dapple and his exhausted neighbor, Aizawa. It had been a sudden and short encounter, but somehow it felt important in a way Izuku couldn’t explain logically, but just felt it in his gut. It didn’t hurt that not once had Aizawa asked about any of his injuries. He hadn’t even stared at them.

It made Izuku feel good. Refreshed and happy that someone, even just for a moment, didn’t treat him any differently than anyone else, and Izuku fell asleep with a smile on his face, thunder rumbling in the distance.

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The next morning was a school day and Izuku managed to wake up early enough to let Pumpkin back out before his mother came in. The cat had woken him up, actually, by lying on his chest and letting its tail smack Izuku a few times in the face.

Inko and Izuku were on their way to his school, Izuku back in his dreaded wheelchair, and they’re
already almost past their apartment complex when he stops in realization. “Oh! Mom mom mom, wait a minute, okay?” he says suddenly and grunts as he stands up out of the chair. Inko looks back at him, eyebrows up in surprise.

“What is it? Did you forget something?” she asks as she now walks back with her son to the apartment doors.

“Yes ma’am,” he says with a nod then stops in front of the apartment door to the right of their own and raises his flesh hand to knock. Inko squeaks in surprise, looking down at her son with wide, confused eyes.

“Izuku, what’s going on? What do you need from our neighbor?” she asks as there is noise on the other side of the door. After a while the noise stops and Izuku frowns, knocking again.

“I accidentally stayed up really late last night,” he begins, cringes, then looks up at his mother apologetically, “Sorry… I lost track of time… but then I heard… yowling…” was that pause too obvious? He hadn’t thought of how to alter the story to keep his mother from knowing he had kept a cat in his room last night. There’s more noise on the other side of the door, this time with what sounds like a grouchy voice accompanying it.

“The stray that wouldn’t let me pet it was outside, hurt, and I tried to go out to help it.” For good measure, when he hears another pause, Izuku knocks again. More noise this time with a very obvious, “Alright, alright,” strung in there.

“Izuku…” his mother begins, her expression worried and sad now. “There was thunder and lightning last night…” she whispers, her voice full of meaning. Of course she knew about her son’s new fear of thunderstorms and the thought that he would have gone out in one, scared and weak, to help a cat was both heartwarming and heartbreaking.

Izuku looks down and shrugs. “It’s okay…” he begins just as the door bursts open and Inko squeaks in surprise, looking up at the sudden appearance of a disheveled looking young man.

“Whatever it is, I don’t want it,” Aizawa snaps immediately, stops, and looks down at the two of them. “Oh.” His expression doesn’t change, he just blinks slowly. “Midoriya, right?” he begins and reaches up to scratch his cheek, looking bored and positively exhausted. Just like yesterday.

Izuku nods, trying to not react too badly, even if the man’s sudden appearance had startled him. His poor mother with bug-eyes was staring in shock. “Yes sir. Aizawa-san, this is my mother, Midoriya Inko. Mom, this is our neighbor, Aizawa,” he offers introductions like he’s been taught. Aizawa nods politely to Inko, who nods very slowly back.

“Hello…” she mumbles, then turns her head to look again at her son, confusion written all over her face.

“I helped Aizawa take care of Dapple, the tortoiseshell, last night,” he explains and Inko squeaks in surprise, looking up at the sudden appearance of a disheveled looking young man.

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“I am so sorry if we woke you!” Inko suddenly says, her manners finally catching up to her. “We
should have waited until later for this meeting,” now she shoots Izuku a small glare and he shrinks away. Oh, he supposes he should have thought of that.

Aizawa is waving his hand dismissively, however, and says, “It’s fine. I wasn’t sleeping.”

“O-oh…” Inko says, brows furrowing and head tilting as she looks over the man. Slowly, her brows lower more in thought, before looking back up to meet Aizawa’s eyes. “Are you sleeping at all…?” she asks and, oh no, Izuku knows that tone. He knows it because she’s always using it on him or Katsuki when she begins to fret over them.

“Mom…” Izuku tries to cut in and stop her, but she is on a roll now.

“What about eating? Do you need anything? It’s wonderful you’re taking care of those cats, but please don’t forget yourself.”

“Moooooom…” Izuku groans this time, face heating up in embarrassment and he covers it with both his real and fake hand. “I just wanted to know about the caaaaat…”

Aizawa’s eyes have widened in surprise at the turn Inko has taken, just staring, before answering carefully, “It’s fine.” Not good enough for Inko, it seems, as her mouth twists and she hums in thoughtfull disbelief. Aizawa glances down at Izuku, brow arched, and the kid shakes his head in morbid disbelief. “Isn’t… today a school day?” Aizawa slowly asks before Inko can go on. It’s the right thing to ask, it seems, because suddenly the tiny woman is looking at her watch, bug-eyed again, and she yelps.

“Oh! Come on, we need to hurry, Izuku, or we’ll be late!” she says and begins ushering her son back to his chair. Izuku tries not to mumble that they always leave early, though, happy to just be going now. He’s so happy to be leaving that he completely forgets to wave good-bye to his neighbor, but he figures, after what Inko had just done, Aizawa probably just wanted to disappear too.

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Izuku asks Leanne to bring him to the scrapyard after school that day.

It was a long shot, he knew this would take a while and it wouldn’t be the woman’s job, but he needed more metal and soon. He had been using the large amount the Hatsumes had given him when he left, broke apart a few of his older, more useless devices even, but now he was officially out and he hoped maybe Leanne would take him, but his hopes weren’t high.

He should have known better. As soon as he had asked his favor the caretaker brightened up, eyes glittering in excitement. She was bouncing slightly on her toes, hands clasped in front of her.

“Midoriya-kun! I would be honored to bring you wherever you’d like to go!” she says, voice just as bright as her everything else. Izuku looked up at the woman in surprise and Leanne pauses, stopping her bobbing. “Ah, well, that is… It’s good to see you wanting to go other places. It’s healthy and exciting! You’re such a brilliant boy, too, I’d feel honored to get to see where you would like to go.”

When Leanne smiles, Izuku smiles back, a weight being lifted from in his chest.

This is how he and his caretaker find themselves at the address Hatsume Āto had given him. It’s not the farthest trip, but it still had left Leanne and him plenty of time to just talk.

They stand underneath the big, metal archway that marks the entrance to the property, the name “Old & Loved” painted crudely on the top, long walls of metal sheets against fences circling the premise. Just inside and to the right is a brick building, large but simple, metal sheets covering what Izuku
suspects are holes in the roof and a big, metal sculpture that looks like one of Āto’s sits out front.

Over to the left and further back Izuku can see the mounds of metal and scrap, a crane carrying an old car across one mound as they watch. “Well!” Leanne says after a stretch of staring in silence, her voice still chipper, “What an interesting place!” Izuku looks up at her from his chair, brow furrowed suspiciously. Since when did adults, except the weird ones, actually find this stuff interesting? Izuku found this interesting. Nobody else ever did.

Leanne looks back down at him, smiling. “What? A new place is always interesting if you let it be,” she singsongs then moves behind Izuku to start pushing his chair herself, grinning as they pick up speed and she says childishly, “Now come on come on! I want to see what’s going on!” It all makes Izuku giggle at her, letting her push him around towards the brick building.

They get to the front door just beside an old, rusty garage door, and Leanne pushes it open for them, a little bell ringing above the door. Izuku hesitates before he enters, looking at the now open door then up at Leanne’s patient face. He was about to meet another new face, someone he would be interacting with a lot in the future, he didn’t want them to see him at his worst. Not at what Izuku perceived was his worst, anyway.

With a grunt Izuku pushes out of his wheelchair, setting it to the side beside the door and out of the way, then wobbles in. It was always a little harder to walk after a full day of school and no rest in between, but he needed to do this, he told himself. He needed to be strong and show whomever he was about to meet that he was not someone to look down on.

Leanne lays a hand on his hair as he passes, ruffling it a little, and she just smiles down at him. The room they enter is long with a few chairs set up against the walls and a desk at the far end, a door to the right behind the desk, and the walls are covered in all kinds of photos, newspaper clippings, a few diplomas, and what look like a child’s drawings. “What a charming place,” Leanne hums with a light lift to her voice and again Izuku looks up at her in mild disbelief. She just smiles back and keeps humming.

“That’s the first time I’ve ever heard this place gettin’ called that before!” comes a booming voice as the door behind the desk opens and a woman comes walking out. She’s average height but built like a tank, her tan skin covered in a few scars and burns and oil, her overalls and white work shirt underneath not very clean, but obviously well worn. She’s wearing yellow, leather gloves with the pointer finger of her left hand cut off, her boots are thick and loud when she walks, a welder’s cap on her head covered in pictures of dolphins, and her brown eyes sparkle with a youthful intrigue at the two present. She definitely seems like someone that Hatsume Āto would associate with, Izuku thinks with a smile, but then his eye narrows as he gets a bit of a closer look at the woman.

She looked weirdly familiar, but he isn’t sure where from.

“Welcome to Old and Loved!” the woman booms, arms reaching out in a large flourish, and that all felt familiar too. “You got the scrap, we got yer back! Ah, pardon me, where are my manners?” She grins and slips off her gloves, showing big, thick, worker’s hands before she then reaches up to pull off her hat and rake her hands through her short, messy, red hair. Blood red hair. Wait…

Izuku’s eye widens in sudden terror at what he thinks this may mean. Could this woman be…?

“My name is Haganehato Mottai! Call me Mottai, though, it’s my thing. And I’m gonna guess you must be Midoriya-kun? Āto told me about you comin’ to see me one o’ these days!”

Yep, the world was a cruel place that just liked to see Izuku suffer. Of course the woman in charge
of the scrapyard was related to his new, terrifying friend. Certainly in the last few weeks of school he had found Haganehato Mashi to not be as bad as he had originally perceived. She was confident and strong and opinionated and none of it was bad. She wanted Izuku to like her and for them to be friends, and she was never mean to him. She stayed true to her promise that they would look after each other, as well, the two of them inseparable and always ready to defend the other in some way.

It was just… she was just so MUCH. She was exhausting and he thought she was great, but he wasn’t sure how he was ever going to manage having to deal with her outside of school too. Maybe he could learn, he was always up for a challenge, but this was the world asking maybe a little too much of him.

“HEY, MAMA! WHY’S THERE A WHEELCHAIR OUT FRONT???”

Oh god, Izuku wasn’t ready. He wasn’t emotionally prepared to deal with this. He looked back at the front door with his one eye wide in panic. “Oh! That’s my daughter, Mashi. Āto mentioned you and her were the same age?” Mottai is saying as the door opens with a bang, Leanne seeming completely fine and even a little excited beside Izuku.

“Mashi? Oh, Midoriya-kun, didn’t you say you had a new friend named Mashi at school?” his caretaker says thoughtfully as the hyperactive girl finally hops in. One of her pigtails has fallen and now it looks like she just has a side ponytail, her backpack is flung immediately into a corner, and she’s covered in mud that Izuku knows she hadn’t been when school had gotten out. She locks eyes with Izuku’s and for a moment they just stare at each other, frozen.

“ZUZU!!” she suddenly shrieks, startling Izuku, and she rushes over, wrapping her arms around his shoulders and squeezing the near life out of him.

“Oh? So this is the infamous Zuzu you’ve been mentioning?” he hears Mottai say behind them and, despite the exasperated exhaustion now setting in, Izuku can’t help but feel a little happy at that. Mashi was talking about him when he wasn’t around, and in a good way by the tone of her mother’s voice. And despite how high energy Mashi was, or how loud and blunt, she was loyal and honest and kind… and she really gave great hugs.

Sighing like it’s difficult Izuku gives Mashi a hug back, patting her back with his prosthetic. Once he’s done that she finally releases him, grinning wide as ever, and swaying back and forth on her feet with her joy. “Why are you covered in mud?” Izuku asks first, looking her over.

“I saw a dog!” is all the answer he gets, which is plenty of answer anyways when considering who this is. “What are you doing here?? Did you come to see me? How did you know where I lived??” she rapid fires her questions and Izuku raises his hand to try to calm her down enough for him to talk.

“I was told to come here to get scrap metal. I didn’t know you’re mom worked her,” he admits and Mashi snorts, crossing her arms and puffing her chest out proudly.

“Works here? She owns the place!!”

“We also live here,” Mottai comments behind them, smirking at the scene of the two kids, Leanne now standing beside her and looking just about ready to start squealing in excitement at Izuku being around his friend.

Izuku scratches at his head and smiles sheepishly, equal parts exhausted by Mashi, but also feeling a spark of his own energy build while being around her. It was a phenomenon he only felt while around the ridiculous girl. “Oh, that’s pretty cool,” he offers and Mashi seems pleased, nodding as she grins.
“I know, right! Are you going to come visit a bunch now? ‘Cause you build so much stuff?” Izuku had of course told Mashi he was an inventor. It was important information and the way she had lit up instantly and bombarded him with questions on the matter had made him feel like he was soaring. Mashi was not a genius, and she didn’t understand the majority of what Izuku talked about, but he didn’t think he had ever seen anyone, especially not another kid, as excited about his builds as she was. Not even the kids in the children’s ward. “That’d be really, really cool! I haven’t seen any of your stuff, yet, but I bet they’re really cool, and it’d be really cool if you got your metal stuff from here!”

“Y-yeah!” Izuku splutters over the sudden flattery of Mashi leaning in and gushing over him and his inventions. Sometimes it felt like she was more excited about it all than he was. “I-it would be cool…”

“Why don’t you two go play upstairs for a bit?” Mottai suggests. “I can get you some metal in the meantime, and show Yu-chan around as well!” Leanne splutters similar enough to Izuku and looks up at Mottai with wide, surprised eyes.

“Oh, goodness! I would hate to intrude. We are already requesting quite a bit out of your time!” Izuku’s caretaker frets and Izuku and Mashi watch, intrigued by the exchange that is now happening before them.

“Nonsense! You’re already here, and you seemed so interested a minute ago, I would hate for you to walk away with nothing!” Mottai replies, loud as her daughter, and she slings a heavy arm around Leanne’s tiny shoulders, getting a few grease stains on her scrubs. Neither seem to notice or care, but Leanne is squirming oddly.

“Oh, well, if you insist. I am quite intrigued what you may have been working on, perhaps?”

“Of course!” Mottai laughs as she turns them and leads Leanne away, the two chatting, leaving the kids to their fun.

Izuku and Mashi watch as the door shuts behind them, standing their alone and confused, when the girl leans towards her friend and whispers, like somehow the adults will still hear her, “You’re a genius… Do you know what just happened?”

Izuku opens and closes his mouth a few times. He knew mechanics and engineering and a tiny bit of neuroscience now, but people were hard. “I think… I think that was called… ‘courting’?” he eventually ventures a guess, head tilting.

“Courting… like in sports?” Mashi replies, confused still.

Izuku looks to her, about to say ‘no, not like a court in sports,’ but then stops himself and thinks, brow furrowing and he brings his flesh hand up to pull at his lip in a thoughtful habit of his. “Actually… my mom one time did tell me stuff like that was like a game and most men were bad at it…”

Mashi is looking at him with full attention, like he holds all the answers, but this response makes her a bit skeptical. “But they’re both girls!”

“Maybe that means they’re really good at the game?” Izuku suggests, shrugging.

“Ooooh…” Mashi nods, finding this idea to be good, now. “My mama’s so cool… But I guess that means you’re really bad at courting, right? ‘Cause you’re a man?”

“I’m still a boy,” Izuku reminds her, “and my mom said only MOST men are bad at it. I could still be
good at… whatever it is.”

Mashi is nodding sagely now, her expression funny but Izuku does his best not to laugh. “True, true, but your chances aren’t great. That’s sta… stab… statues-stoo…”

“Statistics?”

“Yeah, that. No worries though! When I become a woman and my mama teaches me how to ‘court’ right, I’ll teach you too!”

Izuku is only at the scrapyard for about an hour. He and Mashi do end up having a fun time as she shows him her room and all of her toys. She is far from being as hero crazy as Izuku is, but she has a few figures of Ryukyu’s dragon form and even an All Might toy. Izuku of course also has it, and for a few minutes he gushes over it, telling her all about it’s history and make. Just like with his inventions, Mashi is all ears, asking questions with wide-eyed interest.

Her room was mostly covered in posters of MMA fighters and a few movie posters of varying kinds. She has a shelf of Alien and Predator goods, a big cardboard cutout of an old movie star Izuku doesn’t know named Bruce Lee, a punching bag in one corner, an entire battle axe hanging on the wall above her desk, and her bed is caved in from what Izuku guesses is her jumping on the mattress.

It was a well lived in room, and they had had fun, but he needed to get home and Leanne needed to head back to… wherever she went after she dropped Izuku off at his home, he had never actually found out. Leanne had carried a bag of scrap metal for Izuku back to his apartment while he balanced a pile of movies Mashi had let him borrow in his lap. He had been so tired that for once he didn’t mind being in his wheelchair again.

Back home, with yet another homemade snack from Leanne set in front of him, he did his homework then considered his workbench. He was still exhausted from the trip, he wasn’t sure he could build up the energy to work quite yet. Maybe he could go ahead and watch some of those movies?

It seems like a good enough idea. He hasn’t really just let himself watch something for fun, and only fun, in a while. Certainly he enjoyed watching the news and coverage of hero fights, and he enjoyed watching just about every science program he could find, but there was always that double purpose of getting research out of it. He should just enjoy himself this time.

He should have known himself better than that. Of course he couldn’t just watch something without wanting to do research. Research was how he relaxed, was how he had fun, so now he had pulled up one of his empty notebooks and jotted down notes as he watched one of Mashi’s fight movies, Way of the Dragon, watching carefully how the actors moved and fought. These movies were made back when people still didn’t have quirks, these fighting moves were designed by people, for people without quirks. It was perfect.

Izuku was going to be a hero, he was going to replace his missing and broken parts, he was going to upgrade himself to be able to fight, but he had been focusing so much on the technological side of his plan he had forgotten his body was still a quirkless human. He needed to be strengthening his brain and his body, or he would be doomed. He needed to work out, build muscle, and build technique most of all.

He knew he would have an issue with the kicks the actors were pulling in the movie, but the punches, the low kicks, the basic call and response of the fight Izuku could study and attempt to emulate, and once he had fixed himself then he would be able to jump into those more complex
movements.

Feeling energized and inspired, and needing to do his exercises anyway, Izuku heads out to the courtyard, first going through his necessary physical therapy drills, petting a cat whenever it came close to greet him. Dapple was avoiding him again, watching him for a bit, then disappearing after getting her food. Izuku didn’t mind much, not after getting to pet her and help her last night.

Besides, he has other things he needs to do.

And so he begins to train.

For days he pulls out his new, martial arts notebook and looks over what he had written down about stances, his researching slowly growing. He tries to get into the best mimicry of what he has seen without hurting his back. He can’t do the bouncing thing he sees some fighters do, but a solid stance he can just about manage. He tries to practice how to hold his arms to offer the best blocks. His prosthetic now wouldn’t be a very good punching arm, but maybe to block it could do something. Soon that would change, anyway, Izuku tells himself.

He tries to copy some of the punches and block movements, moving forward as much as he can, but when it’s difficult to do when all he has is videos and no instructor.

With science and machines Izuku could figure things out on his own, but this felt so much more difficult. He never felt like his stance was strong enough, his arms never felt secure, but he wasn’t sure what else he could do. He had teased the thought of asking to spar with Mashi a few times, but that just seemed like a death sentence.

Often Izuku isn’t out long, but sometimes he is high on energy and frustration alike and is out even as the sun begins to set. This day was one of those days and at some point he looks over and sees his mother walking around in the apartment. Not uncommon. She must have just gotten home and now she smiles out at him, always so happy to see him outside and moving, even if she doesn’t understand fully his desire to learn these movements, then goes to get dinner ready.

Izuku keeps practicing, keeps trying to figure this out even though he’s alone. He was being impatient again, but he needed to figure it out. He needed to move quicker. Get better quicker. He needed his disadvantages to be advantages already. It hadn’t even been a year since the incident but he needed things to be better already.

“Your fist is wrong.”

Izuku nearly falls over, his stance not nearly that strong, and he looks over not at his porch, but at his neighbor’s. Aizawa is standing there, a bag of cat food under his arm as he pours it into the bowls. He isn’t looking at Izuku, and it makes him wonder if the man had said anything at all, but then he looks over at the boy with a bored yet intense gaze. It’s ruined a little when one of the cats rubs against Aizawa’s side, but still Izuku freezes up.

“W-what?”

Izuku had seen his neighbor more often since he had met him, usually just passing him as one entered or exited their apartments, but occasionally Izuku would catch him, like this, as he prepared the cat bowls and they would sit for a moment and pet the strays.

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“Your fist,” Aizawa says again, sounding a touch irritated. Izuku looks down at his flesh fist. What was wrong with it? “You need to put your thumb over your fingers, not under. You’d break your thumb if you hit something like that.”
Izuku looks again at his hand, analyzing. It made sense, obvious even, now that it was pointed out to him. He slips his thumb out from under his fingers and puts it on top, flexing his hand a little like that, and then looks back up at Aizawa. The man just grunts and gives a minute nod as he goes back to filling the cat bowls with food and water.

Izuku nods thankfully, even though the man isn’t looking at him anymore, and tries to practice again with his improved fist. He goes through a few more movements, shaky and uncertain but stubborn as all get out, when he hears a now familiar, exhausted sigh. He looks back over towards his neighbor’s porch and finds Aizawa standing up and turning to head towards him in the courtyard.

The man stuffs his hands in his pockets and slouches over Izuku as he stops in front of him, looking him over, and Izuku steps out of his attempted stance, staring back up with a big eye and curious, and anxious, expression.

“Why are you doing this, kid? You’ve been doing this for weeks.” It sounds familiar, like when he had been asking Izuku why he had run out to help Dapple despite being terrified that night they had met.

Izuku swallows and ducks his head. He didn’t want to say he was training to be a hero. He had hated people’s responses back before he had been hurt. He knows now that the reactions would be so much worse. No, he wasn’t going to be telling anyone about wanting to be a hero for a while. Not until he was certain he could back it up. Instead, he goes for a half-truth.

“I get picked on a lot for being quirkless and…” Izuku raises his prosthetic and wiggles it. “You know… I just wanted to learn to defend myself, even a little…” It isn’t false, he did want – need – to learn to defend himself, especially with so many uncaring bullies around, even with Mashi there to back him up. He had to be able to stand up for himself. He had to.

Izuku doesn’t see if Aizawa’s expression changes, but he does hear a long, tired sigh that sounds resigned. “Well… You’re not going to be defending anything with a crap stance like that,” his neighbor says and Izuku feels him poke at the top of his head through his curls. After a beat Izuku snaps his head up to look at him, eye wide in astonishment.

“Wait… do YOU know how to fight??” Izuku questions, baffled and excited and he can feel energy beginning to fill his veins. This had never come up before in any of their short conversations surrounded by cats.

Aizawa scratches at his face just under his eye, looking bored as he shrugs. “A little.”

Izuku squeaks immediately in excitement. “Oh my god,” he whispers as he pieces together what he really, really hopes his neighbor is suggesting. “C-can… Can you teach me???” he near squeals, trying desperately not to explode before he actually knows what’s being offered.

Aizawa hums for a long moment then drawls, “I CAN, yes…”

There’s a beat and Izuku deflates a little bit, his expression turning a touch irritable at the slightly creepy smirk Aizawa has taken on. “You sound like a teacher…” he grumbles and Aizawa snorts, smile fading as his expression returns to something bored and neutral. “Fine! WILL you teach me how to fight?”

“No,” Aizawa says immediately and Izuku sags, his soul feeling crushed in the span of a millisecond, but Aizawa isn’t finished. “I’ll teach you how to fight BACK.”

That was all it took for Izuku to pull a 180 and let out a happy scream, throwing up both his arms,
but Aizawa quickly puts out a hand to grab his head, keeping him still despite his happy jitters. He had a teacher. He had somebody who was actually going to show him how to do this instead of him having to figure it out all on his own.

“Only because if you’d kept trying to do what you were doing it was very likely you would have hurt yourself anyway. It’s been painful to watch…” he grunts but Izuku doesn’t care. He’s too excited.

“Can we get started now? Please please please?” Izuku begs, bouncing frantically, and he has a feeling his spine won’t be thanking him later, but he doesn’t care.

“No. It’s late and I have work soon,” the man says, stepping back and crossing his arms. He pauses, looking at Izuku, then sighs. “I’m going to regret this, aren’t I?”

“Probably. I’m a handful. Sorry,” Izuku admits honestly, tone still happy. Aizawa groans and rolls his head back towards the sky before turning away, fully prepared to head back to his apartment, but both he and Izuku jump in surprise when Inko is standing not too far away, smiling at them happily. Izuku recovers first, wobbling quickly over to his mother, eye sparkling.

“Izuku! Mom, Aizawa-san is going to show me how to defend myself!” he yells. He can’t hold in his excitement, he has to tell her. He has to tell everyone! He’s already thinking of how to word his chat messages to Katsuki and Mei.

Inko reaches down to hug her son as he gets close, then looks back over at their neighbor. “Really?” she asks and her voice is a mix of curiosity and mild worry. Aizawa shifts and offers a shrug.

“He was trying to figure it out on his own, and if he’s bullied like he told me…” Inko nods an affirmative when Aizawa pauses to give her a questioning look, double-checking if that’s true, “than he really should at least learn how to do it right.”

Inko slowly smiles a bit brighter at the man, her expression proud of her son and happy that anyone would want to help him. “You are a truly kind man, Aizawa-san,” she says and the man clears his throat and shakes his head.

“I just made dinner. Why don’t you have some, with us?” she asks and the tired-looking man straightens a little in surprise, before he slouches again and shakes his head, raising his hand up to deny the offer.

“I have work soon, I should—“

“How soon?”

Aizawa hesitates when he’s interrupted, looking at Inko oddly, kind of like the morning when he had met Inko and she had first done her motherly questioning. “About an hour…” he replies slowly and Inko happily claps her hands. Izuku is looking between the two, embarrassment quickly mounting at his mother’s antics.
“Plenty of time to eat!” she says decidedly then turns around and heads back to her apartment, obviously expecting her son and neighbor to follow her. Aizawa stares after her, obviously baffled, and Izuku chuckles sheepishly, looking from his mother back to the older man.

“Uh… yeah… sorry about my mom…” he begins, cheeks and ears burning with embarrassment. Oh, why had he said anything?

Aizawa clears his throat and shakes his head out of whatever daze he had gone into. “You’re mother is very… kind,” he acknowledges finally, his brows furrowed under his hair, and Izuku scratches at the back of his head, laughing nervously. Aizawa and his mother had met a few times the last few days, yes, but she hadn’t had a chance to fret over him until now.

“Are you two coming?” Inko calls from inside her apartment, poking her head out through the sliding doors and she looks expectantly at them. Izuku jumps and scrambles towards her, offering apologies, and Aizawa groans, slouching and head falling, but eventually he drags his feet to follow.

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“A hero, huh?” Mashi says as she and Izuku sit together at lunch a few weeks later. Izuku is poking dejectedly at his own bento. As soon as he could he had told as many of his friends he was getting to learn some basic self-defense from someone who didn’t treat him any different than any other person. Katsuki never responded back, Mei was congratulatory but obviously didn’t care too much, and Mashi was, as usual, loud and excited for Izuku.

Since then, in the evening before Aizawa had to go to work, he would run through a few drills and moves with Izuku. It wasn’t very in-depth, but it was challenging, but not because it was difficult, simply because Izuku was so limited in his movements and a lot of the drills needed to be modified.

That was where Izuku’s current issue and frustrations came from.

Aizawa was teaching Izuku how to fight the way he was now, with only one good arm, stiff, difficult legs, and no depth perception. It was… logical, but Izuku wanted to scream this wasn’t what he was going to be like forever. He was going to change this, he was going to be better, which was why he was avoiding trying to make his home, or anything really, all that accessible for himself right in that instant.

He didn’t want to make things one-handed. He didn’t want to make things easier with his wheelchair. He didn’t want to work on one-eyed technology. He wasn’t going to be this way long, he told himself, why make those changes? He was not going to settle for this. He refused.

He couldn’t tell that to Aizawa, or anyone, however. They probably wouldn’t understand, and if he explained it was all to become a hero they would probably try to stop him. Well, almost everyone would.

Mashi, he knew by now, he could trust with this information. He didn’t want to keep bottling it up, didn’t want to just boil in it and his frustrations. Mashi he could tell. Mashi would understand.

“Yeah. I’m working on a new arm and eye, and also a new spinal support system so I can,” Izuku nods, as he finally picks up a little sausage and pops it into his mouth. Mashi is staring at him across the desk with sparkling, excited eyes.

“That is… so cool, Zuzu!” she exclaims loudly, pumping a fist into the air, and at least looks a little sheepish when Izuku hushes her. She leans in over the desk, her food forgotten, keeping her voice low now. “Why don’t you seem excited, though?” Her head tilts and her brows furrow in question.
Izuku is back to poking at his food with his chopsticks, eye downcast. For a while he’s silent, too long for Mashi, it seems, because she reaches out to poke Izuku’s nose. “Yoooo, earth to space man!”

“S-sorry, it’s just…” Izuku sighs. What was he doing? He had come to Mashi because he had been worried and sad, hadn’t he? Because he trusted her on this. “I can’t tell anybody else about it because they’ll… they’ll try to stop me, or tell me I can’t do it, or look at me all sad and pitying, like I’m an invalid.”

“Aren’t you, though?” Mashi asks, honestly looking for clarification, but Izuku still snaps.

“No!” Quickly he shrinks again, looking around when a few eyes glance over to him, and chews his lip until he’s certain no one is looking. “An invalid means someone who is weak. I am not weak,” he hisses lowly, tears pricking at his eye.

Mashi tilts her head the other way, pigtails flopping around, not reacting to Izuku’s tears or outburst, instead just asking, “But you are handicapped?”

“No for long,” he mumbles, wiping furiously at his face to keep the tears down, at least once. Mashi arches a brow and looks at him with something akin to disbelief. He doesn’t understand it, but at least it isn’t pity or sadness. “What?”

“What’s wrong with being handicapped?” she asks sternly, eyes narrowing, and Izuku is suddenly taken aback. This wasn’t how he had imagined the conversation going. “So be a handicapped hero, who cares?” she says roughly, a fire in her eyes. “Think about how important you would be to so many people! Think of all the handicapped people out there who didn’t think they could be anything worthwhile, but then they’d see you and think, ‘Hey! Maybe I could do that too’.”

Mashi suddenly leans back in her chair, arms crossed, glaring at Izuku and he didn’t much like being at the end of her glare. “Wouldn’t being quirkless be a handicap, too, anyway? So… work with it, let it push you forward, let it be your challenge from the universe itself to keep going and getting stronger, and be strong because of your handicap, not despite it!”

Mashi’s voice rose with each word until she was near yelling again, standing up from her seat and leaning towards Izuku, hands on the desk. Izuku leans back in surprise, staring up at her determined eyes.

“I’m handicapped, you’re handicapped times three, and we’re both stronger than anybody else because of it! We have to work harder than everybody else. So let’s be strong and stubborn and honest with ourselves… and show to the world that they should never look down on anyone quirkless or handicapped ever again!”

Izuku’s brow furrows, shocked and confused and energized all in one, but also incredibly terrified. Why? This should be inspiring, to look at all the things everyone has looked at him with pity for like they are challenges, like they can lead to something greater. To see his future and also see something for someone like him, like Mashi, to look up to, to be someone who changes the way people think. To change the world.

People have stopped staring, used to Mashi’s loud antics by now and no longer caring, and Izuku thinks he’s a little grateful as his tears build again. Mashi slowly sits back down, leaning still over the desk, but now her determined expression is softer, more understanding.

“I think… You don’t want to accept you’re junk…” she finally says and Izuku looks up at her, tears rolling and face red from exertion to keep the noises in. “You… you said that none of this matters…”
that you were going to just ‘fix’ everything? But… I mean… I did that when I first found out I was quirkless. Y’know… deny it, try to force a quirk, say the doctors were wrong… I didn’t want anyone to say I was quirkless because I was sure I was just a late bloomer or something…”

“Me too…” Izuku mumbles, wiping at his face, but the tears aren’t stopping this time. He’s thinking at least, trying to figure out what Mashi’s saying and what it means for him. “The five stages of grief…” he suddenly breathes, realization hitting him. He was still… grieving.

Mashi’s brow furrows, but she recognizes this particular look on Izuku’s face and give him time to sort whatever is in his head out. Izuku looks back on the facts. His impatience to just be whole again, his frustration at his training with Aizawa had to keep being adjusted, his near hatred of his dependence on his wheelchair. “I’m seeing this as… as a phase…” he begins saying, brow furrowing. “But that is highly inappropriate. I need to be seeing this for what it is, a permanent situation I must learn to work with instead of against.”

“Isn’t that what I just said…?” Mashi grumbles, but Izuku ignores her.

“I don’t… I don’t want to be like this…” he mumbles, bowing his head again, tears falling harder, his body shaking. “B-but I don’t have a choice… do I?”

There’s a pause. “No…” Mashi whispers back, “No one does…” Izuku hiccups and shakes his head. He had been hoping to get Mashi on his side, to get her to be just as frustrated about the same things as him, but instead she had been a lot more aware than he had given her credit for, and all the more ready to tell Izuku what he needed to hear, not what he wanted.

He had been fighting everything every step of the way.

Mashi is soon walking around the desk as Izuku keeps crying, wrapping him up into a tight, crushing hug, not caring if anyone might be watching them. Izuku hugs her back, right in the middle of lunch in their classroom, and cries.

When he finally begins to come down, breath evening out some, he mumbles, “You know… you’re a lot smarter than you look…”

“Mama said I’m people smart, not book smart, but that’s okay! You can be book smart for the both of us!” she replies, chipper, but there’s a waver in her voice. Had she been crying too?

“I’m not doing your homework for you,” Izuku deadpans and laughs weakly when she yells in indignation. He felt weak and fragile. He still didn’t like the idea of working with his handicaps, of accepting them, but he knew he would need to eventually.

“We’re going to do great, y’know that?” Mashi says after a while, pulling away from Izuku and hopping to sit on top of the desk, facing her friend. Izuku rubs roughly at his eye, trying to rid himself of the remains of his tears, when he stops.

“Wait… you said that earlier. ‘We?’” He questions, looking up at the redhead with a confused expression. Mashi looks back at him like it’s obvious.

“Oh, yeah? That whole hero thing? I want in!” Mashi grins, jabbing her thumb at her chest, her voice booming. “Let’s show this world not to look down on us quirkless folk anymore!!”

Slowly Izuku smiles, nodding at her as she laughs and goes back to her usual self. “Yeah… let’s do that. The universe has offered us a challenge, right?” He smiles a little bigger when that gets Mashi laughing even louder.
“Damn straight!! Now! About this arm thing. Tell me more about it, ‘cause it kind reminds me of this anime a while back about this tiny blond guy who gets a leg and an arm replaced and his brother is a suit of armor.”

“Sounds silly… You’re going to make me watch it with you, anyway, aren’t you?”

“Abso-fucking-lutely!”

Chapter End Notes

Hey y'all hope you're still enjoying this! I hope it doesn't feel like anything's rushing or that anything's forced. Let me know what you think pleaseeeeee I really appreciate all your love and comments.

I unfortunately seem to have caught a bit of a bug so the next one may take a biiti longer to get out.

Chapter Song: Kesha - Hymn
“Is everyone ready??” Izuku yells, receiving a chorus of yes’s in reply a moment later. He glances around at the porches and balconies that surround the courtyard, at his neighbors who have taken to coming out to watch his experiments when he conducts them outside, who now all wear an assortment of safety goggles as they stand far back or sit in lawn chairs.

Izuku and Katsuki sit behind a pane of safety glass seeing as they’re closer to the center of the courtyard where the experiment is taking place. Katsuki is holding a button in one of his palms, looking impatient but also the usual excited he gets when they do experiments. “Hurry up already, shitty Deku,” he snaps and Izuku glances back at him, smiling wide, then turns back to the set up in front of them.

A track is pointed straight upward with a device at it’s base that looks like a metal backpack trying to be a rocket, a dummy strapped to the underside. Multiple panes of safety glass surround it with all kinds of scanners to read necessary data for later.

“Ohayoo! Jetpack 2.3 test flight beginning in 3… 2… 1… Start!” Izuku calls and Katsuki hits the trigger. The jetpack’s engines come to life, shooting bright blasts of fire down onto a safety pad beneath it, and it shoots up the track and into the air. For a second it’s steady, going straight up and up, until it begins to shake and waver. It’s then spinning in tight loop-de-loops and Izuku hums.

“Alright, that should be good,” he says loudly over the noise of the jetpack, even if it is far into the sky. Katsuki snickers in a decidedly creepy way and hits another button on the trigger and the jet pack erupts into a fiery explosion, controlled enough that it doesn’t send pieces outward, but destructive enough to stop it immediately.

The neighbors ooh and aah, some of the younger kids screaming in excitement at the bright explosion, Katsuki laughing like a maniac. Izuku is grinning as well, looking around him at everyone’s reactions, before looking back down at his notepad, writing down his findings.

Izuku’s new prosthetic finally looks like an actual hand, four fingers and a thumb, the joints where they should be, the shapes appropriate. It is made with light plastics and metals, manageable and cheap, and lights click on and off whenever a certain movement is registered from the headband currently resting on his head. The headband is thick, with circular scanners at both Izuku’s temples, and made of the same plastics as his arm and a few wires run from both headband and arm to a solar pack on his hip.

It had taken him nearly an entire year to research, plan, design, and build his current prosthetic, but it had not been the only thing he had been working on. Possible weapons, yes, had been a focus, but he had also revisited some of his other ideas from his time in the children’s ward. The ideas that were so pure and good, a challenge to Izuku’s intellect and imagination, like the jetpack.
He had also built up a bit of a following with his neighbors over the year. He had begun doing more and more of his experiments outside in the courtyard and after the first few tries some of the other apartment owners would come out to watch. Sometimes it was just Izuku doing it, sometimes Mashi was there, sometimes Katsuki was. Whatever the outcome, Izuku felt touched and excited, amazed so many people would be so interested in what he was doing.

He was seven years old now, able to walk a lot more steadily and confidently now, no longer needing to bring his wheelchair everywhere.

He and Mashi had bonded more than he had expected, especially with how loud and chaotic she was, and by this point he was an expert in knowing how to deal with her and her… everything.

He hadn’t actually seen Mei since he’d moved, but it had been fine with how much they talked online, telling each other about their recent inventions, trying to one-up each other, sassing and teasing constantly.

For a while Izuku hadn’t seen Katsuki either. After the move they did chat online, but it usually wasn’t for long, and after Izuku had told him about finding someone to train him Katsuki had gone and vanished for weeks on end. In the past this would have been the silent treatment, but Izuku would have seen him every day at school or at his house. Now, it had sent terror down Izuku’s spine, fear he was losing something important filling his every being.

Eventually Katsuki had spoken to him again, however, and some of the fear had gone, but still something nasty lingered in Izuku’s gut that he couldn’t quite understand. He tried to distract himself by falling back into step with Katsuki, going over ideas and brainstorming functions and inventions, but it never quite went away.

Finally, on Izuku’s seventh birthday, Katsuki had shown up at the Midoriya’s new apartment. He had sneered at everything, not saying anything while their parents were around, but snapping how much he hated it all when it was just he and Izuku again. Again, Izuku felt an unknown discomfort in his gut, more nerves than fear, and he had tried to reassure Katsuki not all was bad, immediately getting them both into an experiment he had been preparing for that day.

It had worked, and Katsuki’s subsequent visits after that were all filled with experiments and just about nothing else unless he stayed long enough for dinner.

Today was one of his visits; their mothers back inside, catching up over tea while their boys literally played with high explosives. Of course, one of their kids WAS a high explosive.

“The center of gravity is still off,” Izuku is muttering as he writes. Even with his new robotic hand, he still writes with his left hand. He had to force himself to keep doing it. Even with replacement limbs he still had to remove the robotics occasionally, or something could go wrong, or any number of situations could leave Izuku momentarily one armed again and he knew he needed to be logical and keep writing left-handed, even if it still left a bad taste in his mouth.

“The tail end needs adjusting and a new steering apparatus must be considered.” Katsuki is ignoring his muttering, too accustomed to it, as he rushes over to the remains of the jetpack test subject. He’s grinning wide as he looks over the wreckage. “Needs to be able to fly straight without pilot acting on it. Must return to air flow sketches and miniature tests.”

“The hell you even need a jetpack for, anyway, Deku??” Katsuki calls, not looking at him, pulling out the charred dummy. They had nicknamed their dummies Breaker, a reference to Izuku’s favorite television show, Mythbusters, and their dummy Buster. Katsuki had teased him about it, but he still referred to the dummy as Breaker, so Izuku counted it as his own win.
“It’s an intellectual challenge, Kacchan!” Izuku replies over his writing, “A simple premise, but near impossible in practice. How marvelous do you think it would be if jetpacks became a common thing? Flying around everywhere…”

Katsuki finally rips Breaker out of the wreckage and looks over at Izuku. He scoffs, rolling his eyes like something Izuku has said is so remarkably ridiculous. “Whatever, I can already do that with my quirk!”

“Good for you,” Izuku replies flatly, without missing a beat, still writing. One of the… “side effects” of being around Mashi so much seemed to be Izuku’s mounting distaste in anyone, including Katsuki, flaunting their quirk and Izuku’s subsequent need to retaliate with sarcasm or sass. At least he didn’t respond with screeching and fists like Mashi.

Izuku had never known another quirkless person before Mashi. He knew they were out there, but they felt like something from a history book. Factual, but untouchable. Now he had a best friend that was quirkless and was everything Izuku did not think a quirkless person would, or could, be. She was vocal about calling people on their prejudices, she took absolutely no crap from anyone looking down on her, she was confident in her abilities and her rights, and she was not deterred by anyone telling her “you can’t.”

Izuku had done his best to follow in her less violent footsteps, wanting to be proud of who he was, damages and all, and he was getting better, he really was, but still he had those days where he looked at himself, at his missing parts, and he hated himself and the universe for putting him here.

“What was that, shitty Deku??” Katsuki snaps, eyes narrowing at Izuku, who finally snaps his notebook shut and looks to his childhood friend, smiling innocently.

“I said good for you,” he replied honestly, “but not everyone gets that opportunity, do they?” He was a lot braver with Katsuki nowadays, and sometimes he looks at himself and the things he’s snarked and asks himself how he’s still alive, but since he is he may as well keep going.

“What?? You and you’re quirkless buddy need something to make you feel impor—“

“It is numbers, Kacchan. Basic numbers. Majority of individuals, quirk or quirkless, are incapable of flight, now do you want to blow up another jetpack or don’t you?”

For a while they stare at each other. These moments have begun happening more and more lately, these tense moments between their joy and excitement from an experiment. Izuku doesn’t know where they came from, or why, but he hopes they don’t last.

This one is short lived, thankfully, because the promise of another explosion pulls Katsuki back to his side, grumpy as he may be, and Izuku smiles. On to the next experiment, he thinks, pushing aside all his worries and fears.

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Izuku sits, that evening, after Katsuki has gone home with his mother, outside with the cats, a new arm in his lap that he is working diligently on. He’s not yet onto the delicate work for this one, instead using a wrench and screw and hammer to get the larger pieces into the right working places so they slot and move fluidly together.

His arm movements are still stunted and robotic, hardly looking human, and he needed to work on that. The headband was temporary, but it turned out to be a great help. It allowed him to work more on the aspects of the arm itself and how they worked and worry later about how he would connect
them to himself. Mashi had been right, though. That anime about the alchemist and his metal brother had given Izuku some very nice ideas.

Also he would never recover from that rasped line, “Big… Brother…” It still made Mashi and him cry, and he blamed her entirely.

Izuku looks up when he hears a sliding door open and sees his neighbor step out, looking disgruntled and exhausted as he begins pouring the cats their bowls of food and water. Aizawa is grumbling something nasty about the heat and being alive.

“Why do you sleep in that sleeping bag if you get hot so easily?” Izuku asks, honestly curious about the logical man’s seemingly complete lack of logic.

Aizawa doesn’t even glance over, he’d known Izuku was there from the start, he always does, as he grumbles, “’s comfortable.” Izuku hums in thought, quietly leaning to the side to scribble a note in the corner of his spread out blueprint to work on a cooling system sleeping bag later, and then sits back up.

Aizawa has stood up himself, stretching some knots out of his back after probably sleeping on the floor in his old, worn down, maroon sleeping bag. Izuku has found him like that many times, wondering why he gets to lecture Izuku on taking care of himself when he does stuff like that.

Izuku pouts when he thinks of that, leans over his notes again, and writes down “obnoxious yellow” under the cooling sleeping bag idea just out of spite.

When he looks back up at his neighbor this time he’s already being stared back at. Aizawa is watching him, looking him over to determine something, and Izuku smiles sheepishly. Usually by now Izuku would already be out in the grass, working on the small self defense movements already shown to him by Aizawa, but this was not one of those days.

Izuku had been trying to be more honest with himself and how he felt. When he wasn’t his mother would worry, or Aizawa would berate him, or Mashi would call him on his shit. He hated a lot of things about his situation, but denying it wouldn’t help him recover and move forward, and that meant admitting when he had bad days instead of powering through them.

“Really hectic experimentation day,” he says in way of explanation. Usually the bigger experiments took a lot of energy out of Izuku, and the emotional strain of Katsuki or the emotional overdose of Mashi rarely helped. All of it more than likely led to some kind of crash that left Izuku depressed, aching terribly, or both.

Aizawa knows this, can see how Izuku sits tenderly in a way to keep the strain on his back minimal. “I heard all of it,” he replies dryly, shifting and sitting down against the wall a few paces to the side of Izuku, letting the cats swarm him so he can pet them.

Izuku has the mind to cringe and look to his neighbor apologetically. Inko and he had learned over their time getting to know the dark, intimidating, tired man that he just had the worst time trying to get to sleep. They didn’t badger why, but they did worry, and often Inko would send Izuku next door with sleepy time tea, warm, soothing soup, or fresh brewed coffee for when he was about to head to his mystery job.

“Sorry, Aizawa-san,” Izuku offers meekly, ducking his head, and Pumpkin sees the opportunity to jump onto his shoulders and settle there. Izuku snorts at the cat and Aizawa picks up the munchkin cat and sets him down so the boy can straighten up again.
“Yeah, you should be, those explosions are loud,” the man says, voice rough, but with little bite to it, and Izuku sees it as the perfect opportunity to lead into what he had been hoping to talk to Aizawa about.

“Yeeehaah, I really am,” he continues, more playful now, and the man to his side slowly turns to give him a suspicious glare, one brow raised higher than the other. He says nothing, just stares and waits for whatever Izuku is leading into. The boy can’t help the grin that is growing on his face as he turns to his side away from Aizawa.

“Yep, super sorry, apologetic, and regretful. It only seemed right I should fix it, right?” he’s rambling as he goes through his things until he finds what he’s looking for. He peaks back over his shoulder to his neighbor, eye sparkling, and with a great flourish pulls out a pair of black headphones. They look normal enough, bulky with padding around the earpiece, but no cord. Izuku hands them over to Aizawa before he can say no, grin near breaking his face in half. “So consider this my apology present!”

Aizawa examines the headphones cautiously at first, which is understandable when one considers he hears the majority of Izuku’s experiments end in explosions. As he looks over them Izuku begins to ramble. “I call them POMs, or Peace Of Minds. I remember you mentioning a really loud friend of yours once before, and then I thought about all my loud experiments out here, and I thought of these. They noise cancel to different levels. There’s a dial that pops up when you press the circle on the right ear,” Aizawa clicks a circle on the outside of the right earpiece and a little dial clicks up, “That one determines what percentage of noise cancellation you want. Go ahead! Try it!”

Aizawa turns the smooth moving dial all the way up to 100%, clicks the dial back to flat, and puts them on. His eyes widen in a rare expression of complete surprise as he looks around him. Izuku just about dances in his spot as he watches, always so happy when not only an experiment works, but that it can be enjoyed for its proper purpose.

He had experimented with the headphones before to make sure they worked, of course, and he knew Aizawa couldn’t hear a single thing around him right now.

His neighbor finally removes the headphones, looking them over, impressed but calmed down. “You said you made these because you remembered my loud acquaintance?” he questions and Izuku nods but also gives a half shrug.

“That and the experiments. You always seemed kinda stressed about them.”

“These… are going to infuriate him.”

“That’s… a good thing, right?” Izuku tilts his head and Aizawa does one of his creepy, all teeth grins that make him look just a touch crazy.

“That’s perfect.”

“Riiiiight,” Izuku hesitates, but he’s smiling anyway. It had taken some getting used to, but he thought his neighbor was pretty funny, in a dark, scary kind of way. “A-anything! The other ear has another dial with logos on them,” he continues and the ragged man clicks up the other dial. There are indeed little logos on the dial. There is one of rain droplets, a lightning bolt, a cricket, a cat, and so on. Right now it is set to a pause symbol. “They’re relaxing ambiance noises, to help with the stress factor. There’s a little volume switch on the side of that earpiece too.”

Aizawa takes a moment to spin the clicking dial, as if he’s considering which one to do, but Izuku
can already guess he’ll go for the cats first. He clicks the dial back into the earpiece, manages the volume for a moment, lowers the noise cancelling to about 60%, and sets the headphones in place.

A moment later he relaxes back against the brick wall of the complex, completely content it seems. Izuku is giddy, watching his neighbor for any more reactions. He has to be patient, he knows that, the dark man likes to take his time, and finally Aizawa opens one eye to look down at Izuku thoughtfully. Another beat passes and the man reaches out to ruffle Izuku’s hair into a complete mess, making the boy squawk and try to fix it back into some kind of control.

“Well, well, you’ve certainly made this old man’s day,” he says and Izuku can just hear a touch of happiness behind his bored, exhausted voice and he smiles big and bright, before pausing and pouting.

“You aren’t that old, you’re only twenty-two,” he retorts but Aizawa has shut his eye again and is reaching up to mess with a dial.

“Sorry, can’t hear you,” a quick point to Izuku’s invention, “noise cancelling headphones,” he gives a dismissive wave of his hand and when Izuku pouts and huffs and goes back to work on his arm, Aizawa just smirks.

The headphones hang around his neck, hidden by his scarf usually, almost constantly after that, in easy reach to use so he can take a quick nap. Or infuriate his loud friend.

The only downside? Now, that so called “friend” won’t stop pestering him about where he got them.

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Two days after Izuku’s eighth birthday he is calling and asking Leanne to take him to the hospital for research purposes.

Izuku no longer has a need for Leanne’s regular services since he was able to walk on his own now and he had Mashi to help him if necessary, and Aizawa next door if there was an emergency. Leanne had insisted, however, that Inko and Izuku keep her number, just incase they may need her again, and today was one of those days.

Using his new flip phone, a birthday gift that Inko had been saving up for for a long while, and that he had quickly begun upgrading in glee, Izuku had made his request to the sweet caregiver. Leanne had of course been worried at first, thinking that Izuku was hurt, but he had assured her it was nothing like that.

“Well, it’s actually my medical scans,” Leanne had said when she finally came by to pick him up. It was a Sunday that his mother was working, and while he did feel a lot more comfortable walking on his own now, longer trips made him, and the adults, nervous, so it had been a logical choice to get Leanne’s help. “But I am still not sure what kind of research you need at the hospital?” They were standing right outside his door, Leanne wanting to understand what they were doing before they got going.

“You are so smart, Midoriya-kun,” Leanne had said. Izuku replies. Leanne was similar to Mashi in that she asked a lot of questions about his research and interests, but where Mashi was just excited about them in general, Leanne did it more out of an intrigue in Izuku himself, wanting to see him grow and embrace his uniqueness.

Leanne gives him a questioning look, brows furrowed and head tilted, and Izuku begins pulling at his own lip as he considers a proper explanation. He wasn’t going to lie, but he wasn’t going to give
“You know how I’ve been working on my arm prosthetics so much?” he begins and Leanne nods, looking at Izuku’s current headband powered prosthetic. “I’ve been considering possible options for my eye and spine, but they’re such testy, delicate spots that it’s… difficult to figure out something safe. I wanted to get my scans to see what I needed to keep in mind about myself, specifically, while considering designs.”

“And you’re being safe about this, right?” Leanne checks, expression nervous over the idea of Izuku accidentally hurting himself, and Izuku is quick to nod an affirmative, because he was being safe, especially with this. If he screwed up there was no telling what could go wrong, what irreparable damage could be done, he had to be absolutely sure he was doing this right.

“Yes ma’am, I am,” he says confidently and Leanne nods, satisfied, trusting Izuku completely, and they finally begin walking away from the apartment.

The walk to the station is the longest part of it, and Izuku does have to sit down on the train and breathe deeply from it, Leanne beside him, rubbing his back soothingly. The hospital is just as Izuku remembers it and it sends an uncomfortable twist through his gut along side the bizarre feeling of security and nostalgia.

“Yu-san,” Izuku starts, hesitant as he stares at the entryway, his flesh hand rubbing nervously over the smooth plastic of his prosthetic. Leanne doesn’t say anything, just waits for Izuku to continue. “Do you think… we could maybe say hello to some people?” He peaks up through his hair at the caregiver and she smiles reassuringly down at him.

“I think that would be a really nice thing to do,” Leanne’s voice is soft and Izuku lets out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding. He tells himself to move forward, but his feet suddenly won’t move. Wordlessly, Leanne reaches out her hand, smile patient and kind, and Izuku doesn’t hesitate to take it.

They walk in.

He expects to have to look for someone he recognizes for a while, but is surprisingly mistaken when, standing and going over some files with a nurse and a receptionist, is a man in black scrubs and a white doctor’s coat.

Izuku doesn’t know what comes over him, but suddenly his nerves are gone and he’s grinning ear to ear as he begins rushing over as quickly as his limp will take him. “Dr. Kenta!” he calls and the doctor looks up, surprised momentarily, but is soon smiling at the sight before him. He says something to the nurse, sets down the file and crouches down as Izuku comes up to him. He scoops the young boy up into a hug and Izuku laughs happily, hugging his old doctor right back.

“Well, look who it is,” Dr. Kenta says when he releases Izuku, heavy hand on his shoulder as he looks him over. His eyes catch on the headband and the prosthetic arm, brows rising in surprise. “You’ve been busy, Midoriya-kun.”

Izuku smiles a little brighter at the doctor’s amazed tone. Last Dr. Kenta had seen him had been when he personally brought the original prosthetic to him. This was a massive jump forward. “It’s been a while, Dr. Kenta!” he greets and his doctor smiles again, ruffling Izuku’s hair fondly.

“It has. How have you been? It doesn’t look like you’re here for any injuries…” Dr. Kenta pauses, looking Izuku over a bit more thoroughly and that’s when Leanne joins them, bowing in greeting to the doctor.
“He’s fine, doctor. We came by because he was hoping to ask for something from the hospital,” she explains then looks down to Izuku encouragingly.

Dr. Kenta stays crouched, nodding back to Leanne, then looks to Izuku with a bit more of a serious expression. “You know we’re here to help. Always. What was it you needed from us?”

After talking to Leanne about what Izuku planned to do, it felt a little bit easier to gather his nerves and actually go about asking for his information. “I wanted to ask if I could have my medical information on my injuries? I’m doing some research and they would be really helpful,” he explains, bowing politely and peaking up at Dr. Kenta through his hair.

Dr. Kenta isn’t nearly as surprised as Izuku had anticipated. Instead he just considers the question then shrugs. “I don’t see why not. We give out that information to the corresponding patient if they want it. We’ve had people who are interested in knowing specifics or just seeing their scans that we’ve put it on a disk for them.”

Izuku blinks his eye at him. He hadn’t expected that. He supposes it makes sense. Of course a patient should be allowed the full extent of their information, it would be highly unethical and probably illegal for any medical office to withhold that information.

“There is one issue, however,” Dr. Kenta continues, and Izuku’s bites his lip. Of course. “You’re a minor. We’ll need to get your mother’s approval. The good news, however, is your mother works at a medical facility tied to us. We could give her a call and sort it out, if you like?” Izuku brightens up again. That was right, Inko worked at an immediate care facility not far from here as a front desk worker.

“She’s at work right now!” Izuku tells him, bouncing in excitement, grinning wide. “You could call her there!”

Dr. Kenta smiles and nods. “Then we’ll get right on it.”

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While the staff sort out Izuku’s information and set everything up, Leanne and he go in search of another familiar face. Leanne seems to know where to go, hunting down her little sister with ease, and the moment they see Sunny Izuku has a moment not different from when he’d seen Dr. Kenta. Despite all the hardships that being in this place had brought, and all the terrible reasons for him being here in the first place, there had been some very pointed spots of light in the forms of these people.

When Sunny turns around at her sister’s and Izuku’s voice, her eyes widen, before she schools her expression and crouches down. She scoops Izuku right up once he’s close enough, hugging him tight and standing, then balancing him in one arm as she looks over him, her expression a forced grimace even though Izuku recognizes her underlying happiness.

“Dang, kid, you’ve grown. Put on a couple pounds? You eating alright?” she says and Izuku pouts, crossing his arms, which draws Sunny’s attention down to the new prosthetic.

Last he had seen Sunny had been about a year ago, back when Leanne still walked him home from school, and Sunny had shown up instead due to her sister getting sick. Izuku, at the time, was still wearing the improved version of his original prosthetic.

“When…” is all Sunny mumbles, tilting her head this way and that to get a good look at the arm, before saying dryly, “Impressive.” Izuku snorts at her standoffishness, knowing she’s just playing,
and finally just wraps his arms around her neck, holding tight for balance and just out of joy.

“Where were you heading, Sunny? I’m sorry if we interrupted,” Leanne says, standing in front of them with her hands clasped in front of her. Sunny adjusts Izuku a little and then motions with her head back down the hall she had been walking in.

“Children’s ward, actually,” she says, then turns to look at Izuku with an arched brow. “You want to come with? I’m sure all the new and old kids will find you just as fascinating as before.”

Izuku’s eyes light up at the thought of going back to the children’s ward. He knows a lot of his friends won’t be there anymore, but he also knows some of them were going to be staying for a long while and they could very well still be there and recognize Izuku.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Sunny snorts at Izuku’s expression as the kid near vibrates in anticipation. Leanne giggles at the sight and quickly whips out her phone to snap a picture. “Hey!” Sunny growls to her sister, looking suddenly frazzled by the photo, but Leanne just smiles sweetly and waves her off, ushering them all forward and towards the children’s ward, ignoring her sister’s complaints, Izuku still balanced in Sunny’s arms.

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Kyou isn’t there anymore, and Izuku feels a mixture of loneliness and happiness for him. Kyou filled the room with so much noise that was so unique to him. Now, loud as some of the new kids may be, it feels too quiet for Izuku. Like something just isn’t right about the place anymore.

Shun is still there though, looking taller in his wheelchair, but also lankier. He’s wearing a bandana now and Izuku can’t see any of his hair poking out.

They end up gravitating towards each other, the two picking up like they had seen each other only yesterday, Izuku telling Shun about some of his new inventions and plans, showing off his arm, laughing with him when they share stories since they’d been separated.

Other kids begin to gather as well, a couple familiar faces, and similar to last time Izuku has their undivided attention as he talks about science and technology. He wishes he brought his notebook filled with some of his more recent ideas to share, but he is happy he has a small travel sized one with him to begin writing notes down when the kids start spouting ideas and questions.

It’s mostly lasers, ice beams, invisibility, and so on. Technology that can mimic the flashiest of quirks, and Izuku humors them as best he can even though some of them are just plain impossible. Then there’s one kid, a quiet, young girl who is pale and small and has an IV sticking out of her arm. She doesn’t look like she has a quirk, but when she finally speaks she has Izuku’s undivided attention.

“What about space?”

Izuku looks to her, eye wide in curiosity and all ears to her. “What do you mean?”

“You know… space. Ever since quirks showed up nobody thinks about space anymore, but you don’t have a quirk, most of us don’t, so… I thought maybe you would have?” She tilts her head, her eyes are droopy and it’s difficult to get a read on her emotions, but it hardly matters. She’s struck something in Izuku he hadn’t expected.

“I… hadn’t thought of space, no,” he replies honestly, brow furrowing as he looks down at his notepad. All his ideas, all his plans and inventions were tied to selfish or earthbound purposes. Space was… remarkable and beautiful in its simple complexity, and it was true that no one ever seemed to
look up anymore, too drawn to the world of heroes and villains and quirks.

Izuku was supposed to be beyond that. He had lectured on it right here in the children’s ward nearly two years ago, how being quirkless meant you were limitless. Izuku was supposed to be – no, he needed to be – better. Maybe not looking to space quite yet, he knew his limits and even that was beyond him, at least for now, but what about the air? His jetpack was a step in that direction, certainly, but was there more he could do? What about the ocean? Well… that one scared him a little bit, but it still intrigued him.

Slowly, Izuku looks up to the girl, eye sparkling in excitement. “What kind of ideas for space have you had?” The girl slowly smiles. She’s missing some teeth, but it’s one of the most spectacular things Izuku has seen in a while.

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“You wanna go to SPACE?? Dude! We’re eight!” Mashi says almost immediately after Izuku and she head out to the courtyard with a few mats to lie on the ground for cushioning.

“Not YET,” he argues, rolling his eye skyward. “Of course not yet. But can you imagine? How cool would that be??”

“Going to space? Pretty fuckin’ dope, I’d imagine,” Mashi agrees, nodding sagely, her usual intrigue at Izuku’s mind beginning to set in after her initial shock. Her blood red hair is no longer in pigtails but instead has been changed to a simple ponytail that bounces when she walks, her hair a lot longer now as well, falling to her midback.

“Like a space station!” Izuku continues as he sets down his first aid kit, a couple of tools, and a small tackle box with who knows what inside. “Or a space suit!”

“Or a space laser!!” Mashi exclaims, throwing her hands out in front of her aggressively, like she’s aiming a cannon, and she begins making whirring mechanical noises as she moves around.

“What is with you and weapons?” Izuku questions, exasperated by the girl’s antics. He knows full well Mashi is a weapons enthusiast, evidently the axe on her bedroom wall far from the only weapon she has, it just happens to be her favorite, but sometimes it still freaks Izuku out just a little bit. Who is he to judge, however? What with his adoration of All Might and all things scientific.

Mashi ignores him and instead runs back to the apartment and comes back with Breaker, a stand for it, and a fire extinguisher. She begins propping up the dummy on a patch of grass away from their mats and Izuku moves the fire extinguisher over towards himself.

“Speaking of weapons! I was thinking of something super badass I could use that you could help me make,” Mashi chirps, adjusting Breaker a bit more, then turning back towards Izuku and pulling out a folded piece of paper from her overall’s pocket. She unfolds it and shows it to her friend enthusiastically.

On the paper is a badly drawn picture of a staff with some kind of gun barrel at the end, protected by curved, metal sheets that end in points and have an arrow pointing to them saying, “for bludgeoning.” She probably means bludgeoning. There are a few other arrows and notes. The barrel has a note saying, “shotgun,” and the grip has a note saying, “light wait.” Izuku blinks at it then slowly looks up at Mashi, brow lowered in a reproachful look.

The redhead doesn’t seem to be bothered and just keeps talking. “I was playing this old video game and there was this shit called a ‘gun staff’ and I want one! I do need some kinda weapon for hero
work, right? Don’t’cha think?”

“I don’t disagree,” Izuku begins carefully and takes the drawing, “but this seems a little… much, don’t YOU think?”

“Nope!” Mashi grins and Izuku groans, throwing his head back, then stuffs the paper into his notebook.

“I’ll THINK about it, but don’t get your hopes up,” he warns, but all Mashi seems to care about is that she may have a chance of getting what she wants. She whoops loudly, throwing her fists into the air, and Izuku, close enough to her, pinches her side under her arm, making her yelp and smack at his real hand. “Now hurry up and help me with this stuff.”

Today it was Mashi’s turn to help him with his experiments, but unlike the jetpack there was likely to be very few explosions this time around. Izuku had been working further on self defense mechanisms for his future builds and had come up with something he felt could really turn the tides.

He opens up the tackle box while Mashi sets up the safety glass, rolling it out of a nearby storage closet the apartment owners let Izuku use. Inside the tackle box is an assortment of small, long, dart-like objects. Where the dart’s needle end would be it is flat instead with a series of very small, metal sensors covering the circular flat side. The length of the darts is mostly clear, showing a hollow interior, with a small, circular hole on one side. Where the tail of the dart would be it simply ends in a point like a teardrop. The majority of them, save for the clear middle and the silver sensors, is black.

In a compartment on the bottom of the tackle box are four containers, three of which are clear, cylindrical, and filled with different colored liquids, the forth looking like a charge box.

Izuku begins preparing the “darts” while he tells Mashi how to set up what appears to be a firing mechanism a few feet away from Breaker. “So, what are those things?” Mashi asks when she’s done, brushing off her hands on her overalls. She’s eying Izuku’s invention with complete wonder.

“I call them the Equalizers,” he says with a happy grin, his eyes still on his work. He pulls out one of the empty darts and rolls it in his fingers, knowing Mashi is looking at what he’s doing. “These are small, compact projectiles that will be implemented into my arm. They can be filled with, currently, four different substances to get four different responses. One bursts into flames,” he points to the clear cylinder filled with a green liquid, “one freezes,” he points to the clear cylinder filled with a light blue liquid, “one zaps,” he points to the black charge box, “and one puts someone to sleep,” he points to the cylinder filled with a lavender liquid.

Mashi makes a little noise of pure elation, her green eyes twinkling, and Izuku smiles to himself. “See these?” he continues, moving the dart to point at the sensors on the head. Mashi leans in closer to get a better look and nods. They weren’t little disks upon first glance, but rather small spikes. “They detect contact to either a surface or a living thing and react appropriately depending on the substance the Equalizer is filled with. There are sensors inside the cartridge as well that tell it what’s inside. For the fire and ice ones it will actually make the dart explode to release the substance. For the sleep and zap ones the sensors extend upon contact to latch onto the target and inject what they need to.”

Mashi leans back, a suddenly uncertain look in her eyes. “Latch? That sounds nasty, even for me!” she comments, shuddering. “Like a lich!”

“Leech, Mashi,” Izuku mumbles and she makes a noise of realization and appreciation. “Yeah, they sting,” he admits, understanding Mashi’s concerns, and raises his flesh arm, rolling back his sleeve to show his bicep, five circular marks of spots peppering his skin. The spots are red, but not swollen or
scabbing. “I wasn’t going to use something like this without testing it on myself first,” Izuku explains at Mashi’s frightened look, “Same way police get tased before getting to use a taser. They sting afterwards, but more like if you got a shot, and they fall right off once all the stuff inside of them is gone.”

Mashi hums thoughtfully for a moment but finally seems to accept the answer, nodding and leaning back down to watch Izuku prep the Equalizers. A small tube is screwed onto the container filled with the green liquid and then Izuku presses the free end onto the hole in a dart’s side. Quickly it is filled with the green liquid that appears to turn into a vapor upon entering the dart. He does this to five darts, then repeats the process with five more with the light blue liquid. He doesn’t touch the purple one, yet, and instead moves to the charge box, where he clamps a jumper cable to a metal bulb then presses the other end that looks like an aux cable to a dart’s hole. After a moment the dart actually begins to glow like a lightbulb and Izuku stops. He does that to five darts as well.

“Allright!” he says, standing, seeming to startle Mashi out of her stupor. She straightens up like a soldier, eyes twinkling.

“What do you need me to do?” She says deeply, making Izuku giggle, and she grins back. Turns out Izuku needs her two, steady, flesh hands. He instructs her on how to load the firing mechanism he’s built, just a simple spring loaded design, and she does as she’s told first with one of the Flame Equalizers, then steps back over to Izuku behind the protective glass.

Around them a few of the neighbors have come out to watch, as usual. They slip on their protective goggles that Izuku had insisted everyone get if they wanted to watch and Izuku and Mashi do the same with theirs.

“Allright! Firing in 3… 2… 1… Go!” Izuku calls and lets Mashi press the button. They watch as the dart is fired out and smashes against Breaker, the vapor lighting up with fire, flickering and dancing, but hardly catching anything on fire as it soon dissipates.

Izuku grins excitedly and throws his flesh fist up. “Whoo!! It failed!” he cheers and Mashi isn’t far behind him. Failures were good. Failures meant they could learn and improve. Failures were a part of science that led to new questions and discoveries. Successes were great and all, and were the final goal, but failures? Failures were what led to the best solutions possible, but only if one learned from them.

They set up the next four darts and go through the process again, to see if the first was just a fluke. It was not, and Izuku writes down his notes, his dark green eye twinkling. This was great. This was progress.

“What is that liquid anyway?” Mashi asks as they clean up Breaker and begin preparing the Ice Equalizers.

“It’s a concoction I made,” Izuku says absently. He doesn’t bother going into too much detail on the specifics of the chemicals, knowing Mashi likes his builds, but gets frustrated when he goes too in depth. “I call it Blaze.”

“Blaze…?” Mashi questions and Izuku freezes, suddenly realizing what he’s said and kicking himself for it. It was only a working title, more for him than anyone else, and was a reference that of course Mashi would get. “Wait… like the Blaze from that old game you never gave back to me??” Mashi looks to Izuku with scandalized eyes, hands on her hips, and Izuku holds up his notepad as if to protect him.

“H-hey! You said I could have Horizon Zero Dawn as long as I liked!” he counters and Mashi
makes a noise of indignation.

“I didn’t think you’d be so obsessed with it!”

Izuku hadn’t been able to put the game down once he’d gotten into it. Majority of the futuristic tech in the game was near impossible to actually build, but that didn’t mean Izuku hadn’t gotten inspiration from it. A lot of inspiration…

Mashi marches over to the cylinders and looks them over before pointing at the green one and saying, “So that’s Blaze.” She then points to the one with the light blue liquid and looks to Izuku. “Chillwater?” she raises a brow in expectation and Izuku sighs, nodding as he ducks his head, ears red. She points to the charge box. “Sparker?”

“Yeah…” he mumbles miserably. “The sleeping stuff I call Corruption, instead of Metalburn,” he admits, “It was the only one that fit well enough…”

“You are such a nerd, Zuzu. Like… the biggest nerd to ever nerd,” Mashi says, crossing her arms as she looks over the Equalizer parts in a new light. Finally, after a few moments, she turns a bright, eager grin to her friend. “I like it!!” Izuku jumps and straightens, looking back at the redhead in surprise, before slowly he begins to smile as well. “Keep the names, they’re badass!”

Izuku giggles and scratches at the back of his head with his flesh hand sheepishly, his cheeks pink. “Yeah?” he questions, nervous she may be joking, but all she does is keep grinning and nod hard enough her ponytail flops over her head and smacks her in the face. Izuku laughs at her expense as she’s spitting hair out of her mouth, and when he calms he looks down at his Equalizers. “I’ll keep them, then…”

“Fuck yeah!” Mashi cheers, throwing a fist in the air.

“Please stop swearing,” Izuku deadpans.

“Don’t tell me what to dooooooo,” she hisses back, but for the rest of the visit keeps her cursing to a minimum.

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The rest of the experiments go well. The Ice Equalizers explode on impact, like they should, but only leave a small covering of ice where they strike. Izuku makes a note of needing more mass of the Chillwater within the same volume. The ice is at least solid the way he wants it to be.

For the Shock Equalizers they have to hook up Breaker with a device to measure electrical output. It’s meant to match that of a taser but only last about two seconds. They are less successful than both the ice and the fire. The darts latch like they should, even on Breaker’s tougher exterior, and exert a shock, but it hardly lasts a second and the scans indicate something closer to a static shock.

Izuku is ecstatic at it all, jotting down his observations and also ideas to fix them.

“So how do we test the Sleep Equalizers?” Mashi asks as she looks over the purple liquid.

“Well, I was going to do the same thing as the others, but only to see if the darts latch and excrete the agent like they should. After that… well…” Izuku clears his throat and looks to Mashi sheepishly. “I kind of need a living volunteer that I can observe…”

Mashi is silent for a while, just staring at Izuku blankly, before she asks in a very unfeeling tone that is so incredibly unlike her, “Is it dangerous?”
“No, I’ve made sure there are no allergens or dangerous chemicals or chemical combinations that would cause lasting damage,” Izuku reassures, worry beginning to mount in his mind at how his friend was acting.

“What about my brain?”

“Well, it’s basically a general anesthesia, like the one they use for surgeries to put you to sleep, so it will affect your brain, but not detrimentally.”

“Don’t those have bad side effects for some people?” Mashi’s eyes narrow.

“Yes,” Izuku nods, chewing his lip and looking away from her almost glare. “But what I have created is a temporary dose, hardly enough to keep anyone under for longer than five minutes, and extensive research and work to make it have the lowest possible chance of causing any reactions beyond the desired one.”

“Have you tested it on yourself? Like with the darts?”

Izuku straightens up a little, nodding vigorously, wanting desperately for Mashi to know that he wasn’t just throwing her to the wolves or anything. “Yes! Yes I did. It can be inhaled or inject and either way it knocked me out for about two minutes and I was completely fine!”

Mashi’s eyes narrow a bit further and slowly she leans towards Izuku, hands on her hip, expression serious, and the young boy leans away, worry morphing to panic. “Midoriya Izuku,” she begins slowly, voice low, “if you think for ONE. SECOND. That I would turn down the chance to be a guinea pig for something as fuckin’ badass as this, you are sadly mistaken.”

Izuku blinks at her, eye wide, and after a beat she snorts loudly and begins to laugh, throwing her head back and clutching her belly as Izuku catches up to the moment. Now it’s his turn to look serious and dark.

“You’re terrible. Absolutely terrible,” he grumbles and Mashi just laughs harder. It’s infectious, it appears, and despite Izuku’s prior stress he’s soon giggling along with her, head bowed and shoulders shaking as they both fall into their glee.

He’s the first to recover, but Mashi isn’t far behind, wiping at her eyes to rid herself of her joyous tears. “Alriiiight!” she says, still giggly and hyper. “Let’s do this thiiiiing!”

They test out the latch of the Sleep Equalizers, and Izuku is happy at the results. Thus far that’s the most successful, but they still have to test how they work on a living subject.

They move the firing machine to point now at where they laid out the mats, adjusting the safety glass, and Mashi gets covered with some extra protection. A full welding mask, protective headphones, and a padded chest plate. She stands in the line of the machine, turned sideways so the dart should land on her arm, and she’s near vibrating with excitement.

“How are you not even nervous?” Izuku wonders aloud, brow furrowed as he looks at her, and she shrugs, not really knowing, or caring, either.

“Just shoot the thingie!” she whines and Izuku smirks at her impatience. He makes a point of taking his time with the last preparations, making the redhead groan, and finally gets behind his own safety glass.

“Okay, you ready?” he calls and she gives him a thumbs up. “Good. Firing in 3… 2… 1… Now!” He hits the button and the Equalizer is shot, landing with a small ‘th-wack!’ against Mashi’s arm,
right where they wanted it. Izuku watches as Mashi uses her other hand to raise the welding mask, looking down at the dart sticking out of her arm, perplexed, but not hurt. Izuku walks around the safety glass, watching her curiously.

“That was is it?” Mashi says, then huffs like she’s irritated. “That didn’t do anythi—“ She suddenly drops like a sack of potatoes to the mat beneath her, limbs splayed out, and a loud snore almost immediately leaving her mouth.

Izuku stares down at his friend’s unconscious body then pulls out his notepad.

“Delay in activation,” he mutters as he writes, “Unlike medical anesthesia seems to just put to sleep instead of make unconscious.”

Two minutes and twelve seconds later, Mashi seems to fling herself into a sitting position, shrieking, “ANYTHING,” startling Izuku who is sitting beside her. She blinks a few times, dazed, while Izuku watches her, waiting for her to do something. Slowly she turns to stare at Izuku, eyes wide, her pupils thankfully normal. “That was fucking awesome, do it again.”

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On Wednesdays, whenever it gets late and Izuku and Aizawa are outside training, Inko always calls them both in for dinner. It has become a regular thing for Aizawa to join them at least once a week, sometimes more, for dinner at Inko’s request. More like demand, really, but Aizawa never says that out loud.

It’s a kind thing the Midoriya’s are doing, inviting him into their home, feeding him and looking after him, treating him as one of their own. He could have never guessed that one day he would be in such a position like this.

He could have never foreseen that at the ripe old age of twenty-one he would have a disabled child appear on his porch, soaked and terrified but desperate to help a cat that hated everyone. He couldn’t have guessed that he would begin spotting the kid outside in the courtyard more often, doing what he assumed were exercises for his injuries, followed by terrible attempts at martial arts. He could have never guessed he would, one evening, finally have enough of watching the train wreck of a self-defense display, and go over and offer to teach the kid.

He could have never guessed that the boy’s mother would almost immediately take him under her wing and mother hen him every chance she had.

Aizawa had been on his own for a few years now, in the hero business just trying to make ends meet while keeping the streets safe. His current agency still didn’t think much of him, mostly because of his attitude, and he knew it was because of his attitude because his numbers were better than some of the underground heroes that had been there for a few years already.

Aizawa was alone majority of the time, and he was fine with that. He had hardly had a home life before going off on his own, hardly even saw his parents as parents with how absent they had been. Sure, Hizashi dropped by regularly, trying to drag him out on the town and only occasionally succeeding, but other than that he was prepared, and perfectly content, to be on his own forever.

Now, he isn’t sure he could do that again. He would never, in a million years, ever admit to it, but he looked forward to the dinners at the Midoriya’s. He liked having someone dote on him like he was family, and he liked the Midoriyas themselves. For a while he hadn’t known what he was feeling when Inko dropped off a bento or box lunch before his nightshift, or when Izuku would give him an apple or orange or other fruit whenever they crossed paths when Aizawa was coming home and
Izuku was heading to school, or when Inko fretted over his sleeping schedule, or when Izuku would see him staring off into space and invite him over for video games, even though Aizawa didn’t play. He knew what happiness felt like, of course he did, he was human, but he had never had anyone treat him this way and for a while he just assumed he was either going crazy, having heartburn, or some weird combination of the two.

Certainly Hizashi doted on him when he got bad, and he cared about his health and well being, physical and mental, but it was different having a friend look after you versus… Aizawa hesitates to say family, because that doesn’t seem right, but its something close.

He was still young and getting his foot in the door in his hero career, and again, he would never admit this out loud, but it was so surprisingly satisfying coming home and knowing he had two people always on his side just next door.

Inko was what Aizawa imagined a good mother was supposed to be like, even though they were only eleven years apart. She, and her son, were easy to cry, but she also had a strength to her Aizawa so rarely saw in people. She never took Aizawa’s excuses, seeming to always know exactly what he needed and making sure he got it. She was loving and kind, always looking after her son and changing her very way of life to make sure he was comfortable, and now she was extending her great kindness to Aizawa.

Izuku was something truly unique, a genius of a boy with knowledge and imagination and compassion beyond what Aizawa could ever believe one human being, let alone a little boy, could ever have within them. He was braver than some heroes Aizawa knew and he was always amazed by what he not only was able to think up, but actually create. Remarkable creations, some of which he even created with Aizawa in mind, like the POMs, and wasn’t that one of the most kind things anyone had ever done for him?

Aizawa doesn’t realize he’s smiling to himself while at one of their dinners, thinking about his situation, until Inko spots it and begins smiling back. “What is it?” she asks and Aizawa drops his smile, looking to her. Izuku, beside his mother, lifts his head up to look at the two adults.

“What?” Aizawa asks back.

“You were smiling,” Inko replies, smiling a little bigger herself.

“I have been known to, while rarely, smile on occasion,” he drawls sarcastically and Izuku giggles behind his hand.

“Ah yes, yes, of course,” Inko says as if realizing something, but her tone is playful, “Silly me. Please, go back to eating, ignore this crazy woman’s observations.” She’s still smiling as she goes back to her own bowl. Izuku gives Aizawa a big grin of his own, looking all the child he really is, despite his intellect and all the terrible things he’s been through, and slowly Aizawa smiles back. Izuku brightens at that, giggles a bit more, then goes back to his own food, giddy and dancing in his seat.

Slowly, Aizawa also goes back to his dinner, hiding his smile behind his food.

He didn’t know how this all had happened, or what he had done right to earn such kindness, but he wasn’t sure he could give this up for the world.

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The jetpack is hardly making any progress.
Izuku glares at the remains of yet another test flight. He felt like it was going nowhere fast. Failures taught a lot of lessons, he tries to remind himself, but by this point it felt more like repetitive insanity instead.

Katsuki is crouched over the remains, lifting up metal slabs to look at the broken inner mechanisms, looking angry.

“This thing hasn’t made progress in MONTHS! What are you even doing, shitty Deku??” Katsuki exclaims. The experiments have ended for the day so, thankfully, Izuku’s neighbors have gone back inside and won’t see Katsuki’s building meltdown.

Izuku sighs deeply, so tired and not at all as excited as he should be while doing these experiments, and definitely not in the mood to listen to Katsuki’s attitude. “So sorry, your majesty, why don’t you do all the necessary fixes and alterations next time?” he sasses back, voice low as he doesn’t look at Katsuki. He resists the urge to go even further and remind Katsuki that the blond hadn’t even liked the idea of a jetpack in the first place.

“Excuse me?” Katsuki’s voice is dangerously quiet this time and Izuku can almost feel his glare on him. The green-haired boy shrinks in on himself a little, feeling the expected spike of fear, but he does his best to keep himself from cowering. He was so much better at dealing with Katsuki now, at being confident, but there were some days or certain tones of voice that had Izuku falling back on old fears and habits.

“Nevermind,” he says, eye still down. Confident or not he didn’t enjoy butting heads with anyone, especially not with Katsuki and his track record.

“No, no, no! You said something stupid right there!” Katsuki cuts in, his silent anger no longer there as he marches closer to his childhood friend.

“I’m trying to get it working, Kacchan, but it’s hard and it isn’t the only thing I’m working on. Just… getting angry at me isn’t going to help,” he says and he feels so tired. When he doesn’t get any response he peaks up at Katsuki, surprised he doesn’t hear any screaming, and finds the blond just standing there, fuming, but not yelling.

“Whatever,” he huffs, obviously furious, but at least not taking it out on Izuku for once. Izuku, after a long wait of making sure Katsuki doesn’t explode, lets out a long breath, relieved that the issue had been avoided. Maybe now they could actually have fun with these experiments…

“ZUZU!!”

Izuku freezes, his blood running cold, and with speeds that he knows will make his spine ache later, he whips around towards his apartment. His mother and Mitsuki must still be inside, talking, because he doesn’t see them. Instead, Mashi is walking through the back door, all grins, as she jogs towards him.

It isn’t uncommon for her to drop by sometimes. She’ll just appear, some big idea in her head or a new old movie she’s discovered in hand or just wanting to hang out, and it has become a common thing. It is normal. This happens all the time.

What has never happened before is her dropping by while Katsuki is here too.

Izuku had entertained the thought of Katsuki and Mashi meeting before and had immediately known that it would end in disaster. They were both too high energy and headstrong and confident that they were bound to butt heads in the worst kind of ways.
“Who the fuck are you??” Katsuki snaps behind Izuku and he quickly looks back at the blond and pales. The boy is flexing his hands and tiny explosions are popping around his fingers. The anger he had been on just a moment ago is rising back to the surface.

Mashi jogs up beside Izuku, her brows furrowed in confusion as she looks at Katsuki. “Haganehato Mashi. Call me Mashi, though, it’s better,” she replies naturally enough. There’s no shaking in her voice, no fear of the blond and his crackling hands, and Izuku knows that Katsuki doesn’t like that. Katsuki likes when people are in awe of him, he’s used to that. He doesn’t like when they don’t seem to care. “I wanted to come by and see if Zuzu wanted to check out this cool new cat café a couple blocks over!” She grins over at Izuku, expecting him to react positively, or at least in some way, but her smile dwindles when Izuku just stands there, frozen, eye wide with obvious fear as he looks at her, then back to Katsuki.

Katsuki pauses, thinking, and Izuku really hopes he’ll calm down, that he’s considering something good at the very least, but then his brows lower and his sneer grows deeper. “You’re that other quirkless kid Deku mentioned a while back,” he growls and Izuku feels his stomach drop. He wants to eject himself out of this whole mess immediately, but he can’t. He can’t just leave the two to fight, what kind of friend would he be? What kind of hero would he be?

“Well… I’m quirkless, what about it?” Mashi retorts, her happy go lucky mood plummeting as she goes on the defensive. She places her hands on her hips and puffs out her chest in a very obvious challenging stance and Izuku smacks her arm.

“Please, stop,” he hisses and he hadn’t even realized tears had been growing in his eye.

“Do us a favor and get outta here, quirkless wannabe,” Katsuki snaps and Mashi bristles.

No no no, Izuku recites in his head, his hands rising to try and placate them before this escalates any further. How had this even happened? How could just a single moment change everything? Just one unexpected change in events. He needed this to end. He needed it to end right now because the world was shaky and he felt like there was a weight in his chest crushing the air out of him.

“Ohhh, you must think you’re real important, huh? Lemme guess, you got a real flashy quirk that makes you think you’re better than me, don’t cha?” Mashi grounds out, teeth bared.

“I don’t think I’m better than you. I know I am. Anyone could be better than some quirkless brat,” Katsuki snorts, crossing his arms and throwing his head back, looking down his nose at Mashi like she’s nothing. Like all she is is a piece of filth to him.

“You don’t even know me, fucker, why are you so great, huh? I bet if you didn’t have that stupid silver spoon you was born with I could beat the living shit outta you!” Mashi roars right back and Izuku looks desperately towards his apartment. He should go get an adult. He should get someone to help him stop them because he knows he can’t. He can’t do anything. His body won’t do as he tells it.

“Like hell you could! Now get lost, I don’t need Deku distracted by your stupid shit mouth,” Katsuki steps forward, challenging, expecting Mashi to step back, but she doesn’t. She steps forward too.

“Don’t talk about Zuzu that way, shithead,” she hisses and Katsuki leans in towards her, a few explosions going off in his palms, making her flinch back in surprise.

“Fuck you. I’m number one and I’ll do what I want.”

Mashi recovers a moment later, her fists clenching so tightly her knuckles turn white. “Not for long,
shit rag! Me and Zuzu are gonna be heroes and wipe the floor with you!” she roars, and Izuku’s heart drops, following his stomach.

His eye widens in horror as he stares at the redhead and, slowly, she seems to realize what she’s said and she, too, slowly looks back at him, her expression so full of regret and fear of her own. “Zuzu, I-I’m SO sorry—“

“What??” Katsuki roars, an explosion going off and Izuku’s terrified eye flies to him. He’s shaking now. He’s shaking and frozen at once as the blond takes a threatening step towards him, more tiny explosions going off in his palms. “The hell does she mean you’re going to be heroes? What kind of bullshit is that?? You know you could never be a hero, shitty Deku! I thought maybe after the accident you finally had it figured out.”

Wait…

What?

Izuku’s shaking stops and his brow furrows. What did Katsuki possibly mean by that?

The blond scoffs when he sees how Izuku’s expression changes. “Get this through your thick skull, idiot. You’re worthless, Deku! You can’t be a hero, you’re weak and broken and useless!”

Katsuki snorts and rolls his eyes. “All you’re good at is making me stuff so that I can be a better hero!” There’s a sudden stillness in the air as soon as those words leave Katsuki’s mouth. A moment later something flickers across Katsuki’s face, just for a split second, something that could possibly be regret, maybe, but Izuku suddenly doesn’t care. He doesn’t care or wonder or feel anything. Making things for Katsuki? That’s what he thought Izuku was good for? Making things for him? THAT was why he still hung around Izuku? To use him??

Something that might be rage boils up in his chest but is suddenly smothered by an even heavier despair. Tears are falling down his face and he bites hard on his lip as he tries desperately to keep eye contact with Katsuki. He thinks he hears Mashi raging behind him, screeching and yelling, but Izuku has a tunnel vision on his childhood friend.

“Is that why you were so interested in making yourself all those replacements?” Katsuki questions, realization dawning on his enraged face. He shakes his head and growls. “News flash, Deku, you can’t fix yourself. You’re always going be worthless, with or without this,” and suddenly Katsuki is reaching forward and an explosion is going off by Izuku’s head and he near screams, lurching back, nauseas with spots in his eye and something in his head clicks off as suddenly his prosthetic arm goes entirely limp.

He stares ahead but can’t see, his world seeming to crumble away in a second. His headband. Katsuki had destroyed his headband. He can feel the hot remains burning against his head.

Some subconscious part of him recognizes Mashi rushing past him and finally attacking Katsuki, her fists flying as she goes berserk, explosions from his palms hitting her sides but she doesn’t let up, screaming bloody murder as she punches him over and over again.

There’s more yelling behind Izuku, adult voices as finally, from hearing not just explosions but yelling too, their mothers had come to check on them. Mitsuki rips her son away from Mashi and Inko comes straight into Izuku’s line of view, but he can’t hear what she’s saying. He can’t hear anything. There are tears in her eyes as she holds her son’s face and Mitsuki rushes Katsuki back towards the apartments, yelling furiously about something.
Mashi comes into view too, keeping her distance, rubbing desperately at her face to stave off her own tears, her clothes and skin burnt, but she’s still standing as she looks at Izuku, her green eyes panicked and apologetic.

Inko keeps trying to talk to him, takes the burnt headband off of his head, but he won’t answer. He can’t. He’s scared, shocked, depressed, and he suddenly doesn’t want to be there. Doesn’t want to be anywhere. He just doesn’t want to exist.

But that can’t happen, his brain supplies, he has so much work to do. He has so much work to do to make sure this doesn’t happen again, but he just can’t find the strength to respond to his mother and he feels guilty for that.

He’s so tired.

So he steps forward into his mother’s arms and cries.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Song: GRiZ - PS GFY (can't you imagine Mashi singing this? :3)
Hey guys! I love answering questions and talking to y'all about IIOHAAH, but I don't wanna fill the comment section with too much of my rambling or with anything spoiler-y someone might see, so if you want message me on my tumblr over here!

Also I changed the work's summary to sound... I dunno, better?

It doesn’t bother Izuku as much as he thought it would when he’s told Katsuki won’t be coming over for a while, but after what he did and what he said, he probably shouldn’t be surprised.

Mashi stays the night, not wanting to leave Izuku alone, and he appreciates that. He should be upset with her too, he thinks, but for what? Coming over like she always does? Defending herself from someone being cruel to her? Defending Izuku? Sure, she let it slip they planned to be heroes, but in the heat of the moment, and with Katsuki acting so smug, Izuku can see why she did it.

Inko doesn’t leave Izuku’s side, asking if he’s okay, what he’s thinking, what he needs. She frets over Mashi too, helping her with her burns, but her focus is mostly on her son.

Izuku still won’t talk.

Inko makes katsudon for dinner, Izuku’s favorite, and invites Aizawa over, whispering what had happened to him at the entryway, trying to be discreet, but Izuku knows what’s going on. The four of them sit down to eat, Aizawa ruffling Izuku’s hair but mostly acting like his normal self with a strain to his lips that looks decidedly not happy, Inko hovering by Izuku’s side, looking over him like a hawk, Mashi yammering a mile a minute to fill the silence.

When dinner ends and Aizawa needs to leave he crouches down in front of Izuku, looking him over for a moment. “You’re a brave kid,” he says and Izuku, for a moment, feels like he’s back at the hospital after the incident, everyone calling him brave and strong, and it makes tears prick at his eye. “Whatever that kid’s problem is, it isn’t yours.”

Izuku stares at him for a long moment and when he realizes his neighbor is waiting for an answer, expression calm, he wipes at his face and nods. Aizawa nods back and stands, bidding Inko good-bye, and heads out for work. Izuku appreciates that. Appreciates Aizawa being honest but not overbearing. He doesn’t think he’s ever seen Aizawa with such an angry look in his eyes, however.

The rest of the evening is filled with his mother and his friend trying desperately to make him happy. They throw on an All Might movie, which he only can half focus on. They try to get him to play some video games, but his heart isn’t into it. They try to get him to talk about his inventions but it only succeeds in making him cry.

Eventually they pull together a bunch of the sheets and pillows and blankets to make a pile on the floor in front of the couch. There isn’t enough furniture for a pillow fort so instead they go for a nest of comfort. They turn on the tv and set it up to play How It’s Made constantly, the show both interesting, but also great background noise.
Once they all settle onto the nest Izuku’s mind finally begins to catch up to him. He had been focusing on what his mother and friend had been doing and avoiding looking at himself.

His back was in so much pain even with the painkillers his mother had given him. His prosthetic had been completely removed as well, his mother on his right as if to protect him from anything that dare try to take advantage of him, Mashi on his left, playing as his missing eye, finally no longer talking like crazy.

He felt terrible, like his world had twisted and he couldn’t make it right again. He had been so worried about losing the last thing from his old life, of losing his connection with Katsuki, he hadn’t seen the warning signs. Hadn’t seen that he was still worthless in his eyes.

He tells himself the flash of regret he had seen on Katsuki’s face had been his imagination. There’s no other explanation in his mind, and worrying about it will only bring him grief.

Now, however, he’s in his apartment, curled up with two people that only want him safe and happy, being protected by them as they try to help him through whatever is going on in his head.

“I love you both,” he croaks finally, finding enough of his voice to let it out, and they both quickly look to him. His mother reaches out and runs her fingers through his hair soothingly as he begins to tear up again.

“Oh sweetie, we love you too,” she whispers back and he looks up at her, lip quivering, while Mashi scoots closer to curl up against his side, hugging his arm tight. With the two of them, he would be safe. He would be loved and nurtured and safe. He could do so much, and he knows he needs to. He needs to work to make sure no one, quirkless or disabled, has to deal with anything he has dealt with ever again.

But for now he just curls up, safe and warm, and sleeps.

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Izuku lays his head on his dining table and groans, sounding positively pathetic as Inko and Aizawa lay out dinner around him. The older man eyes the boy oddly, not sure what might be going on, and looks over to Inko, hoping for an explanation.

“Is he alright?” he questions when he can’t catch her eye. She’s smiling fondly, though, so he imagines nothing’s wrong, but he’d rather not assume. Izuku, in response to Aizawa’s inquiry, lifts his head just enough to give a louder, more dramatic groan, and Inko tries not to laugh at her son.

“Oh, he’s fine—"

A muffled, “No I’m not,” comes from Izuku’s mess of hair.

“—His history test grades just came in and he isn’t happy with them,” Inko finishes, smile gentle as she turns to look at her son. Aizawa arches a brow and looks between the two green-haired individuals. Izuku was upset about a grade? That didn’t sound right at all. Although, he does remember it being mentioned in the past that History was his least favorite subject.

“Oh, he’s fine—"

A history test grades just came in and he isn’t happy with them,” Inko finishes, smile gentle as she turns to look at her son. Aizawa arches a brow and looks between the two green-haired individuals. Izuku was upset about a grade? That didn’t sound right at all. Although, he does remember it being mentioned in the past that History was his least favorite subject.

“How bad was it?” he questions and Izuku groans a little louder, pressing his forehead into the table. Inko actually does snort now. “95,” she answers simply.

“My perfect record!” Izuku cries immediately after, sitting up to dramatically grasp at the air, eye skyward, then flops back onto the table. Aizawa feels like his brain might screech to a halt in utter
disbelief. He was upset over a 95? Had he really never had a 95 before? Aizawa had always been a good student, but he was far from perfect. Average, was a better definition, and a 95 was usually the best grade he could get.

“You have never gotten a 95 before?” he questions, moving to sit across from Izuku. The mass of green hair nods.

“He’s never gotten below 100,” Inko adds on and Aizawa glances at her then down to her son again, baffled.

“Not even on papers where the teacher’s opinion is at play?” he questions because really, Izuku was a little genius, but even this seemed a bit much.

Inko giggles for a little, answering for her son, “He has written papers in the past explaining why a teacher’s bias is detrimental to a student’s improvement and confidence, called out the very teacher grading a particular paper, and ended up with bonus points that weren’t even being offered.”

Aizawa whistles and looks back at Izuku. The kid is slowly sitting back up again, slouching in his seat. “Okay, you’re obviously great at math and science and don’t like history, what about grammar? Surely you’ve had issues with grades there?”

Izuku shrugs. “It’s like complex math with words, you just need to know the formulas and laws.”

“Literature?”

“I finish most of the books the day they’re assigned.”

“English?”

“Fluent since I was… four? Five? Somewhere in there. I’m working on German at the moment.”

Aizawa shakes his head, a few strands from his loose bun flopping out and into his face. “Why would you want to do that?” He understood the English since there were classes on it, but German?

“There are a lot of inventors I’ve met online from America, the UK, Germany, Egypt, China, and alllllllll over Africa. I want to make it easier on us for communication. German is just the first step.”

Aizawa stares, mouth snapped shut and eyes wide. He looks over at Inko, looking for some kind of assistance in this conversation because he officially doesn’t know what to say. She’s little help, evidently, as she must find his expression funny and she starts laughing immediately.

Aizawa shakes his head, looking back to Izuku, not finding any help there. “Kid… you are something else… I really don’t think you should be worried about a 95, but if it really bothers you, why not talk to your teacher and see if you can round it up or do some extra credit?” Izuku is looking at him, all his focus on him. “Why don’t you like history, anyway?”

Izuku deflates, ducking his head and reaching up to absently adjust his new headband. This one is a lot more durable than the last one and it doesn’t have to be hooked up to a power source since apparently it, and the arm, can be charged separately. Aizawa tries not to get angry when he sees it, remembering the apparent fight from only a few months back that he had somehow entirely missed. He could have helped, he thinks, then berates himself immediately for worrying about what could have been. How illogical.

“I’ve always been bad with dates, names, and people. Everything else has a strict system that never changes across the world, except Literature, but usually I can memorize the books they assign us
since they aren’t that complex. It’s just…” Izuku suddenly lets out another, frustrated groan, throwing his head back. “It’s already done, isn’t it? I know it’s interesting to know about the past, and give respect to it, but why put so much focus on it?”

Aizawa watches Izuku’s frustration, brow furrowed at the boy’s distress. Why was history important? Well, that was a loaded question. Aizawa reaches back and undoes his hair, giving himself a second to consider the question posed, ruffling out his hair as it falls completely in his face. “Well… haven’t you ever heard that history repeats itself?”

“Yes, I have,” Izuku says immediately and Aizawa can hear an eye roll in his tone, but the boy at least doesn’t actually do it. He still gives Izuku a warning look and the boy shrinks back, looking apologetic. “B-b-but! Could we not put more focus on morality, philosophy, counseling, and building up children more positively in order to build a better society so that history doesn’t repeat itself rather than using history? Can we not lead by example in our every day lives rather than looking for examples in stories of people long dead?”

“Well…” Aizawa shifts in his seat and rest his chin in his palm. “Can’t you say the same about all the other subjects? You’re a scientist, you do research, you learn from experiments that other people have done in the past, don’t you?” he poses the question and Izuku opens his mouth to answer, but then snaps it back closed, brow furrowed as he considers.

“Okay, then it makes sense to teach history to people going into specific fields that need to know about certain, past events. Why teach it to such a degree while we’re still just in elementary school?” Izuku asks and Aizawa knows he isn’t arguing. When he’d first met the boy he had thought he was, but he knows now that this is just a back and forth desire for information and clarification.

“Well…” Aizawa shifts in his seat and rest his chin in his palm. “Can’t you say the same about all the other subjects? You need math and science for your field, but other kids don’t, so should math and science not be taught to the same degree because of that?” Inko has finally set down the food and Aizawa has half a mind to feel guilty for suddenly not helping her finish setting up, but she’s smiling too big for the feeling to last.

“I see you with those neuroscience books,” Aizawa pushes on. Neither he nor Izuku reach for the food yet, but Inko has no issue prepping her own dish and eating as she watches and listens to them. “What does it say about brain functions and different forms of learning?”

“We use different parts of our brain depending on what we’re working on, and different people’s brains use different parts all on their own as well. For instance, artist brains think differently than a historian’s brain…” Izuku trails off, pulling at his lip as he thinks, the wheels in his head turning.

“In addition,” Aizawa adds on and he has Izuku’s undivided attention again, “when we learn about history we also learn about our rights and freedoms. We can see how people have tried to take away a person’s rights in the past, can see how some people fought for their humanity, and we can identify if anything is being taken from us and we can work our systems to make them better.”

“Our systems are broken,” Izuku mumbles almost instantly, and isn’t that sad? Izuku is only eight, soon to be nine in a few months, and he already is seeing the dark side of the world. Aizawa figures that he probably would, what with all the hardships the world has decided to throw at him, but he still feels an immediate, instinctive need to keep the boy safe and away from any more of these sufferings.

“Okay. Then do your research, look at history, and find a way you can help it,” Aizawa says simply and Izuku stares at him for a long while, thinking and piecing together all this information, before nodding at his neighbor, a determined look in his eye.
“Yes sir!” he says, then pauses and smiles, scratching his cheek with his prosthetic hand. “You know, Aizawa-san... You’d make a pretty good school teacher.”

“You take that back this instant,” Aizawa deadpans almost immediately, making Izuku squeal with laughter in response. “I was trying to help you and you tarnish my reputation like that? I am betrayed.” Not a single emotion actually fills his words and Izuku is hanging slightly to the side out of his chair as he giggles uncontrollably.

“My boys,” Inko says, finally speaking up, and Aizawa’s head snaps to her in surprise, brows raised. ‘My boys’? What did she mean by that? “You both are ridiculous. Now eat, before it gets cold.” She’s smiling to herself as she waves at them then at the food and Izuku, still giggling and cackling under his breath, does as he’s told and prepares a plate. Aizawa hesitates, still eying Inko cautiously. She looks to him, eyes kind, but then turn to slight worry when she sees his expression.

“Aizawa-san? Is everything okay?” she asks and the exhausted man swallows and nods, finally going to prepare his own dish. ‘Aizawa-san.’ Yes, that sounded more appropriate and familiar. He could handle that.

He forces down the bubble in his chest, refuses to call it any kind of emotion, and insists to himself that this time it actually is heartburn.

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On Izuku’s ninth birthday Mashi shows up at his apartment with a DVD in her hands, which isn’t unusual, but she seems a little extra excited about this one. She shoves it into his face and he grabs it before it can fall, looking to her confused, then down to the DVD.

“I’ve been holding off bringing this by for nearly a MONTH, ‘cause I wanted to surprise you on your birthday – happy birthday by the way! – and it’s super old but I think you’ll love it!” Mashi yammers. On the DVD cover is a picture of a man wearing a bow tie and the title ‘Bill Nye the Science Guy’ printed on it. Izuku thinks maybe he’s heard of this guy before, but he can’t quite remember where. Probably the internet.

“This looks really cool, Mashi!” Izuku says, his eye twinkling and he turns over the case, reading the back as the two back up into the apartment, closing the door behind them.

“You like it?” his friend questions, her voice a touch nervous, and Izuku nods vigorously in reply, making her grin again. “Good! Let’s watch it, then! Also, I really like your new hoodie!” she yammers on, pulling at the sleeve of Izuku’s new All Might hoodie. It’s limited addition and he knows his mom had to have saved up a lot for it, which makes it all the more precious to him. He wishes he could get so much more All Might merchandise like he used to, but he understands that with their current finances that really wasn’t an option. That just made all the times he did get to get something all the more special.

The two head for the living space, Inko sitting at the dining table with a jigsaw laid out in front of her. It was a Saturday, which meant no work, and she would get to spend some much deserved time with her son on his birthday, and in this case that meant working on a jigsaw puzzle together.

She smiles the moment she sees Mashi, and the redhead quickly rushes over to her to give her a tight hug in greeting, never one for holding back. “Hi Midoriya-san!” she greets loudly and Inko pats her head.

“Hello Haganehato-chan,” she says as Mashi pulls away and Izuku makes his way over to the television, eye sparkling excitedly.
Mashi immediately pouts up at Izuku’s mother. “Nooooo! Call me Mashi! It’s betterrrrr!” she whines and Inko giggles, shakes her head, and ushers her over to join her son. She would have time to be with her son later in the day. For now she’ll leave them alone to have fun. So Inko stands and grabs her purse.

“I’m going to run a few errands, Izuku! You two be good!” she calls and the young boy looks back at her from his spot on the floor in front of the television.

“Yes ma’am!” he calls back then goes back to whatever he’s working on, making Inko smile before she heads out.

Mashi runs and slides over to Izuku on the floor where he gives her an unimpressed look. “You’re going to have carpet burn from that,” he comments dryly about her unnecessary slide over.

“Yes! Already stings!” she says cheerfully, then sits up and begins poking at Izuku’s flesh arm. “Put it in alreadyyyy! I wanna see what it’s like!” she says eagerly and Izuku can’t help but feed off of that energy even more than he already was. He was excited too. He always found the old movies, games, and television shows Mashi found to be interesting, but the fact she had found a science related show, and saved it for his birthday, was both heartwarming and positively exhilarating.

They pop in the DVD in the old player, set up the television, and wait. And wait some more. And wait even more. Both of them are pouting at the screen, they can see it, their reflections pout right back at them.

“Why isn’t it playing?” Mashi whines, slouching and looking to Izuku like he holds all the answers. He sighs.

“It’s old… And we’ve been having some problems with it lately, I’ve just not had the time to fix it,” he admits, scratching the back of his head, and Mashi groans loud and long. “It’s okay! I can fix it now and—“

“No time!” the redhead near yells, popping off of the ground and getting the DVD back out and into its case. “No time no time no time!” She then grabs Izuku by the hand and drags him out of his apartment – she at least lets him lock the door behind them – and goes to the door right beside his. Mashi then raises a fist and immediately starts banging on the door, shrieking loudly, “MR. CAT MAN!!!”

Izuku jumps in shock then quickly goes to grab Mashi and pull her away from the door, his eye wide and expression panicking. “What are you doing???” he hiss-whispers, and Mashi wiggles out of his grip.

“Cat dude has a DVD player, doesn’t he?” she asks like it’s the most obvious thing in the world and Izuku would very much like to push her off a cliff right now.

“Y-yeah… but that doesn’t mean you can just go screaming at someone’s door like that! He sleeps during the day!” he retorts, not believing this is happening. It is Mashi, however, so maybe he should believe it. He should just be used to it by now.

On the other side of the door he hears a scuffle, and he feels awful that they may have woken up Aizawa, and he turns to give Mashi a sharp look. “If he opens the door, you are apologizing to him,” he hisses, and his friend huffs and pouts, crossing her arms and looking away.

“Fine,” she grumbles after a while of Izuku just glaring at her. He turns back to the door, waiting to see what might happen.
The scuffling and a voice, wait, no, voices, plural, come from the other side, until he hears a very singing song, very loud, and very not-Aizawa voice call, “NOW WHOOOOOO COULD THAT BE??” The door opens with a snap, and Izuku and Mashi both jump. Standing in front of them is a tall, blond man with his long hair tied loosely back into a ponytail, a tiny mustache on his face, and purple tinted glasses balanced on his nose. Behind him, further into the apartment, Aizawa stands there, looking frazzled, one hand out stretched like he’s trying to stop the man, eyes agitated and somehow more exhausted than usual.

The blond man is smiling big as he looks down at the kids and they look back. There’s a long stretch of silence as no one does anything, but then Mashi grins brightly and says loudly, “Hi!”

The man grins bigger, straightening up like he’s preparing for a show. “Well hellooooo there!!” he says in English, voice somehow louder than Mashi’s and Izuku already thinks he has a headache. He tilts sideways a little to get another look at his neighbor, who has now taken to leaning his back against the wall and burying his face in one of his hands.

“I’m Haganehato Mashi! Call me Mashi, though, it’s better!” the redhead says brightly, not at all bothered by the sound because OF COURSE she wouldn’t be. She then grabs Izuku’s right shoulder and pulls him closer to her. “This is my best friend, Midoriya Izuku! He’s Mr. cat dude’s neighbor!”

“Oh my god,” Izuku breathes in horror to himself.

The blond snickers at that and looks back over his shoulder at Aizawa, who is glaring death through his fingers at him. “Mr. cat dude?” the man repeats, obviously only just keeping it together before he starts laughing.

“Shut up,” Aizawa snarls, his shoulders up, and Izuku is reminded slightly of Dapple with her raised hackles and hissing.

“ANYWAY!” the man booms and Izuku jumps in surprise. “My name is Yamada Hizashi, and it is a pleasure to meet you both!” He does a grand gesture with his hands then bows deeply, like it’s a show. “Now how can we help y—”

Mashi thrusts the DVD case up at his face with both her hands. “Zuzu’s DVD player isn’t working, do you wanna watch Bill Nye with us???” Oh god, Izuku doesn’t think he’ll be able to handle these two together. He doesn’t even know Yamada, but he’s pretty positive this is Aizawa’s “loud friend,” and he doesn’t think this will end well at all. At least not for him and his eardrums.

“No!” both he and Aizawa say in tandem, looking at the pair in mounting horror.

“SURE!” Yamada yells louder, and that’s that. The two kids get ushered into the apartment, Mashi and Yamada talking back and forth like they’ve known each other for years, both loud and excitable and ready to party. Izuku trails over to stand by Aizawa’s side, the two of them watching their friends get along and make a storm of noise. They no longer feel terror, only the embrace of the abyss.

“I tried to make her stop,” Izuku says to his neighbor after a moment. Aizawa grunts.

“I tried to make him not answer the door,” he replies. They both sound like they don’t want to be here right now.

In unison they sigh, shoulders sagging miserably. “Well,” Aizawa begins slowly and Izuku looks up at him when he doesn’t immediately continue. He finds his neighbor and instructor smirking down at him and Izuku’s stomach drops. “Good thing I have those noise cancelling headphones. I should go
Izuku blanches as Aizawa begins to walk away and he hisses after him in disbelief, “You’re leaving me alone with… this???” He motions to their loud friends as they set up the DVD, still yammering at each other about… antique vases? How had they gotten onto that subject?

Aizawa shrugs as he walks away, not giving any answer, and Izuku feels utterly betrayed as he’s suddenly grabbed by Mashi and dragged to sit in front of the television, between her and Yamada.

Eventually Aizawa comes back into the room and lays down on the floor against the far wall with the headphones IZUKU had made for him and in the yellow sleeping bag with heater and cooler built into the very fibers that IZUKU had made for him. The traitor…

It isn’t that bad, though, Izuku soon finds. He should have figured it wouldn’t be. He feeds off of Mashi and Yamada’s energy equally, and he knows he will be utterly exhausted later, but for now he feels great.

The show draws all three of their attention, Izuku quickly falling in love, and letting them know tidbits of information on the science that was being used as they watched. With each new episode, as they grow accustomed to it, they all three chant “Bill, Bill, Bill, Bill,” along with the opening. Izuku has never seen an adult act so much like a kid before, he thinks as he watches Yamada go along with them, and he thinks he is pretty weird, but pretty cool too.

Aizawa continues to slumber behind them, which Izuku thinks may actually be good. He so rarely gets any good sleep, and if they could distract his friend from keeping him awake than maybe this was a lot better than he had initially thought.

They watch at least four hours worth of the show when Mashi gets a call from her mother telling her to come home, they were having her favorite meal that night, yakiniku. She’s up – wishing everyone good-bye and Izuku another Happy Birthday – and gone in a flash, never one to linger.

Izuku sees that as his cue to go ahead and get back to his own apartment. He gets his new DVD out, because Mashi said it was his now, and stands carefully, cringing at the pain in his back from sitting too long on the ground. Yamada stays sitting on the floor, oddly quiet as he looks at Izuku limp around.

“So you’re the one that’s been looking after our dear Shouta-kun?” he suddenly asks and Izuku pauses. He turns back around towards the blond man in surprise, his eye wide in curiosity. He doesn’t need to ask for clarification because Yamada just pushes on. “For the last… two and a half years? Yeah. My buddy over there has gotten treated really, really well by some people I don’t know. Given gifts, food, urged to sleep more,” Yamada’s hands flap when he talks and he nearly knocks over a stack of books nearby. Izuku tries not to giggle. “Stuff I’ve been trying to work on with him but never reeeeeally succeeded with!”

“How did you know?” he asks, honestly curious.

“I’ve known him since high school!” Yamada exclaims, throwing his hands upward, then letting them fall and return to their regular gesticulations. “I know him really well, young man,” he says ‘young man’ in English, “I know when something changes, and something did, and it’s pretty awesome, I just didn’t figure it out until now!” Yamada sighs dramatically and his shoulders slump. “So cruel, don’t you think? He never told me this entire time!”

Izuku does giggle now and Yamada cracks open one eye behind his shaded glasses to smile at him, pleased at the reaction. “My mom helps, too,” Izuku says, but then thinks about it. “Actually, she
does most of everything… Aizawa-san has been helping me with my self-defense so that I can defend myself from bullies,” he explains and Yamada’s brows curve upwards in concern.

“You’re bullied?” he asks and it’s the quietest Izuku has heard him so far.

“I’m quirkless AND handicapped. Makes me a target,” he says with a shrug and reaches up to scratch behind his head, looking to the side at the wall, his expression suddenly growing hard. “I shouldn’t be a target at all, but the fact is, right now, I am, so I should at least make myself a hard target to hit, right?”

Yamada lets out a loud bark of laughter that startles Izuku, his eye widening but then relaxing as he smiles sheepishly. “NICE ONE!!” he says that in English too, “I like that!” Izuku feels his cheeks getting pinker at the praise, scuffing his feet a little on the carpet and ducking his head.

After a stretch of silence, however, Izuku thinks he should continue his thought. “Aizawa-san is… super cool,” he mumbles and he hears Yamada shift, giving him his full attention. “He doesn’t treat me like I’m worthless or less human than anyone else or something to pity. He just treats me as me. Yes, handicapped,” Izuku looks down at his prosthetic and flexes it as close into a fist as it can go, remembering how Aizawa adjusted the fighting styles to match up with Izuku’s body, “but still me. It… means a lot to me.”

Izuku keeps his head ducked as he reaches up to scratch at his head again, nervous suddenly, but Yamada makes a noise to encourage him to keep going. He obviously has more to say.

“I never had a male role model,” he admits after a while, voice low. “My dad was never there, all my teachers didn’t care about me. Dr. Kenta was cool at the hospital, but he never felt like my role model. Aizawa-san, though… He’s been there for me and looked out for me and he’s so cool… I dunno… I guess… it’s just…” for a moment he flounders for the right words, and when he finds them he nods, determined, and looks up at Yamada’s intrigued eyes. “I wouldn’t mind growing up to be just like him one day!”

There’s a beat of silence and then Izuku’s eyes slide just past Yamada’s shoulder to the mound of sleeping bag behind him, where Aizawa is slumbering, except…

His eyes are open. And one of the headphone earpieces has been slid off one ear. They stare at each other for a long stretch of silence, no one saying a word, Yamada shifting so he can get a good look at the both of them, shit-eating grin on his face. Izuku isn’t sure but he thinks maybe Aizawa’s ears might look a little pink, but it hardly matters because suddenly Izuku’s whole face lights up tomato red. A noise begins to escape his throat, starting low and weak and very slowly rising in volume until it is very nearly a shriek.

When he runs out of breath, he gasps in loud and deeply, then yells, “I HAVE TO GO BYE!!” And with speeds that rival Mashi he bolts out of the apartment, runs into his, and dives into his room to hide under the covers.

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That evening Izuku sheepishly heads out to the courtyard to exercise and practice. He is beyond mortified, but that doesn’t mean he should skip out on this, even if he so desperately wanted to.

Aizawa eventually joins him and, much to Izuku’s relief, acts like nothing happened. He simply helps Izuku through a few new movements and adjusts some of the old ones, just like normal.

As things are wrapping up Aizawa makes a noise like he remembered something. “Oh yeah,” he
mumbles then reaches into a back pocket and tosses Izuku something. He fumbles with the catch, still no depth perception after all, but at least the young boy doesn’t drop it. “I’m not a big fan, but your mom said you’d like it, so, Happy Birthday, kid.”

Izuku looks up at Aizawa with furrowed brow, then down to what it is he caught. In his hands is a small, mystery toy box with All Might’s logo and colors adorning nearly every side. On the back are multiple sketches of small, chibi All Mights, each in a different one of his costumes, in varying poses. Izuku’s eye widens and he scrambles to open up the box and see which figurine on the back he might get. He shuts his eye tight as he pulls out the tiny figurine, not looking yet.

“What did I get? What did I get?” he questions excitedly, bouncing up and down, not quite ready to look, but still wanting to know. It was an odd feeling.

“Uh… well, it’s All Might…” Aizawa offers dryly and Izuku pouts.

“No help at all,” he grumbles, he thinks he hears the older man snicker, and finally opens his eyes. In his hand is a tiny All Might in his silver age costume, flexing with his feet out, cape billowing behind him. Izuku’s eye lights up like fireworks and he holds out the figure with both hands, bouncing excitedly and squealing.

“Oh my gosh!” he says. “Oh my gosh, oh my gosh!” He opens his mouth to begin information dumping on Aizawa all the things he knows about this variation of All Might’s costume, but then he remembers his neighbor’s general disinterest in the number one hero and he stops himself. He clears his throat, still jittery and excited, his eye still sparkling as he looks up to Aizawa, who still looks tired and bored. “Thank you!” he crows, hopping up and down, “Thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you—“

Aizawa reaches over and grabs Izuku’s head to hold him still, like he’s done so many times before when the boy gets a little too overexcited. When the green-eyed boy seems like he’s calmed down enough the man releases him. Izuku is still vibrating happily, but he’s at least not jumping and possible hurting his back.

“No problem,” Aizawa says simply with a half shrug and turns around to begin heading towards his apartment. “Anyway, time for me to go,” he says absently but then pauses. Izuku watches him, head tilting when he doesn’t keep heading for his door. Then he’s twisting to look over his shoulder at Izuku, expression and tone blank as usual when he says, “Oh, and I’m flattered, but I don’t think you can be like me.

“I think you can be better.”

Izuku nearly drops his gift, mouth slack in disbelief as Aizawa turns back around and heads inside. Had that… really just happened?

Izuku gulps and slowly looks down to the tiny All Might figurine and smiles. This was turning out to be one of his most favorite birthday yet.

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After the fight with Katsuki Izuku had drowned himself in his work on his arm. For nearly two months he had distracted himself with only that, researching this and testing that. He rebuilt his headband prosthetic, improved it some, then focused solely on the next step. The big change.

He wasn’t going to be taken advantage of again. He wasn’t going to let Katsuki or anyone hurt him again. He needed to move past the headband and get to the next step.
Some of the inspiration had, indeed, been from the alchemist anime he and Mashi had watched, but this was real life, and he had to build it from scratch.

By his ninth birthday he was an expert in neuroscience and how the brain and the nervous system worked. That was what he had needed to know. That was the biggest component. So now he knew how to work with the nerves of his body, how to turn their organic energy into energy that could fuel a robotic limb.

He knew all the theories and he had his plans, it was just a matter of making it work. Of building the thing.

It took him a while to build a mold of his own torso and stump, but he had managed with Mei’s advice and help over chat. He had then used it to make experimental, gelatin molds with fake bones, arteries, and nerves set up at his stump. Using this, and all the others he would make, he was able to test out his machine and see the results without needing to play guinea pig.

His number one goal was to make sure no damage was done to himself. If it didn’t work? Fine. Didn’t do what he expected or wanted? Okay. But he was not taking any chances of being left with any more permanent harm to his person.

So on the December 17th after his ninth birthday he called Mashi up on a Sunday his mother was at work. She came over immediately, for once looking skeptical of Izuku’s proposed plan.

“I… Zuzu… Are you sure about this? Like super duper, absolutely positive it is safe?” the redhead asks for the thousandth time and Izuku can’t find it in him to be irritated. What he was suggesting was something no one had ever done before, certainly not a nine-year-old with his base of operations being his own room.

He’s sitting in his bathroom tub, standing mat removed. The room has been emptied of a lot, actually, for safety purposes.

And for the mess.

He sits with his back to the edge of the tub, knees up, holding what looks like a thick, metal disk with multiple rings on one side and the other just covered with all kinds of sharp looking devices. It’s shiny and clean and sterilized. It needed to be made to the best of his ability, the best of anyone’s ability, because if this went the way he was predicting and hoping for, this device would never be coming off of his body again.

“I’m the most positive I’ve been in my life. I’ve ran thousands of tests to get to this point,” he explains, still looking at the device. He’s not wearing a shirt and a few markings have been written on specific places of his stump for reference points. “And then after that I ran hundreds of safety tests. I refuse to fail, and if this thing causes any more damage to me, than I won’t be able to move forward for a very long time.”

Izuku looks up to Mashi, his eye hard with his stubborn intensity and resolve. “I’m absolutely certain this will not do me harm, but I am trying to be as safe as I possibly can be, and that means having someone here with me.”

Mashi is sitting on the top of the toilet, her expression still wary. “Why not get a doctor to do it?” she mumbles and immediately cringes. She knew the answer to that one.

“They’d never go along with it,” Izuku sighs anyway, looking again at the device. It was so clean and polished. It looked so professional. Despite the butterflies in his stomach and the anxiety making
every bit of him shake, he’s able to take a moment to be proud of himself.

“So… what’s the plan, then?” his friend asks, finally seeming to accept Izuku’s reassurances and trying to bring a little energy into her voice. He knows she’s still wary, can see it in her shoulders, but her eyes have that spark to them when it comes to Izuku’s inventions.

Izuku smiles gratefully to her before he nods and gets serious. He lifts up an Equalizer currently filled with a much darker colored version of the Corruption, and, okay, maybe he should rename at least this one because that sounded terrible. “This will not put me to sleep,” he explains, “but it will numb me without hindering any nerves I need to keep ‘awake.’ It…” he sighs. There was no getting around this one. “Everything else won’t hurt, but the nerve connection will. And there will be blood, decent amount to flow, but what you need to look out for is if it starts spurtting or flooding out.”

Mashi scowls, leaning back and looking so uncomfortable and unhappy where she sits. Izuku feels awful. “I’m sorry, Mashi. I’m so sorry,” he looks down and shakes his head, “but you’re the only one I can trust with this.” He knows she’s only nine-years-old, that she doesn’t see the world quite like Izuku, that she hasn’t been through some of the horrors he’s been through, but she isn’t completely innocent either. She’s tough and resilient, confident in a way Izuku envies. She can do this, he knows she can.

And so does she, it seems, because she swallows, takes a deep breath, and nods, eyes serious and hard.

“After I put in the numbing agent, I wait a minute for it to fully kick in, then I take my Base here,” he lifts up his device, “press this side exactly where it needs to be on me,” he shows the side with all the wires and drills and blades and Mashi gulps, “then you hit that button and it does the work for us,” he motions to a button currently connected to the Base by a detachable cord, sitting on the edge of the tub. Mashi glares at it for a long moment before nodding.

“What do you mean that it does the work for us?” she asks as she finally slips off the toilet lid and grabs the sterile clothes Izuku had gotten out for her.

Izuku rolls the Base in his hand for a moment before replying. “I mean we don’t need a surgeon or a doctor or anything. The device acts on its own, cutting and connecting the necessary parts between itself and me.”

Mashi swallows again, Izuku can hear it, and stares for a long, hard moment at the device before, silently, she turns and heads to Izuku’s bedroom to change. She probably doesn’t really need to change, what with Izuku in the bath tub the way he is, but he figured she would need a moment to herself.

He waits patiently for her to return, gathering his own nerves while she no doubt does the same. When she reenters the bathroom, a new fire in her eyes, Izuku knows he’s going to be okay.

She shuts the door and slides some noise cancelling cushions Izuku prepared into all of the cracks. She then comes over to the side of the tub, sits down just outside of it, and takes the button in hand, nodding to Izuku, no words needed.

Izuku nods back then takes a deep breath and, before he loses his nerve, he presses the Equalizer into his skin between his shoulder and his right pec. He tosses the empty dart away when it releases from him, done with the injection, and he sits back and waits. The silence is deafening. Izuku keeps thinking of how scared he is and how guilty he feels for dragging Mashi into this, but as the numbness takes hold he forces himself to think beyond them. He thinks of the future, of being a hero, looking out for those quirkless or damaged like him, making a difference in the world, building a
foundation for society to build themselves up, instead of knocking themselves down.

He’s thinking of that when he finally raises the Base up to his stump, forcing every bit of his willpower into keeping himself from shaking, and lines up the Base with the marks he’s made. He takes his time, makes absolutely sure the alignment is perfect, then says, “Hit it.”

Mashi presses the button.

The Base immediately clamps down, holding tight, and Izuku thankfully feels no pain from it. The cord connecting the button to the Base detaches on its own and now Izuku can hear whirring and clicking and movement.

He can feel pressure, but no other sensations as the Base begins digging and cutting into him. He can hear the drills and can feel the bone deep vibrations of them.

He doesn’t look at Mashi, but he knows she’s right there, and after a few moments of just listening to the Base as it works itself inside of Izuku the red head can’t help but reach down and grasp Izuku’s free hand, holding it tight between both of hers.

Izuku is shaking as it goes on. He knows what’s to come. He knows what’s next. He hears a zapping noise from the Base and knows what is about to happen, but could never truly be prepared.

His world goes white as the first nerves begin to be connected, his head falling back. He thinks he might be crushing Mashi’s hand and he hears someone screaming. He wants to tell his friend to ignore him, go see what’s wrong, but he realizes soon after that it’s him who is screaming.

With each nerve he lets out a screech of pain that for a second dies down, but then kicks up again with another connection. He tries to move away from the pain but he can’t. It’s on him, connected to him.

Part of him.

He thinks he’s crying, heavy tears falling down one side of his face, and even though the world is white at the edges, he still sees the blur of red as someone moves and presses their forehead to his. He squeezes Mashi’s hand even tighter. If she’s talking he cannot hear her.

In the experiments the connection took three whole minutes, but this feels like years. It feels unending. A part of him wonders why he did something so terrible to himself. Another part yells back, screeches as loud as him, that he needed to.

Suddenly, with a loud click, everything stops and Izuku’s world wavers from the abrupt change, nausea setting in. He wails still, pain echoing through his body, but he’s no longer screaming. His vision is just dull at the edges now, his breath heavy and painful, and he keeps crying, desperate, pathetic noises escaping him as he lays there in the tub, something tacky rolling down his side.

Slowly the noises come back, first Mashi’s voice since it’s the closest. She’s leaned over him, looking between the Base and the boy it’s connected to. She’s crying. Like Izuku she’s not a pretty crier.

“I-it didn’t s-spurt, Z-Zuzu,” she’s saying, her voice breaking and pathetic, tears rolling down her face. “I-it d-d-did what it was s-s-s…” she wheezes on a cry and Izuku wheezes too. “S-supposed to do, I-I think. So it’s o-o-okay now, r-right? Z-Z-Zuzu?”

Izuku feels guilt as his first emotion, looking up and focusing on Mashi’s weeping face. Slowly he nods and she wails, nodding frantically back at him, then leaning away so she can wipe at her face,
one hand still gripping Izuku’s left.

Izuku doesn’t move for a while, the pain turning dull oddly quickly. He thinks that’s probably shock and he’ll need to inject himself with another variation of the Corruption – really a new name was in order for that – but for now he can manage. He stares at the ceiling for a long while, crying along with Mashi, their hiccups and wails mingling and he is so grateful he thought to set up the noise cancelling devices. Unknown to Mashi and his mother he had built in specially made disks into the walls of the bathroom, preparing for this day, that absorbed noise nearly entirely once he turned them on. The specially made cushions in the door’s cracks were just the final touch.

As their crying begins to die down, their voices ragged and broken, Izuku opens his mouth and says quietly, “Ow.”

Mashi gives an ugly snort around her tears, looking to Izuku like he’s the most remarkable, and most ridiculous thing she has ever met and experienced. Funny, he usually thought that way about her.

“Zuzu… you are the brilliantest asshole in the whole universe,” she says, voice rough.

“Most brilliant,” Izuku wheezes and Mashi waves him off dismissively.

“Yeah, yeah…”

They’re silent for another long stretch of time, still hiccupping on tears, but finally able to breathe some. Mashi is the one to break the silence this time. “Now what do we do?”

Izuku breathes hard for a long moment. He’s exhausted in a way he has never been before and his brain is taking so long to do as he tells it.

“I… need different painkillers,” he rasps. These would be more localized and also deal with his nerve pain. Where had he left it? It was in an Equalizer as well. “It’s… on my desk… I think…”

“Okay,” Mashi says immediately, her voice wavering but determined now as she wobbles up to her feet, “I’ll be right back, I promise!” She turns and rushes out of the bathroom, leaving Izuku alone to try and gather his thoughts. What was next after that? He knows he had a plan, but what had it been? He really should have told Mashi all of it beforehand.

Mashi reappears not too long later, carrying an Equalizer she holds in front of Izuku’s face, asking if this is the one, and he stares at it for a long moment. Finally, determining that it was, in fact, the one, he tells Mashi where to stick it near the Base. Once she does relief floods Izuku’s system. The dull ache had been much less dull than he’d realized as suddenly he’s released from it. He lets out a shaky sigh, sinking further into the tub, then cringing at the sticky texture beneath him.

Ah, right, that was the other thing. They needed to clean up.

Mashi is ahead of Izuku on this one, thankfully, and pulls down the showerhead but pauses. “That thing’s waterproof, right?” she questions and Izuku nods immediately. Waterproof, fireproof, rustproof, and so on. Besides, even if something did happen to the exterior, it would be fine. The interior workings were what was now connected to Izuku, was now a part of his very body, while the exterior could be changed and altered if need be, such as if he needed a bigger Base as he grew.

Mashi washes him down, not being shy as she helps scrub the blood off of him. Once she’s done with him she promptly leans down and lifts Izuku up. The boy yelps in surprise, but then remembers that Mashi, while short, is a strong girl, what with all her fighting. She was strong, and Izuku was light, even with his small build of muscle.
She takes charge after that, carrying him back to his room and laying him in his bed. She then points to his pajamas she pulls out and tosses at him. “Change,” is all she says as she then turns around and goes back to the bathroom to clean up the blood in the actual tub and put everything back where it should be.

She’s acting tough to mask her unease, Izuku thinks absently. He wants to tell her not to distract herself like that but even in this state he knows that would be one of the most hypocritical things he’d ever say.

Izuku is slow in his movements, exhausted and weak, and also with a big, numb patch from the Corruption – yep, a new name was needed. Slumber sounds good, he’ll go with that.

He does get changed, however, his pajamas feeling so soft and nice as he settles back into his bed. He had a new arm ready to test out on the Base, one just as shiny and professional looking as the Base, but he just couldn’t find the energy to try it out just yet.

Mashi eventually returns, grabbing Izuku’s blood soaked shorts. She rummages around by his workbench for a second, then leaves out the sliding doors and out into the courtyard. Izuku follows her with his eye, confused, but can’t see her when she leaves. He does see that she had opened up his tackle box with the Equalizers in it.

When she returns her hands are empty and Izuku’s brow furrows. “What did you do?” he mumbles, voice as weak as his body.

“Burned your shorts to fuckin’ ashes,” she responds with a shrug and finally, after all of this, she gives him a huge, Mashi grin. He hadn’t realized he’d missed it and he’s quick to smile back. It wavers a moment later and he lets out a long breath.

“That was exhausting,” he whispers. Mashi nods in agreement. “Thank you for being here,” he adds on and she looks over to him with an arched brow.

“I was apparitions—“

“Apprehensive.”

“Yeah, that, but you know I always got your back!” she grins again and points at herself with her thumb. “We’re a team! We stick together, no matter what!”

Slowly Izuku begins to smile again, nodding. “Yeah…” he whispers, laying his head back as the exhaustion finally begins to drag him down.

He doesn’t even realize he falls asleep until he wakes up again in the middle of the night, Mashi gone. He’ll find out later she left a note for his mother saying he had a bad day and was sleeping.

The ache is beginning to return to his stump he realizes as the sleep in his mind begins to clear a little more.

He has a bit more energy now as he forces himself up and out of bed, moving over to his workbench to pick up another Slumber Equalizer, jamming it into the skin beside his shoulder.

He flops into his chair as it begins to take hold, letting out a relieved sigh. For a while he just sits there, staring at the ceiling, until his eye slides slowly down to his masterpiece. The reason he had done all of this to himself.

The robotic arm is propped up on a stand, the smooth surfaces a shiny silver with multiple moving
parts and compartments, thick cords underneath showing some of the inner workings. Where it connects to the Base there are multiple rings, their locations inverted to those on the Base.

Izuku stares at it for a long time, realizing where he is. What he’s done. He’s successfully connected his Base to his body, with no detected adverse effects. The next step was seeing if the connection actually worked.

Slowly he reaches over and lifts up the arm. It’s pretty lightweight, hardly what will be used for his hero work in the future.

He lines up the arm and Base connecter and hears a slight whir as the magnetic parts wake up and start pulling at each other. As he brings the arm closer the magnets jump in power suddenly and the arm snaps out of his hand and connects to the Base with a loud clang and click. Suddenly his nerves aren’t numb anymore, like the arm somehow overrid the Slumber agent, and isn’t that an unexpected addition?

The pain returns to Izuku, but with it something in his brain snaps into place, a connection that had once been lost twining together. His nerves are in pain, he is in pain, but it is hardly as bad as when they were connected. He’ll need to research that, but for now…

With a fluid, unhindered motion Izuku raises his right arm.

He smacks his flesh hand over his mouth to keep in a sudden sob, his emotions still flayed and everywhere as he watches himself move his robotic hand, the movements fluid and like a hand and arm are supposed to move. He can form a fist, roll his wrist, bend his elbow, and none of it stops before it is meant to complete. None of it won’t do as he says. It’s near perfect.

Izuku rubs at his eyes with his left hand. He had done it. He had succeeded. He was one step closer to becoming a hero, handicaps and all.

Slowly Izuku turns his head upward, eye falling on his hanging blueprints above his desk. There are a lot of his arm, but also of the Equalizers, a taser, Mashi’s gun staff, and all kinds of other plans. He focuses in on the one that looks like a segmented, metal snake with the words “Spinal Backup” written messily above it.

Now onto the next challenge.

Chapter End Notes

FINALLY! The arm is attached!!

Some important stuff to note:

1. While I do have inspiration for the arm, I won’t give any specific links, only some details in the story. I want y'all to imagine some of this tech in whatever way you like!

2. Couple reasons Izuku doesn't recognize Present Mic is that it has been stated in a light novel nearly no one recognizes him when his hair is down, in this story Izuku is still a fanboy but with his interests split like they are he isn't AS familiar as he is in canon, and in this story I'm going to put more emphasis on a pro hero's civilian life and so a lot are harder to recognize outside of costume.
Chapter Song: **Duelle - Louder**
Inko admits that she rarely fully understands her son’s inventions. The science behind them was beyond her comprehension, but even so his inventions still seemed within the realm of possibilities.

Then there were the few he obsessed over, wanting to get them exactly perfect, and when they were done Inko would look at them and wonder how they could be something real and tangible and actually working. How these seemingly impossible things could be put together by her spectacular son and used daily.

However, she has never been as amazed as she is now. The night before she had returned home to find a note from Mashi telling her Izuku was sleeping, that he was having a bad day and needed the rest. Now she wonders how much of that was true, but she can’t find it in her to be angry. Not yet, anyway.

Izuku is standing in front of her in his room, smile so big and breathless like even he still can’t believe what he’s accomplished. On his right side is a perfectly proportional, robotic arm, but he isn’t wearing a headband and the arm looks much more complex than anything Inko has ever seen him use.

“What is…” she begins but immediately freezes as Izuku lifts the robotic arm and waves, just like a normal hand should.

“Hi, mom,” he says softly, still smiling. Inko stares at the robotic arm, flabbergasted, then slowly back to her son, a question in her eyes she can’t quite form into words, mouth opening and closing silently. Izuku chuckles sheepishly, looking down at the robotic hand as it forms a fist then releases it a few times. “I, uh… finished my arm…”

Inko squeaks to herself and Izuku must take that as a bad sound, like Inko is scared or worried, and she is, oh god she is, but that’s not the main feeling that seems to be coming up inside her. Her son’s eye looks up at her, wide with anxiety as he begins to ramble. “W-well not finished-finished! There will still be plenty of upgrades, and probably variations too, and there are a couple issues I have to work out anyway!”

Inko moves closer to her son, her hands shaking, and kneels down in front of him, her eyes filling with tears. Izuku is watching her, not sure what she’s going to do, but then she’s pulling him into a hug, pressing his face into her shoulder.

“My baby boy… You truly are amazing,” she whispers and she hears her son’s breath stutter as he too begins to cry, hugging her back.
She’ll need to ask him more fully what it is he’s done to have this arm, because she has never seen something like it before, not even with the high tech, professional grade prosthetics out in the world. But for now she just hugs her son, telling him how amazed and proud of him she is, letting him, once he is done crying, begin telling her how he made the arm and all the inner workings.

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Izuku still has to take Slumber to keep the pain from getting too excruciating, but that won’t be forever. His body needed to heal and the nerves needed to get accustomed to the familiar-not familiar connection to the robotic arm, but it would happen. He figures he’ll need to figure out some new physical therapy exercises for the limb. The motions are fluid and a huge improvement from his last ones; where the issues appear is where the smaller motions are involved. They are more difficult, like his brain needs more time to focus on them. He’ll definitely need to work on that.

Also, the nerve ache would not go away even with Slumber, so he’s left to muscle through it if he wants to keep his arm on when he heads to school that Monday.

When he gets a moment to himself before school he covers the outside of the Base and the skin around it with high level disinfectants – also his creation – based off of those used in hospital settings.

The Base itself was highly sterile; the tools used to connect itself to his body covered with an agent to keep things clean through the entire operation, and a valve on the top of the Base where Izuku could add more in while everything healed. Even with the Slumber in his system it still stung as all get out, but it was worth it.

He had been careful to avoid any lasting injury leading up to this; he wasn’t going to get sloppy now.

His mother wishes him a good day at school as he heads out, a nervous but proud look in her eye, and Izuku feels terrible for lying to her. More like giving her half-truths, sure, as he’s been doing a lot lately, but it’s still basically a lie. He had explained the process like it was simple, nothing to be concerned about, and that Mashi had helped him with some of it when he needed an extra pair of hands, which all wasn’t entirely wrong, but his wording was misleading. The only full lie he had given had been that it hadn’t hurt a single bit, and he’d smiled reassuringly at his mother’s worry.

She bought it, it seemed, maybe not fully believing every word but having no reason not to trust her son, and that made his stomach twist. He was abusing her trust in him, he knew he was, but if she knew how painful it had been, how bloody and scarring and scary it had been on both he and Mashi, she was bound to ban him from continuing with his spine and eye, and he couldn’t have that, not when he’d already come so far.

Mashi meets him about a block from school, screeching in joy as she sees Izuku and the arm at his side. She sprints over, enveloping him in a hug that has a lot more meaning to it than their usual greetings, and Izuku hugs her back, silently thanking her for everything she’s done.

“That. Looks. AWESOME!” Mashi immediately gushes when she hops back and begins running circles around Izuku, looking at the arm from every angle. Izuku smiles a little sheepishly.

“Thanks, Mashi,” he mumbles, smiling. Mashi continues to gush as the two of them continue to the school, asking if the arm is magnetic and if she can put magnets on it. Izuku eventually admits that, yes, technically she could, but he would prefer she didn’t, which basically meant she was going to do it anyway, but Izuku could handle it.

They get into class, early as usual, and plop into their seats beside each other, both smiling big
despite themselves.

“Y’know,” Mashi says as she drops her bag onto the ground by her desk, a loud thunk echoing through the room, “Yesterday was a fuckin’ nightmare.” Izuku flinches at that, smile dwindling as the guilt begins to set in again, but the redhead isn’t done, her grin wide and pure and not at all forced. “But god damn am I proud to be your friend right now!”

Izuku’s breath catches and tears prick at his eye, his flesh hand coming up to wipe at them. “Th-thank you,” he squeaks and Mashi shrugs, like it’s no big deal.

“Man, you cry a lot,” she observes as the green-haired boy scrubs at his face to keep away the mounting tears. Izuku huffs a small laugh.

“Yeah… Sorry…” he mumbles and Mashi makes a noise of displeasure.

“Don’t be. Means you’re more willing to FEEL. Mama says most boys don’t like to feel things… Or admit they feel things… It’s one of the reasons she hates papa. So this makes you even MORE special!”

Izuku chuckles again, a bit louder and more freely, and nods his thanks, Mashi nodding back before she pulls out a sketchpad and plops it onto her desk, pulling out a zip lock bag of colored pencils. “So I had an idea for my gun staff!!”

Izuku rolls his eye and turns towards her. She’s to his left so he leans his cheek on his new, metal hand as he looks to her. He doesn’t tell her he’s actually been working on her gun staff for a few weeks now. That would ruin the surprise.

“Oh yeah? Tell me what you were thinking,” he says as if he’s humoring her, but she doesn’t care, taking a deep breath to begin yammering no doubt when more students come walking in. Both of them close their mouths as Kaito and his group of “friends” come in. They watch him skeptically as he passes, hoping he’ll mind his business this morning.

Kaito is an entirely different kind of cruel than Katsuki. Kaito’s is sneakier, harder to spot at first glance, hard to realize he’s even being cruel until afterwards sometimes. Kaito is cocky like Katsuki, but he’s also smooth and tricky. Somehow this all makes him seem worse to Izuku.

Kaito glances at them like an after thought, his usual, confident smirk in place, and usually he’d sniff at them and keep going, but then his eyes catch on Izuku’s arm and he stops.

Izuku freezes up, eye widening, and he quickly moves his arm so it’s hidden more by the desk, but it’s too late, he’s been singled out.

“Whoa whoa, Midoriya-kun, what’s that?” Kaito says, sounding casual and friendly. His blond hair is still in a loose bowl cut, but now it has been trimmed so the wings at his ears aren’t there anymore. He moves around his group and comes up beside Izuku, keeping as far from Mashi as he can. He looks over the arm curiously, eyes sparkling with intrigue, before he looks up at his classmate. Izuku tries not to make eye contact. “This is really cool, Midoriya-kun! Did you make this?”

For a while he’s silent, looking right to the left of Kaito’s ear. He can feel Mashi’s heated glare behind him, but she keeps her distance. For now. They’d been trying to let each other fend for themselves a bit more lately, not wanting to become too dependent and hopefully boost their confidence, but still they knew the other was always there to look out for them.

“Yes,” he mumbles, his lips tight. This was to be expected at some point, but that didn’t mean he enjoyed it.
“You MADE this?? Wow! That’s pretty cool, Midoriya-kun,” Kaito nods and Izuku wants to tell him to stop saying his name, but he doesn’t. He doesn’t want to prolong this encounter any more than it already had to be. “Guess you won’t have as much trouble with lifting and moving stuff now, right?”

“Yes,” Izuku mumbles again, still averting his eyes. Kaito hums, nodding, then reaches out to touch Izuku’s robotic arm.

In a swift movement the quirkless boy yanks his arm away, glaring at Kaito, trying to say with his eye that that was out of line, but their eyes meet and Kaito opens his mouth to ask, “Why do you even need an arm like this, anyway?”

Mashi is leaping out of her desk as Izuku’s mouth opens. His eye is wide, body shaking at the familiar pull of Kaito’s quirk, hating it every single time. “To be a hero,” he answers just as he hears a crash behind him.

He shakes himself out of his daze and stands up, revolted and upset that Kaito has done this to him again. He doesn’t even realize what it is he’s said when he realizes something is unusual. Usually when Kaito bullies him like this Mashi charges at him before anyone can hear Izuku’s answer, making a scene with little care, but she didn’t, and Kaito is smirking up at him smugly.

Izuku turns back around to look for Mashi, confused and beginning to feel a little hurt, but she isn’t where he expected. Instead he finds the source of the crash.

A boy from Kaito’s group stands there. He’s new, with arms like a gorilla’s, and when Izuku had seen him before he had been shy, quiet, and kept to himself. Now, however, his arms are outstretched, like he’d pushed something, and the desk behind Mashi’s seat is overturned, the very redhead in question laying on the ground, her head on the floor and her feet up high over the fallen desk.

Izuku stares, eye wide at the scene, piecing together what must have happened. He stares at Mashi’s body, then up to the new boy like he can’t believe him. The new boy lowers his arms and also stares at the redhead, his expression not smug or happy like the rest of the group, but regretful and panicked.

“Hey, Hayashi-kun! Good job, that’s exactly what I needed!” Kaito calls and Izuku whips his head around to look again at the blond, his eye terrified at the situation at hand. No, this couldn’t be happening. Kaito wasn’t supposed to have some guard like this, he was supposed to be a wimp physically, easy to manage when necessary with a little intimidation.

“She… Why isn’t she moving?” Hayashi, the boy with the gorilla arms, asks quietly, his voice squeaky.

Izuku’s brain stops.

It just stops. He knows it has done that before after traumatic events, but he can’t draw himself to care as he turns back around to look at Mashi. He doesn’t see any blood, but Hayashi is right, she isn’t moving. Why isn’t she moving? She’s breathing, but she isn’t moving. Izuku should know this, but his brain won’t start up like it should.

He looks to Hayashi, who is standing, fidgeting terribly, tears in his own eyes as he stares at the redhead he doesn’t know. For once Izuku isn’t the one crying, which feels odd. He should be crying right now, shouldn’t he?
“It’s fine!” Kaito laughs, waving his hand, and slowly Izuku looks again at him. “She’s thick headed and tough as a rock. Leave her be,” he’s being so dismissive and he turns his eyes back to Izuku, who is staring blankly back at him. They meet eyes and Izuku doesn’t take his away.

“You actually want to be a hero?” Kaito asks in disbelief, his quirk activated, and this time, as gross as it feels, Izuku doesn’t care that the answers are being ripped out of him.

“Yes.” His voice is dead, no emotion to it. His brain isn’t doing as it’s told, but he doesn’t care about that either, for once.

Kaito and his friends laugh, finding it so hilarious, Hayashi behind Izuku shifting closer to Mashi, not paying attention anymore to the conversation.

“But you’re quirkless, Midoriya-kun! You can’t be a hero. Come on, you must have been taught this before?”

His answer is being pulled out again. He still doesn’t care. He just keeps staring. “People have attempted to teach me, yes, but people also used to teach that the Earth was the center of the universe, or that diving under your desk would help you survive a nuclear explosion, or that we only use ten percent of our brains at a time,” Izuku tilts his head, “Why would it be out of the realm of possibility for me to be one of these many false lessons?” Izuku’s eye thins, glaring at Kaito in a way he’s never glared at anyone before. Behind him he hears Hayashi lifting up Mashi as carefully as he can. “Although… That ten percent of the brain thing may still apply to you. I am uncertain. Would you be willing to let me run tests on you?”

Kaito reels back, shocked at Izuku’s sudden change in demeanor. He never had to deal with Izuku before, he only really had to worry about Mashi. That was why he must have recruited Hayashi to play barrier. Izuku was not what he had been prepared for. He at least knows to be insulted, however, and he narrows his own eyes, glaring right back. “What on earth is your problem??” he snarls, using his quirk.

“You, mostly. That and some indecision,” Izuku is forced to say truthfully, which is fine by him. He was going to say it anyway.

Kaito snarls as he marches around the desk and right into Izuku’s face. He isn’t scared of Izuku like he’s scared of Mashi.

Hayashi is standing up, holding Mashi in his arms, tears on his face as he looks around, lost and pathetic and so, so regretful. “K-Kaito-san, I don’t think—“ he tries to cut in, wanting to stop this, and Izuku feels for him, he really does, but his brain still won’t work logically like it’s supposed to. Not even emotionally like it’s supposed to. It only feels a foreign emotion Izuku understands, but has never truly experienced.


“Shut up.” Kaito snaps, voice low, and he looks up at Izuku. Funny, he’d never realized his tormentor was shorter than him. Most people weren’t. “Indecision, huh?” Kaito says conversationally, smirking, and he activates his quirk. “Indecision about what, genius?”

Izuku stares back at him and shrugs, not at all trying to keep the truth back, and he thinks maybe Mashi or even Katsuki would be proud of him for what comes out of his mouth next. “About whether I’m going to kick your ass or not.”

Kaito scowls deeply and Izuku can picture it. Can picture reeling back his new, robotic arm and
nailing the bully right in the face, but something stops him. Kaito seems to notice the hesitation and scoffs. “No you won’t. Same reason you’ll never be a hero. Not because you’re quirkless or disabled, oooh no, but because you’re a coward!”

His brain begins working again.

No. No this was wrong. All of this was wrong. His rage, so raw and unfamiliar, suddenly becomes an afterthought. Kaito was terrible, and he was going to pay, but hitting him wasn’t going to help. If Izuku hit him, then he wouldn’t be acting as a hero. There was a way to deal with every problem and violence was not always the best solution. In fact, it rarely was.

Without another word to Kaito, Izuku turns to Hayashi, looks him in the eye, and says, “Let’s go to the infirmary. Come on.” Hayashi, who is still crying, with Mashi in his arms, nods and together they rush out of the classroom and head to the infirmary, shoving past Kaito and his group with little afterthought.

Izuku sits beside Hayashi in the infirmary, the bigger boy crying his eyes out as the nurse looks over Mashi, Izuku silent as a statue, his metal hand absently rubbing circles in Hayashi’s back. The other boy keeps apologizing and willingly tells the nurse, and the principal later, exactly what happened, Izuku still silent.

Thankfully Mashi only has a mild concussion, which still makes Izuku feel awful, but it could have been worse. She had banged her head on something – a desk, a chair, the floor, it was anyone’s guess – as she’d fallen, but she was fine. She would be kept at the infirmary until her mother would come and get her and both boys were asked to head to class. Hayashi wasn’t crying when they left the infirmary, but he did keep telling Izuku how sorry he was. He didn’t get a response.

Instead, in silence, Izuku turns away from their classroom and begins hurrying away, moving at a speed that was punishing to his spine, but he didn’t care.

He left school grounds and in a daze walked straight home, head down, not a tear falling.

He hardly even realizes what he’s doing when he raises his flesh hand and knocks on his neighbor’s door. The world feels hazy and disjointed, like he isn’t there anymore, with time skipping around out of his control, body moving on autopilot.

The door in front of him opens and Izuku looks up, expression blank as he sees, instead of Aizawa, Yamada standing in the doorway, looking down at him. His mouth is moving, big smile in place, and then he’s standing there, watching. Waiting.

The smile begins to fade and he looks back into the apartment, saying something back, and Izuku can’t figure out his tone, and now there’s a new face and now it’s Aizawa, who is kneeling down in front of him, looking him over, saying something.

Izuku blinks and he’s in the apartment, sitting on Aizawa’s couch. Yamada is sitting beside him, his arm around the boy’s shoulders, hugging him and talking, and Izuku thinks he sees Aizawa over in the kitchen, doing something.

Izuku feels tired, he suddenly realizes, and he voices that thought out loud. More noise and movement and Izuku doesn’t really care. He’s just tired and the world isn’t fitting right into his conscious, or maybe he isn’t fitting into the world. Either way he shuts his eyes and falls asleep.

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Yamada Hizashi eyes the slumbering figure on Aizawa’s couch, for once that figure not being his
The little Midoriya boy had shown up out of nowhere, early in the morning, when Hizashi was known to bring Aizawa breakfast on occasion. The little guy had looked bad, like something had gone really wrong and he was in shock bad, and even though he was a pro hero, Hizashi sometimes just didn’t know what to do with a panicked kid.

Or maybe he was dissociating. Hizashi occasionally suffered from that, which a lot of people were usually surprised by since they usually suspected Aizawa the one to have that issue. It was possible the boy had that problem as well, but usually for Hizashi there was a trigger.

The kid, currently, after passing out against Hizashi’s side, had been bundled up in Aizawa’s precious, ugly yellow sleeping bag and the POMs had been slipped over his ears. Aizawa himself was in the kitchen with his cell phone to his ear, talking just soft enough Hizashi couldn’t make anything out.

Instead Hizashi focuses on the kid and trying to make sure he’s at least okay physically. He has a new prosthetic. It looks fancy and he wonders where it’s from.

“School says there was a fight with some of his classmates,” Aizawa says as he reenters the living space, phone still in hand, glaring at it. “His friend, Haganehato—”

“She prefers Mashi,” Hizashi cuts in and Aizawa give him a chilling glare, not at all in the mood, and for once the blonde shuts up.

“She has a concussion due to some bullies. Midoriya was present.”

“How come they gave you that information? You aren’t a family member,” Hizashi wonders aloud, giving his friend a thoughtful look and hoping the school systems aren’t falling apart as they know it.

“I’m his emergency contact,” Aizawa says absently, going back to his phone to do something, and Hizashi smiles at that. Of course he was.

Now that Hizashi knew about the Midoriya’s that meant he and his high school friend could talk about them more freely, Aizawa no longer having any reason to keep them secret. The blonde had thought he had gained the best opportunity to pester and tease his friend, but instead he’d discovered that Aizawa Shouta was a much bigger softy than he’d ever first realized, worrying about his neighbors and gushing, in his own Aizawa way, over things Izuku did.

“What are you doing now?” Hizashi asks.

“Calling his mother, let her know what’s going on and ask if there’s something we need to do…” Aizawa suddenly pauses as he looks to Izuku’s sleeping form, the boy’s small chest rising and falling evenly. “That’s a new arm…” he observes and steps closer. “But how is it connected…?”

“I think just directly to him?” Hizashi suggests, also looking at the arm again. The boy’s sleeve was covering up where it connected, so it was hard to tell.

Aizawa’s brows furrow in what is definitely concern. “What?” the sound hero questions, leaning towards his friend as he stays silent for a long while.

“Midoriya is very talented, but also very reckless…” he begins slowly, thinking his way through every word. “He has been working on a perfected arm ever since I met him… I never thought I would see it so soon, if this is what that is… But…” The wheels are turning in Aizawa’s head, thinking over the facts he has available, the observations he’s made, and… His eyes widen and
Hizashi leans in closer, nearly falling off the couch as he waits expectantly for the tired man’s thoughts.

“He has been studying neuroscience to learn how to connect his arm directly to his brain…” he hisses, “Now the question is how did he do it?”

“Maybe his mom knows?” Hizashi suggests, looking to Aizawa’s phone currently on Midoriya Inko’s contact information. After a long beat the erasing hero nods and taps at Inko’s work number then puts it on speaker, not worrying about noise with Izuku wearing the POMs.

“Immediate Care, this is Midoriya,” comes the answer and Inko sounds different over the phone. Oddly fake, but that could be just her work voice.

“Midoriya-san!” Hizashi calls in greeting and Aizawa shoots him a glare.

“This is Aizawa and Yamada. Do you have a moment to talk?”

There’s a pause and then Inko is back, voice a bit more normal sounding. “Yes, yes, it is quiet here right now. Is everything okay? Are you both well?” Hizashi feels so touched by how concerned and honest her voice is, and then feels proud and grateful that this woman has become such an integral part of his best friend’s life. Her and her son.

“We are both fine. You see…” Aizawa looks back at Izuku, pausing just long enough for Inko to cut in.

“Is it Izuku?” The two friends look at each other. So something was up.

“Yes. Apparently there was a fight at school and,” Aizawa glances at Hizashi’s expectant face and sighs, “Mashi received a concussion. She is healing fine, but Izuku never showed back up to class and then he appeared back here.”

“He looks really spooked!” Hizashi adds in.

For a while none of them speak, just waiting in the silence, until Inko lets out a long sigh. “I’m sure both of you have noticed that Izuku tends to distract himself when he is upset,” she begins, voice quiet. She sounded exhausted. She was such a brave woman trying to raise her son on her own, and from what Hizashi had seen the few times he’d gotten to interact with them, they were incredibly close and loving, but it had to be draining. Inko knew her son so well, and even just hearing a simple explanation she seemed to know exactly what was going on. “When something particularly upsetting happens, however…” Inko heaves a great sigh, “He shuts down. The best thing to do is to be there for him and create a safe environment… Like with you two…”

“Of course, Midoriya-san,” Hizashi says as Aizawa says, “Yes ma’am.” Hizashi glances to his friend, brow raised. He doesn’t think he’s ever heard him say “ma’am” before in his life.

“I am worried about him…” Inko pushes on and her voice sounds so weak and tired and Hizashi wishes he could hug her. He wishes he could hug a lot of people, though, so this wasn’t too alien of an emotion.

“I noticed he has a new arm,” the eraser hero comments, glancing back at the boy. Hizashi looks too and his brows raise in surprise when he notices the new robotic fingers twitch, like he’s a dog dreaming about running, but that wasn’t supposed to happen. Prosthetics weren’t connected to the brain… But that was what Izuku had been trying to do, wasn’t it?

“I came in this morning and he had it on. Aizawa-san… I have never seen him so proud of himself.
He’s been working so hard and been so focused and it’s like all his work has finally paid off, but I don’t understand it at all and… in the past, that has been fine, but I’m not sure how I feel about this.”

The three fall silent, considering the given information. Hizashi can see the concern hidden in Aizawa’s expression. “Little Izuku is a really, really smart kid,” the sound hero begins, adjusting his glasses, frowning. “Smarter than us, that’s for sure. He’s able to do anything if given the resources! No doubt!” He says the last phrase in English, hoping to ease the mood at least a little. It’s what he was good at. “And he’s a good boy. I’m sure if we sat him down and talked to him we could figure out what was going on!”

“Thank you, Yamada-san,” Inko breathes over the phone, but sighs. “That’s not all, though. I think, because he’s so smart, people forget how young he really is. He’s only nine! And he’s been treated as an outsider his whole life, then… then the accident… He’s… he’s been through too much, and I don’t want to take his happiness from him, but I don’t want him putting himself through even more…”

“He’s only nine…” Aizawa agrees, nodding mostly to himself, then cringes darkly and Hizashi doesn’t like the look on his face. It strikes his very heart with concern. “He deserves to be a kid… He needs to be a kid…”

They fall silent again, the feeling crushing, especially to the talkative Hizashi who, for once, doesn’t know what to say.

“Did he explain his arm at all?” Aizawa finally asks and there’s a sigh on the line.

“Yes, but I didn’t understand most of it. He said he created a ‘neurological connection’ between himself and the arm, which is why he doesn’t need the headband, but… I don’t understand how he could have done that…”

“We’ll talk to him!” Hizashi quickly says, leaning in towards the phone, his eyes determined. He didn’t know Izuku or Inko that well, had hardly gotten to know them since those two kids popped up to watch Bill Nye, but he knew Aizawa and he knew anyone to make such a good impact on his best friend was worth helping.

“Maybe he’ll talk to us more?” he continues, “I know you and your son trust each other a lot, but…”

“Sometimes it’s harder to talk to your own mother,” Inko finishes for him and it sounds bitter but like there’s a smile in her voice too.

Hizashi snaps his mouth shut, pausing, then nods and mumbles with a nervous chuckle, “Yeah…” He looks up when he feels eyes on him. Aizawa is glaring at him, almost expectantly, and it takes him a moment to realize what his friend is trying to say and when he does he tries hard not to laugh. “Uh, I mean, yes ma’am!”

Aizawa looks away, Hizashi grinning like a moron. “We’ll look after him,” the tired man assures and Inko takes a moment before she replies.

“I know you will. I trust you,” she replies and the honesty in her voice makes Hizashi’s breath catch, and he’s not even the one she’s speaking to. He looks to his best friend, not sure what he’s going to find, and certainly not expecting to see his friend smiling down at the phone, looking so raw in this moment.

No, Hizashi didn’t know the Midoriya’s that well, but if they were this important to his best friend? Then Hizashi was going to help defend them with every fiber of his being. In Hizashi’s opinion,
anyone to get his best friend to smile like that was worthy of the world.

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When Izuku finally wakes up it is ten o’clock and Aizawa is ready. He has hardly left the boy’s side, worry he’ll later deny feeling encompassing his entire being. The boy is slow to sit up and focus, rubbing at his eye with his flesh hand, yawning.

Hizashi just about skips over and quickly sits down on the floor in front of the couch, folding his arms on the edge of the cushions and leaning his chin against them. Another thing Aizawa won’t admit is how grateful he is that Hizashi is here to help him with this. He cares deeply, more deeply than he’d ever expected he could, for the Midoriya’s, but that doesn’t mean he knows how to handle these things well. He was usually too blunt and honest, coming off as rude, and he didn’t think that was the best method to use here.

“Hey there, kiddo,” Hizashi says as quietly as he can, which sounds more like a normal person’s speaking voice. Izuku doesn’t reply and Aizawa snorts before reaching over to take the POMs off Izuku’s head. The boy jumps in surprise, looking up finally and thank god for the awareness finally back in the boy’s eyes.

Aizawa doesn’t say anything, just leans into Izuku’s line of sight and nods. Slowly the surprise seems to fade from the boy, who nods back. Now he just seems confused.

“Little Izuku,” Hizashi speaks again, head tilting and one brow arching. He was keeping his tone light and friendly, not wanting to panic the boy. “Do you remember walking back here from school?”

Aizawa doesn’t take his eyes off his neighbor, watching as his brow furrows and he looks down at his lap, noticing the much too big sleeping bag around him, but doesn’t try to remove it. Instead he slowly begins to burrow back into it as he thinks.

“A-a little…? Maybe? I-I remember school and Kaito,” Aizawa and Hizashi exchange a look, memorizing that name for later, “bullying me and Mashi getting pushed… A-and…” Izuku’s eye widens as he goes through his memories, something making him draw short like a slap to the face. He swallows then slowly looks up at Aizawa, looking for answers like the lost child he truly is.

“Th-th-they hurt Mashi… She’s okay now, b-but they hurt her and I…” Izuku sounds like he wants to cry, but he’s not and that scares Aizawa more than he’d like. Izuku always cried over the littlest things, much like his mother, whether it be happy or sad or anything else. Heck, he’d cried when Pumpkin had rolled in his lap and bapped his face with a paw because it was “SO cute, Aizawa-san.”

“A-Aizawa-san…” Izuku is still looking at him, “I… I wanted to hurt him back…” the disbelief in his own actions makes Izuku’s breath hitch and Aizawa wants to reach out and help, but isn’t sure how. “I got s-so angry and I wanted to just hit him… I-I c-c-can handle him being m-mean to me, b-but… but he heart my friend! A-and I hated him!” Izuku ducks his head, like he’s ashamed of himself, “But then I hated myself…”

“Kid…” Aizawa begins, slowly, then reconsideres and takes a deep breath. “Izuku…” both Izuku and Hizashi look up at him, surprised by the name but he very pointedly ignores that. “Do you remember how we met?” Slowly, still surprised and now confused, Izuku nods. “You went out in a thunderstorm you were terrified of just to help an injured cat. Your mother has also told stories of you going out of your way to help her, or the kids at the hospital, or any animal you come across.”
“You’re one protective kid,” Hizashi observes, looking back to Izuku, reaching out with a hand to grab the boy’s foot through the sleeping bag and jiggle it in a kind gesture. The boy looks down at Aizawa’s closest friend. “Did you hit that Kaito bully?”

The green-haired boy shakes his head immediately, eye wide with horror at the idea of hitting his classmate and despite the situation at hand Aizawa can’t help but feel a little proud of him. “B-b-but I really wanted to,” he whispers, ducking his head again.

“But you didn’t,” Hizashi pushes forward, leaning up towards Izuku a little, tilting his head this way and that to try and catch the boy’s eye. “It’s okay to feel things. You can’t control how you feel or what you want to do, so you aren’t responsible for that.”

“You’re responsibility is how you act on these emotions,” Aizawa finishes, carefully laying a hand on the boy’s right shoulder, hand bumping what feels like the edge of his new robotic arm. For once the boy doesn’t flinch away from contact to that part of his body.

Izuku finally hiccups, his breathing shaky, but still no tears. Instead it feels like he’s bracing himself for something, like there’s more to say. Hizashi squeezes Izuku’s foot, head tilting and asking, “Hey, what is it, kiddo—“

“I want to be a pro hero!”

Both men lean back in surprise, eyes wide as Izuku seems to break, a weight that has been on his shoulders for years finally crashing down on him. Before either of the secret pro heroes can say a word the boy is pushing on, a flood of secrets being released all at once.

“H-how can I be a hero w-w-when I WANT t-to hurt people?”

Aizawa sees Hizashi open and close his mouth a few times before pushing, “But… you didn’t… not deep down.”

Izuku shakes his head viciously, hair flopping everywhere, and he’s pressing forward with even more.

“I’ve always wanted to be a hero, b-b-but everyone told me I was worthless and couldn’t do it because I was quirkless, then I got hurt and I knew, I KNEW, people would tell me I could never do anything because of this or that, and I knew my mom would be upset and angry and worried so I never said anything, I never said a word, but I lied and I never wanted to, I never ever did, but…”

There are the tears, flowing down the one side of his face as he begins to wail, voice getting louder and more desperate with each word and Aizawa has never seen Izuku this bad and he wishes Inko was here to help, but he has to swallow that down and deal with it. He and Hizashi are here and they will help this child that has been through too much in only nine years of life.

“I am so tired of people telling me I’m not capable of doing anything!!” Izuku throws his head back and Aizawa takes him, wraps him up as best he can in the yellow sleeping bag, and drags him into an awkward but tight hug. It doesn’t take long for Hizashi to climb up onto the couch too and hug the boy as well. Izuku hiccups and cries and clings half to the sleeping bag and half to the front of his neighbor’s shirt. It must smell awful, Aizawa half thinks, he hasn’t really done his laundry in a while, but Izuku doesn’t seem to care.

“I-I’m n-not useless,” Izuku cries, his voice quiet now, desperate.

“That’s right, kiddo,” Hizashi says immediately, not allowing any argument for the otherwise.
"I-I can be a h-hero… I c-can help p-p-people…"

Aizawa and Hizashi look to each other, eyes wide and panic pricking at the edges, but then the dark-haired man looks again at the boy and remembers how devoted and stubborn he was, how he instinctively needed to keep people safe, how he had crafted what looked like a perfect arm when he was only nine and had created so much more.

“Yeah…” Aizawa whispers and Hizashi is looking at him, “Yeah, I think you can…”

Izuku wails again, louder and raw, and Aizawa hates to think that this is one of the first times any adult has ever told him he really could do what he dreamed, but then he remembers how critical and angry Izuku was at society. He remembers how people look at being quirkless or disabled.

He hugs the boy a little tighter, not caring about the odd angle he has to twist, and it seems to be enough for Izuku too.

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At half past eleven Izuku finally seems to have calmed down enough for the men to go onto the next subject. Hizashi takes a moment to enjoy the scene laid out before him before they get started; Aizawa and Izuku sitting beside each other, Izuku still bundled up in the yellow sleeping bag, both snacking on juice packs in silence.

At first Hizashi thought to tease Aizawa on adopting Izuku as his own, but then he remembers Inko and realizes, no, the Midoriya’s adopted him. The sound hero smiles brightly and Aizawa gives him a reproachful look. The two of them did kind of look like they could be siblings…

“Well, kiddo,” Hizashi sighs dramatically before Aizawa can ask what he’s grinning about. “I’m afraid there is one more thing we need to talk about! We promised your mom we would.”

Izuku glances up from his grape juice pack, apparently his favorite. He lowers his snack and takes a deep, bracing breath, and before either men can continue he asks, “It’s about my arm… isn’t it?”

Aizawa hums an affirmative, leaning back against the couch. “Your mom’s worried,” he says simply and the unspoken “and so are we” hangs in the air.

Izuku shrinks in a bit more, looking away, obviously ashamed and guilty. “I know,” he whispers. “I know she is… I know she didn’t want to freak me out or upset me, too, and I think I was just so excited that I tricked myself into believing that she was okay…”

“Are YOU okay, is the better question,” Hizashi cuts in, his hand popping up to poke Izuku’s head a little roughly, but not mean. “I know,” he whispers. “I know she is… I know she didn’t want to freak me out or upset me, too, and I think I was just so excited that I tricked myself into believing that she was okay…”

“I know, I do, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” Izuku sobs, shuddering in his seat. “I’m not that strong, I’m not that brave.”

“Your mama said you told her about a ‘neurological connection.’ What’s that about?”

Izuku is silent for a long, long moment, and Hizashi thinks maybe he isn’t going to answer, but when he opens his mouth to encourage him Aizawa kicks at him and glares, telling him without words to shut up. Hizashi lets him have his way. He does know the kid better, after all.

Finally, after that long, long pause, Izuku takes a deep breath and begins to talk, low and scared. Hizashi doesn’t like that he’s scared so he reaches out again and squeezes the boy’s foot.

“In order to make the most efficient arm it would need to act like a normal arm. While movements can be programmed and perfected, the real issue is the connection from brain to limb. That’s what is lacking. The headband idea is close, but it’s a liability, too clunky, and too much interference. There needed to be a direct connection, so…” Izuku raises he robotic arm and Hizashi is still amazed by the
fluidity of it. If not for the shiny metal and cable muscles beneath it would have looked exactly like a normal arm. “That’s what I did.”

“How?” is all Aizawa asks and the nervousness that Izuku shook off during the scientific explanation is back full force.

“I… had to connect the arm to myself… entirely…” Izuku cringes, knowing that he’s explaining this part badly, it’s written all over his face. “It would be… easier to just show you…” he finally sighs and shimmies out of the sleeping bag enough to take off his t-shirt. Where the arm meets the skin it looks clean and fine, nothing wrong, but then Izuku is reaching up and tapping at a few buttons and the arm promptly releases from a ring of metal still clinging to the stump. Aizawa catches the arm and moves it out of the way, eying it apprehensively but focusing back on Izuku again.

Hizashi stares in wonder as Izuku begins messing with the metal still on him. “This is the Base. It’s like the… outlet for my new arm designs. It can mostly be dismantled as well for upgrades or as I grow,” the boy explains and Hizashi purses his lips, eyes narrowing.

“‘Mostly’?” he questions and Izuku looks fearful again. He nods then reaches up and begins messing with the Base. There’s more tapping it and twisting here and lifting there, like a 3D puzzle, as he undoes the metal pieces until all that’s left to show are five, one inch diameter disks currently attached to Izuku’s very flesh.

In unison Hizashi and Aizawa are on their feet, eyes wide. From each of the disks there are two wires, save for one that has three nearest Izuku’s back, that curve out the sides and go into Izuku’s skin as well. Light scarring can be seen around the disks that look fresh but surgically clean. There’s no blood anywhere, which Hizashi counts as a plus, but…

“You physically connected machines to your body??” Aizawa near roars and the blond jumps back, surprised at the volume. He’s never heard his friend do that before, but then again… this was all a new one for them.

Izuku cringes and shrinks back and the tired man catches himself, knowing getting angry like that wouldn’t get them anywhere, knowing it would only send Izuku back into his shell.

“I… don’t know exactly what you did, Midoriya-kun,” the sound hero begins, hands up in a placating motion, “but you could have been hurt.”

“No I wouldn’t have,” the boy immediately retorts and the two heroes pause, glancing at each other, then back to Izuku.

Aizawa’s eyes are narrowed now. “Explain.”

Izuku swallows, fear creeping back into his features and now part of Hizashi thinks that’s good. He shouldn’t be completely fearless with this. “I-I’m going to be a h-heroi,” he begins, ducking his head and looking at his robotic palm. “I’m going to make a difference in people’s lives. I couldn’t do that if this went even a little bit wrong.” Izuku looks back up at the men, his face desperate for them
to understand. “I recreated my own body using molds and fake tissues and veins and nerves. It was near perfect. Then I tested the Base until I reached a successful version, and from there I tested that successful version a total of 219 times to make sure it was perfect. Nothing bad was going to happen, I made SURE of it!”

Hizashi hears Aizawa give a bone deep sigh beside him and Izuku seems to take that as a bad sign, pushing onward.

“I-I studied medical procedures extensively and assured that I had all necessary tools to go about this! I-it wasn’t even that big of a procedure, didn’t even hurt but a bit of a sting.” Hizashi isn’t sure he believes that last one, but Izuku looks desperate.

“Why didn’t you tell anyone?” the blond asks, his voice shockingly quiet, disbelief at the whole situation coloring his tone.

Izuku looks away. “You would have stopped me… You wouldn’t have believed me… Even when I do something important people only see me as some stupid kid…”

“But you are a kid,” Hizashi cuts in, putting his hands on his hips, and Izuku looks up. There are tears in his eye again. “You’re far from stupid, you’re way smarter than me!”

“Which isn’t difficult,” Aizawa mumbles and despite the tense atmosphere Izuku lets out a wet giggle.

Hizashi pouts and gives them both a glare before continuing. “You’re not stupid, but you are a kid. There are things in life you have yet to explore! Experiences you have yet to achieve!” Hizashi swings his arms around as he speaks, but then suddenly he just stops, which has both dark-haired boys in the room looking to him oddly. The arms drop and Hizashi looks over his glasses at Izuku meaningfully. “Kiddo… When was the last time you just… let yourself be a kid?”

Izuku seems taken aback by the question, eye widening in surprise, mouth opening as if to answer but then shutting again when no words come out. He looks down and away and that’s all the answer Hizashi needs.

“You’ve been rushing to get better ever since I met you,” Aizawa says slowly, stepping forward and kneeling down in front of the boy, looking up at him carefully. Izuku looks back at him hesitantly.

“You keep pushing yourself to get over these hurdles you have, like if you don’t you’ll fall behind… but that isn’t going to help you. You need to take your time and let yourself be in the moment. The world isn’t going to pass you by.”

“You’re NINE for pete’s sake!” Hizashi exclaims, throwing his hands up to punctuate it, and Aizawa jabs a thumb back at him.

“Yeah…” the dark-haired man agrees and Izuku gulps. Slowly, fear still in his bones, he nods and Hizashi knows they aren’t done. You can’t just change something like this in a single “come to Jesus” moment, but it’s a start. And he knew how to make it an even better start.

“HEEEEEEEY!” he calls as he suddenly comes over and hops onto the couch beside the green-haired boy, making him jump and Aizawa send him an irritated glare. “How about we go to the park and grab some ice creammmmm? I mean, come on!! You managed to behave yourself against all odds while faced with a bully, you made a groundbreaking invention, and you managed to melt this guy’s heart,” he jabs a finger at his best friend, who glares even harder. “I think that deserves some ice cream!”
“You’re not… mad?” Izuku whispers, looking between the two men, eye wide with worry.

Aizawa heaves another deep sigh and Hizashi decides to let him tackle that question. The tired man hangs his head, shaking it as he gathers the proper answer. “No, kid, we aren’t mad. We were worried for you, and disappointed you kept this from us… You’ll have some trust to rebuild, but we aren’t mad.”

“I don’t think it’s possible to be mad with such a good boy!” Hizashi comments loudly, gaining absolutely no response for that one. Izuku does keep looking between them, apprehensive and scared.

“Really…?” he whispers, looking to Aizawa again.

“Really,” the man reassures and reaches out to ruffle the kid’s hair. “Now… we are going to have to tell your mother about all this,” Aizawa says and Izuku’s whole body seems to deflate, which would be much funnier under different circumstances.

“Right… I understand,” he mumbles. Aizawa nods then grabs Izuku’s robotic arm and hands it back to the boy, but he doesn’t immediately reattach it. Instead he just stares at it in his lap. “Can you…” he bites his lip, thinks, then tries to push on. “Can you not tell my mom about the hero part? I don’t… want her to be worried and she… she doesn’t mean to hurt my feelings, but she never really dealt with it well…”

Hizashi looks to his best friend to answer this one as well. This part really wasn’t his choice. He wasn’t as close to the mother and son as Aizawa was. “Okay… We’ll keep that part quiet, but only that.”

Izuku nods and smiles a little, thankful, and finally begins putting back together to parts of the Base where they belong, attached to the disks against his skin, and then reattaches the arm. “Can we… still get ice cream?” he whispers and Hizashi grins, jumping off of the couch like he’s a child himself.

“YEAH!” he yells and Aizawa cringes at the volume as he stands. Neither he nor Izuku have much chance to argue after that as the blond grabs them both and drags them out of the apartment.

They make their way to a park Hizashi likes that’s a bit of a walk, but worth it with how beautiful it is and all the vendors nearby. The issue he hadn’t expected had been when Izuku soon stopped, very carefully holding his back and sweating as he breathed hard. Turns out his sprint back to the apartments had hurt his back more than any of them had realized, so, with no second thought at all, Hizashi hopped over and, as carefully as he could, gets Izuku up and sitting on his shoulders.

Aizawa eyes him oddly, but doesn’t say a word. If anything, when he looks away he looks a little bit happy, the two walking beside each other with Izuku balanced on Hizashi’s shoulders, seeming to finally be having some fun.

“H-hey! M-maybe next time we can go by the cat café you like, Aizawa-san!” the boy says at some point, eye sparkling, and Hizashi grins at the idea of taking the boy out to have more fun and just be a kid like he was supposed to be.

Aizawa looks up then nods. “Sounds like a good idea, kid,” he replies simply and Hizashi can just hear Izuku say “yes” under he breath, excitedly.

They continue walking a bit further, Hizashi talking a mile a minute while the other two remain silent. In a momentary lull in his words Izuku takes the opportunity to speak again. This time his words are hesitant.
“I’m… grounded, aren’t I?”

“Super grounded!” Hizashi says cheerfully, and Aizawa looks up at the kid, who the sound hero imagines must look pretty dejected.

“For now, though, just enjoy yourself, okay?” the tired man says, voice low, and Izuku shifts, pausing.

“Okay,” he breathes and Hizashi can hear the smile in his voice.

Chapter End Notes

Listen, dadzawa is best Aizawa, but I'd like to propose you this: big brother Aizawa that acts as man of the house! Let Inko adopt him! She basically already has!

And if anyone is curious I headcanon Hizashi as having depression and Aizawa having bipolar disorder, just based off of mine and my family's experiences, really...

Again, y'all wanna talk to me come see me at my tumblr here.

Chapter Song: Jennifer Hudson - Burden Down
Hello friends! Been a little while huh? School has been kicking my butt, y'all! But also I have been working on some art I think some of y'all may like?

**Here she is!** An (Adult) Mashi design for you all! Hope you like her! Now onto the story!

“My soldering iron, Mashi! I can’t believe them!” Izuku complains as he wobbles beside his friend down the road. The redhead is grinning as she listens to him, enjoying getting to see him so animated like this. It was a rare scene so she made sure to treasure every one.

“I mean… it could have been worse, considered what you did,” she says with a shrug, laughing brightly when Izuku shoots her a betrayed look.

“It was safe! It was entirely safe!” he retorts. It was a common conversation they had this past week. Izuku had never been grounded before, Mashi had quickly discovered, and now that he was he had a lot to say about it. Mashi didn’t even think the confines of his grounding were that bad, especially considering she got grounded constantly and knew how bad it COULD get. Also considering what it was he had done. Then again, they did still trust him deeply, it seemed, so maybe it wasn’t so farfetched.

“You just gotta go three months without it. Come on, that’s easy!” she cackles, grinning at him as he groans up to the clear sky. It was the weekend and the two of them, with permission, had decided to go out and have some fun. Well, fun for Izuku, Mashi saw it a bit more like running errands.

Izuku, without his soldering iron, was a lot more limited in his builds, which had been Inko’s genius plan. He was unable to craft anything very large, and certainly nothing complex like a limb that surgically attached itself to the user’s body. He could keep up his sketches and blueprints on the things he could do when he got the soldering iron back, but that could only hold him over for so long. He needed to build and create – Mashi liked to tease that his blood was probably oil – and in order to do that they had to get creative.

“I’ll… be fine,” Izuku finally grumbles. Mashi knows he’d never complain about this to the adults. She knows he understands why they did this and that he is getting off easy, but it must still be frustrating and Mashi is always willing to let him rant to her. “Just…” he groans again and rolls his eye skyward, “I had so many ideas I wanted to get to!”

Mashi watches him for a moment, seeing if he’s done talking, then reaches to pull absently at her ponytail, messing it up almost immediately. “You’ll be able to do them later, no problem-o! For now, we’re…” Mashi trails off, brow furrowing, as she tries to remember what it was they were doing here. Izuku had tried to explain it, but there had been a lot of words that Mashi didn’t understand.

“Getting some supplies from an old friend of mine,” Izuku replies, smiling reassuringly towards Mashi, and she relaxes. She was always worried she’d say something stupid, or forget something simple, and Izuku would realize how much of an idiot she really was. That he would realize that he
could do so much better. But he never did.

He always stood beside her, stubborn and kind, always made her feel like it didn’t matter, that difference in intellect they had. She still worried that one day he would leave her behind, but for now she held tight to him and enjoyed every minute.

“The Hatsume’s, right?” Mashi asks and Izuku nods. They had hopped on the train and headed for Izuku’s old neighborhood. Mashi knew Hatsume Āto from her visits to the scrapyard. She and Mashi’s mother were close friends with similar attitudes, and Mottai often would receive art pieces from the other woman.

Mashi had never met Āto’s daughter, though. She didn’t know too many kids her age, anyway, and the ones she did were all mean to her or scared of her. Izuku had always been the only exception, and also that Hayashi boy, now, who kept bringing Mashi pudding cups from home during lunch since he’d pushed her. She didn’t know any girls, though.

“Yeah. Their art store was rebuilt and Mei said she could get me some chemicals and materials,” Izuku replies. Mei. Right, that was the daughter’s name. Then Mashi thinks about what her friend had just said.

“Why… do you need chemicals…?” the redhead asks hesitantly. She loved Izuku’s inventions and loved listening to him talk about all the things he loved and did, but after the Base she was a tad skeptical that Izuku might hurt himself again.

Her friend sighs deeply, like he’s heard that question before, and Mashi isn’t really sure what that means. “The word ‘chemicals’ isn’t a bad word, Mashi,” He says, pinching the bridge of his nose with his flesh hand. His metal one was still spectacular and he moved it like he’d had it all his life… For the most part, well… Mashi was good at reading the environment and had quickly noticed that Izuku avoided using it for smaller movements, like with the fingers.

“Literally everything in the world is made up of chemicals,” Izuku pushes on and points at Mashi beside him. “YOU’re made of chemicals. I’M made of chemicals. That dog over there is made of chemicals,” he explains and Mashi’s brain momentarily derails, head snapping up, eyes wide.

“Dog?? Where??” She snaps, head flicking around as she searches, but then she deflates when the green-haired boy to her left begins to giggle. She pouts and gives him a dirty look. “That was cruel. You’re cruel.”

Izuku waves her off, this time with the robotic hand, and keeps smiling brightly. “Anyway!” he chirps and Mashi huffs, crossing her arms, but also enjoying seeing her friend laugh. “You know those experiments in school, or at home sometimes, where you make oobleck?”

Mashi’s pout drops to make way for the entirely clueless look she gives to Izuku. They blink at each other before Izuku snorts, smirking a little, and offering instead, “The non-Newtonian fluid?”

“Zuzu, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

This time Izuku groans and throws his head back, but then is leaning back towards Mashi like it was nothing, the need to explain and teach too deeply sewn into his DNA. “The stuff that when you’re gentle with it, it moves like a liquid, but if you hit it then it gets hard.”

Mashi straightens up and her brows rise in realization. “Ooooh! Yeah, I know about… Oomba!”

“Oobleck.”
“Oobloob?”

“Oobleck.”

“Oophlook?”

“Oobleck.”

“Oobleck?”

“Oobleck?”

“That’s the one.”

Mashi grins victoriously and Izuku bumps her shoulder with his metal arm, smiling as well. “Well, I am kind of doing something like that, but I am attempting to create something new that can be used as a shock absorber,” the boy presses on as they turn a corner. He seems to know where they’re going, even though it’s been years since he’s been back in his old neighborhood.

The redhead’s brows furrow. “Shock absorber? Can’t you just get some already made?”

“What kind of money do you think I have?” Izuku asks with an arched brow. Or what Mashi assumes is an arched brow, she can’t see the other one under the big eye patch. She shrugs. She honestly had no idea how Izuku ended up with some of the things he did. “I have to get everything from the scrapyard or from broken down parts. I don’t have any money, Mashi.”

Emerald green eyes meet a forest green one, Mashi’s widening in awe. “Wait… so all this cool shit you build is with garbage??” Izuku blushes at the obvious amazement in his friend’s voice and ducks his head, but he’s also pouting now.

“First off, not garbage, I recycle it. If it has any purpose at all it isn’t garbage,” he begins, giving Mashi a bit of a warning look, and she shrugs but makes note of that. She’ll probably still tease him a little anyway. “And second… yes, basically. Everything is broken down, polished, and heavily cleaned ahead of time.”

“Cooool,” the redhead breathes, grinning when Izuku blushes a little deeper. “So what do you need the shock absorbing stuff for?”

“If I’m going to improve my arm for hero work I need to make sure that it is made up of the best possible materials, and I can assure their quality if I make them myself,” Izuku explains like it is obvious, and maybe it is, but Mashi hadn’t thought of that and it just makes her more amazed at her friend’s logical planning.

“But… You will be making money soon, right?” the redhead pushes, tilting her head as she looks to the boy at her side. They aren’t walking that fast, since he still wobbles and occasionally needs to stop and take a breather, but Mashi doesn’t mind. They’ll get to where they need to go eventually, wherever that may be.

Izuku gives her a confused look at the question, brow furrowed and he waits for her to explain what she means. She never liked that, having to explain what she was thinking. She wasn’t like Izuku, she couldn’t always formulate her thoughts into something that made sense to other people.

For Izuku, though, she could at least try.
“Well… y’know…” she tilts her head this way and that, arms crossed and pouting, but Izuku doesn’t interrupt her, used to this by now. “You made a crazy cool arm thingy, right? Aren’t you going to sell it to people who really need it?” She wiggles her hand at Izuku like she’s hoping her thoughts will transfer from her to him. “Like… like those kids! The ones you tell me about at the hospital! Wouldn’t they need these?” Mashi’s arms drop and she gives her friend a sudden searching look. “Or are you… I dunno, gonna give them away? That’d be cool, I guess…”

Izuku is pulling on his lip, a habit he does when he’s thinking. Mashi thinks it makes him look silly. “I would like to eventually distribute them, but… You saw how messy it was. How much it hurt.” They lock eyes for a moment in understanding and then sigh, dejected. Mashi did remember that. It had only been a week ago, and it still turned her stomach. At least she wasn’t having nightmares, which Izuku had mentioned in passing that he was having. “I need to first develop it even further, both the arm and the Base. The arm has a lot of kinks to work out.”

Mashi crosses her arms again, slumping her shoulders forward as they walk, her brows furrowing in thought. “How… do you plan to improve the Base, though…? You’ve already attached it!” the redhead turns to give her friend a wide-eyed look of horror, “Don’t tell me you’re gonna take it off! That sounds bad!”

Izuku is already waving her off with both hands, shaking his head. “No, no, the Base, for the most part, is fine. It’s the nerve connection I need to adjust. I need to find a way to numb the nerves but still be able to connect to them. It’ll take some time, but I am confident I will be able to create something by the time I’m ready to test it.”

Mashi grins over towards Izuku, eyes sparkling in excitement and relief as he reassures her. He really was so cool. She wondered how she’d managed to convince someone as amazing as him to be her friend.

Wait…

Mashi leans away and frowns. “Wait… what do you mean ‘when I’m ready to test it’? How are you going to test it?”

Izuku gives Mashi a look like she should know this and, yeah, she never did like that look, but when it came from him it was easier to manage. “I’ll be able to test it when I attach my Spinal Bridge and Artificial Orbit. I’ll have plenty of time, though, since I need to properly design, test, and perfect both of them so I can attach them at the same time.”

Mashi’s brain had already gone into white noise mode about midway through Izuku’s response and her feet promptly stopped moving. It took the boy a moment longer to realize she was no longer beside him and he, too, stopped and looked back at her with a concerned expression.

“What’s wrong?” he asks, sounding honestly concerned, and now it’s Mashi’s turn to stare at him like he should already know this.

“Y-you’re really planning on doing… THAT,” she waves wildly at Izuku’s mechanical arm and he glances down at it then back up to her, “AGAIN??”

“Two times, actually,” Izuku supplies on instinct, then cringes apologetically at the unbelieving look Mashi sends him.

She is forever amazed by Izuku. He was brilliant and kind and brave, but sometimes he was also incredibly reckless. Arguably more so than Mashi herself, and that was saying something. “Zuzu… but… what if you get hurt?”
“I won’t,” Izuku says immediately, voice so sure that Mashi can hardly argue. Her eyes widen and she straightens up, still looking at her friend apprehensively, but beginning to calm down. If he said something was going to happen, it usually came true. “Just like with the Base, I am going to assure complete safety and success. And by the time we get to them I should have that nerve numbing and connecting solution finished so that the pain of last time will be a far off memory.”

As Izuku spoke Mashi felt herself relaxing more and more. She trusted him. More than anyone in her life, she trusted Midoriya Izuku entirely. If he said he would be fine, than he would be fine. Still…

“You promise?” she asks, head tilting and eyebrows turning upwards in concern.

Izuku smiles back at her, bright and happy and confident. “I promise! Cross my heart!”

Mashi lets out a breath she had been holding in, shoulders slumping finally in relief. Good. That was good.

She smirks and looks back up at her friend through her lashes. “I thought you were the tin man! You don’t have a heart!”

Izuku immediately groans and rolls his eye skyward. Mashi had noticed he did that a lot more often nowadays. Something he’d picked up from his neighbor, she assumed. She blows a raspberry at him while he shakes his head.

“I’m surprised your mama is okay with you doing this again!” the redhead comments as she trots up to Izuku again and they continue walking through his old neighborhood. “I thought she had been super upset!”

Izuku doesn’t answer immediately, which is concerning, and Mashi quickly looks to him, one brow arched. He’s looking away, his ears pink from embarrassment or shame, Mashi can’t quite tell, and he’s humming. Mashi’s eyes narrow. “Zuzu…”

“Well, you see…” Izuku begins, moving his hands around in nervous gestures. “No one ever TECHNICALLY told me not to do this again.”

Again Mashi stops walking, eyes wide as she stares after Izuku. He’s still walking, not stopping for her this time. “Zuzu,” she says again, a bit louder this time, but Izuku keeps walking. She begins walking a little faster to try and catch up.

“Zuzu!” she says, but he’s picked up speed and now she has to jog to catch up, calling after him, “Midoriya Izuku! You come back here right now!” All she hears is his nervous but gleeful laughter as they race through the streets.

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They have to take a breather once they calm down. Even Mashi is a little winded, but Izuku looks like he may keel over. They sit down on the ground against a fence in a nice little neighborhood with houses instead of apartments and Mashi thinks maybe rich people must live here. It makes her skin crawl, like she’s in the wrong place and making a fool of herself.

Izuku doesn’t look too pleased to be here, either, she thinks when she glances towards him.

“You okay?” she asks, because she may be uncomfortable being here, but she can push that down for now to check on her friend. “This place givin’ you the creeps, too?” She tries to grin at him, worried and trying to lighten whatever is weighing on him, and something is weighing on him, she can see it.
“Yeah… something like that…” he mumbles and, okay, she must have been off because he didn’t sound like he was telling the truth. “It’s just…” he takes a deep breath. Ah, yes, that was the sign he was about to be honest. He used to be a bit more difficult to crack, too nervous and scared of admitting something he wasn’t prepared for, but now he was more willing to talk. At least to Mashi, anyway.

“Kacchan lives near here,” Izuku whispers and Mashi’s inner monologue comes to a screeching halt. Kacchan? As in Izuku’s childhood friend? As in the cruel, explosive boy that Mashi had hated on sight?

“That asshole?? Who cares?? Fuck him!” Mashi announces loudly, scoffing and crossing her arms. What did that guy have to do with anything? Well, maybe Izuku was scared of being seen by him. Maybe they should leave. Yeah, okay, Mashi nods, that was what they would do. She wasn’t going to let her friend be upset over someone who wasn’t even there. She would carry him away if his back hurt too much, she didn’t even care. “Let’s get the hell outta here!”

She begins to stand, but Izuku suddenly grabs her wrist to stop her. She looks back at him, eyes wide in surprise at the abrupt motion, and when she sees his pleading eye she slowly sits back down, eyes locked on her friend. “Zuzu…?”

“I know what you’re thinking,” he begins and brings up his knees, wrapping his arms around them and curling up tightly. Mashi isn’t sure if that helps relieve his back or make it worse. “But I’m not upset to be here, or worried about him,” he smirks, bittersweet but humorous, and looks to the girl beside him. “You’d probably hit him before he could ever do anything, anyway.”

“Damn straight!” Mashi nods, face set in a determined scowl, and an adult that passes by gives them a startled and scandalized look at the curse, but Mashi ignores them and Izuku giggles, which is all she cares about.

“Right…” he looks off, distant and unfocused, and Mashi begins fidgeting at the silence. She doesn’t like it, or what may be running around in her best friend’s head. “I think…” he begins, and pauses again, and Mashi wants to curse and shake the answer out of him, but she refrains. She had to be patient with Izuku sometimes. It was hard and it sucked, but she was getting better at it.

“I think I want to talk to him.”

“WHAT???” Mashi springs off of the ground, eyes blown wide in complete disbelief, her mouth hanging open as she stands in front of Izuku. He won’t look at her anymore, his head ducked down. “Why on earth would you ever want to do that?? He’s an asshole!!” Mashi is waving her arms around as if to emphasize her words and Izuku lets out a long sigh, sounding too exhausted for his age.

“Because there’s more to him than that,” he mumbles and Mashi’s arms fall limp to her sides and she watches him. He still won’t look up at her. “Because… I know that hoping to be his friend again is silly, or that we’ll ever be on good terms again is just illogical, wishful thinking, but…” Izuku shakes his and his brow is furrowed up like he’s having difficulty with his words, or his thoughts in general, which occasionally happens to him when it comes to emotions. “But… I don’t want to be on BAD terms with him either. I don’t want to be on bad terms with anyone…”

“It’s been months since you guys saw each other! Since he was a total dick to you! Do you expect him to apologize or something??” Mashi shakes her head, still not believing what she was hearing, and she quickly gives a sharp glare down at the green-haired boy even though he isn’t looking up at her. “YOU aren’t planning on apologizing to him, are you? Because he was the asshole, not you.”
“I know that,” Izuku whispers, “and I don’t expect any apologies from anyone, but… I don’t like that we didn’t talk. I don’t like that… that I didn’t get to defend myself or say my piece…” Mashi cringes and looks away. Was that her fault? For jumping in to defend Izuku instead of letting him do it himself? Well, it was too late now to worry about it and part of Mashi knows she would do it all over again if necessary.

“So… I don’t want to be on bad terms with Kacchan… but I don’t think we can be good together anymore, either… maybe…” Izuku sighs and Mashi finally moves to sit beside him again, face concerned, the anger melting away. “Maybe we could be on neutral terms? Or no terms at all…”

Mashi hates how dejecting Izuku looks. She never knows exactly what to say. She feels like there must be something, her mama always seemed to know, but she’s clueless.

So she says the first thing that comes to mind. “If he’s a dick again, I’ll kick him in the balls.”

Izuku chokes on air and begins to wheeze-laugh in embarrassment at Mashi’s vulgar language. He covers his mouth with his flesh hand and grabs the redhead’s shirtsleeve with the robotic one. Mashi grins back at him, happy to have been the one responsible for this.

When Izuku falls silent again, a small smile on his face, Mashi stands and brushes herself off. “Come ooooon! Let’s get outta here and find the Hatsume’s!”

This time Izuku doesn’t argue getting up and leaving. His limp is a little more pronounced, but he’s fine to go, stronger than anyone Mashi has ever met.

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Izuku expects the new art store to look somehow different. It is in a new location and has a new front sign, but the second they step inside it feels like maybe he’s gone back in time, and for a moment his breath stops. He stops walking and everything seems to twist, morphing into a fiery, bloody mess, thundering stomps echoing in the background, suffocating air all around him, pain lancing up his face and side and—

Then Mashi is stepping closer to his side, giving him a concerned expression, bumping shoulders. She doesn’t know what is going through his head, and he never wants her to know, ever, so he smiles apologetically and steps further in, letting her follow him and hoping she won’t bring anything up.

He’s a little nervous to be seeing Mei again after so long. Last he saw her it had been years ago and, yes, they still talked over chatrooms, but that still wasn’t the same. Last he had seen her she had been a tiny gremlin that terrified him. Now he wasn’t sure what he would find.

They make it to the counter and it feels shorter than Izuku remembers, but then he reminds himself that he is taller now. No one is there and Mashi wastes no time slapping the bell on the counter over and over like the madwoman she is. Izuku smacks at her arm with his metal hand and she pouts at him, looking defiant, slaps the bell one more time, and finally drops her hand with a huff.

It manages to get someone’s attention, Izuku would be worried if it didn’t, and soon a slightly familiar, but different face is coming out from the back.

Hatsume Mei is still a short thing, but she’s grown taller than Izuku now, which really isn’t that hard to do. Her pink hair has grown out some and she holds it back with a pair of goggles acting like a hair band. Her face is still pudgy but not as much as it used to be and her body seems a little lankier, like she may be in the middle of a growth spurt and the weight distribution hasn’t caught up yet.

She still has crazy eyes though.
“Well, well, well!” Mei says the second she sees Izuku, her eyes narrowing and a smirk growing on her face. The smirk is a new thing, but it seems natural on her. Izuku takes a deep breath, bracing for this interaction. “My rival has returned,” Mei continues, her walk as close to a saunter as she can get, which isn’t very close.

“Hi, Hatsume-chan,” Izuku greets with a bow of his head. Despite how terrifying he remembered having to deal with her was, or how she was currently nudging him and smirking at him, he was happy to see her. She looked happy and healthy and he couldn’t wait to see some of her “babies” she had been telling him about.

“Oh! So formal, my dear, sweet rival,” Mei sighs dramatically. Izuku opens his mouth to retort about her being not formal at all, and that he did have a name she could be using, but she is already shushing him and scurrying forward at the sight of his arm. “Oh! Now look at that!” she chirps gleefully, making him hold up his arm so she can get a good look at it. “And here I was thinking you may have been lying to me!”

Izuku pouts and pulls his arm back, flexing the metal fingers into a fist. “Why would I lie about this?” he questions, momentarily baffled, but Mei just waves him off and lifts his arm up herself to keep examining it.

“Pride, perhaps? Wanting to defeat me in our race of intellect?” she retorts almost absently and Izuku rolls his eye. There was no way he could get out of this. Mei was too persistent to ever have her mind changed, even if she was presenting it as a half joke. “Have you filed for a patent? You don’t want anyone stealing your designs, do you? Now that would be dumb and—”

“H-hi…” the small word draws both scientists’ attentions and they look over towards the source. Mashi, who Izuku is only now realizing has been silent this entire time, is standing there, stiff as a board, her eyes wide as if in shock as she stares at Mei. She looks ready to collapse, her shoulders shaking, her cheeks flush, and Izuku has never seen her like this before, concerning filling up his gut.

“Uh, hi?” Mei offers back and Mashi stiffens further, which Izuku hadn’t thought possible. A small squeak escapes the redhead, who just keeps staring at Mei.

“Hi…” Mashi repeats again, like she’s in a daze, and Mei’s lips twist before looking back to Izuku. “She an experiment of yours? Break her brain or something?” the pink-haired girl questions and Izuku is surprised when, instead of exploding, he sees Mashi deflate, her head ducking and her expression looking near devastated. Izuku doesn’t like that look.

“She isn’t an experiment,” he snaps a little too harshly and quickly schools his tone and expression. He knows Mei was only teasing. “She’s my friend, and she isn’t used to meeting new people,” at least, that’s what he assumed was going on. He wasn’t actually sure, but Mashi looks up at him with a smile of thanks and he assumes they’ll just be going with that for now.

“Yeah? Wait…” Mei turns back to Mashi, who is back to her big-eyed gawking now that the other scientist is in her face. “You’re the quirkless kid that kicks people’s butts, right?”

“That’s me!” Mashi squeaks, voice cracking and hardly her usual, confident bark. She gulps, obviously realizing how her voice came out and berating herself for it. Izuku… really doesn’t know what’s going on.

“Huh…” Mei leans back, crossing her arms and nodding as if impressed, as she looks Mashi up and down. “Well, keep up the good work!”
The redhead immediately starts a frantic giggle-laugh, grinning, but her eyes looking like they’re pleading for help. Like she can’t stop her actions and she really would like someone to just stop her now.

Mei gives her an odd look, but at least doesn’t comment anymore, instead focusing again on Izuku. They lapse into conversation on their inventions, Mashi standing off to the side, listening as usual, but her eyes keep drifting towards the other girl. Izuku is concerned, but he thinks whatever is going on can wait until later. For now he will enjoy speaking to his “rival” and getting the materials he came for.

When Mei does go back to grab the box of chemicals, Izuku looks to Mashi, concern written all over his face, but they don’t get a chance to talk. Mashi is eager to take the box from Mei’s hands when she returns, smiling big and dopey when the mechanic thanks her, and continues to grin like that as Izuku and Mei wish each other good-bye.

The walk back to the station with silence between the two friends for a while, Mashi still carrying the box, whatever is inside thunking together with each step. The sun is high in the sky and Izuku thinks that, by the time they get home, it will certainly be lunchtime, but that is a passing thought. Instead he’s still mostly focused on the redhead at his side.

They’re nearly to the station when finally he has to break the silence. “So… what was that back with Mei?” he questions softly, like he’s trying not to spook the girl, but she still jumps like she was shocked. Her smile drops and her eyes go wide again, this time just in horror, no daze to them at all. She glances at Izuku, then quickly away, flushing in embarrassment.

“I… uh…” she splutters. She’s trying to think of a lie, but she’s always been terrible at lying. At least with Izuku, and she must know this because soon she’s giving up trying to think of something and her shoulders slump. “She was… really nice, is all.”

Izuku arches his brow in mild disbelief. “If that’s what you want to call it,” he half jokes, looking the redhead over.

Mashi gives a shrug, still looking away. “I dunno… people just don’t like to talk to me much,” she mumbles, and Izuku understood that. The moment someone heard that they were quirkless they stopped caring about the two. Or worse, despised them. “Especially not… girls...” Mashi finishes and the boy’s head snaps up towards her, confused.

What did girls specifically have to do with this? “What do you mean?” he pushes and Mashi squirms a little in her stress. She would probably be flailing her hands around right about now if she weren’t holding the box.

“Y-y’know! Girls! They…” the redhead finally looks over, expression desperate for Izuku to understand. “They think I’m gross and mean and weird, but...” suddenly her eyes are sparkling and dazed, a distant and dreamy expression on her face. “But girls are so pretty… and every time one actually talks to me I can’t control myself, but I’m super happy anyway and it feels like... like...” Mashi has to pause to properly think of a way to define her thoughts. Izuku is patient, just watching and waiting. “Like... there’s something in my chest, all squirmy and warm, and it just wants to burst out!”

“Like your Alien movies?” Izuku questions, his expression confused at Mashi’s description. That didn’t seem pleasant at all, but she seemed happy about it.

“N-no! Less gory, more giddy!” the redhead splutters in surprise, looking to Izuku, finally out of her daze, but then she’s tilting her head and smiling to herself. “My own personal xenomorph would be
so cool, though…”

“You would be dead, Mashi,” Izuku deadpans and Mashi blows a raspberry at him. He would never understand how she could remember and repeat the name “xenomorph” and not the word “oobleck,” but that was just a part of his friend he had learned it was better to accept than question.

“Anyway! Haven’t you ever had that feeling before?” Mashi continues, now her eyes curious as she looks to her friend. “Mama says it’s normal. I still don’t get it…”

Izuku had a pretty good feeling he knew what was going on with his friend. It seemed obvious now, and he was reminded of a few things he had read in the past while skimming through the internet or the library, but it had never actually presented itself to him before. “I think… you get crushes on girls,” he says slowly, trying to remember the name for that. He thinks it started with an ‘L’.

Mashi seems fine with that, shrugging, and asking instead, “Okay… So, have you ever had a crush on anyone before?”

Izuku is momentarily jostled out of his thoughts and he looks up at Mashi in surprise. No one had ever asked him a question like that before, so he didn’t have an answer at the ready. They walk a little slower as he thinks, pulling at his lip absently, Mashi tilting her head as she waits for him.

Had he ever had a crush on anyone? No one had ever been very close for him to develop feelings, and the few people he was ever close with just didn’t seem like he could ever have a crush on them. Not Mashi, not Katsuki, not Mei, not anyone.

Was there anyone he had simply found pretty, though? A crush didn’t have to be someone he knew well. He thought of the people in his classes, of the popular kids that everyone seemed to like in some shape or form, but…

Izuku’s shoulders begin to curl as he can’t think of anyone. No crush, no attraction, nothing. He admired people, and he could tell if someone was “attractive,” but he had never felt anything like a crush before. Certainly not the way Mashi had explained it.

“No…” he mumbles, “No, not that I can remember.” Mashi’s mother had said it was “normal,” though, right? So why couldn’t he remember ever feeling something that was supposed to be normal?

“Oh! That’s fine, then!” Mashi says cheerfully, but it doesn’t help Izuku feel much better this time around. “I’m sure you will eventually!” Would he? He considers having a crush on someone, feeling what Mashi had just explained to him, and it feels alien and bizarre.

When Izuku doesn’t immediately respond Mashi begins filling the silence with chatter, going back to the idea of having her own xenomorph. The conversation is enough to pull Izuku back and he throws in his own thoughts as they climb onto the train and head home.

Still, he wonders why there is yet another thing about him that doesn’t match the norm. Why he can’t seem to catch a break. He doesn’t know what it means, and he doesn’t like not knowing. He could ask his mother, but this seemed a little awkward to bring up to her, which left him with only one other option.

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After Mashi heads back to her own home Izuku finds himself in front of his neighbor’s door, knocking quietly. If Aizawa was sleeping, he wouldn’t hear it and could continue resting, but if he was awake it would be just loud enough for him to catch.
Izuku felt kind of bad coming to Aizawa again instead of his mother, but some things really were just easier to talk about with the older man. Besides, between him and Inko it felt like they always had an answer to Izuku’s questions, which meant he would always be good and he was confident Aizawa could help him.

Izuku waits in silence, staring at the door. His back hurt from all the walking, he would need to sit down soon, but for now he can manage. It shouldn’t take that long, and if it did he could ask to sit down on his neighbor’s couch.

After a while there is the familiar sound of scuffling feet on the other side of the door and the lock being undone. Izuku straightens up as the door opens and Aizawa looks back at him. He doesn’t look like he was just woken up, at least, as he gives Izuku a mildly curious look.

“H-hi, Aizawa-san!” Izuku quickly greets with a bow of his head. The man nods back but says nothing, just waiting for Izuku to say what he came over to say. It used to be intimidating, the silent waiting, and to a degree it still is, but nowadays it is much more manageable. “I, uh… I wanted to ask you a questi—” Izuku cuts himself off when he glances past Aizawa and further into the apartment where two pairs of eyes are peaking out around the corner to see what is going on. One he recognizes, Hizashi looking as cheery as ever, but the other he doesn’t.

It’s a woman with pretty, long black hair and sharp, blue eyes behind delicate glasses, and a light but perfect decoration of make up on her face. She’s smirking, eyes sparkling with curiosity, and Izuku suddenly feels very unsure of himself.

He never knew when Aizawa had company, they seemed to come and go at their own leisure and not the tired man’s, but he had really been hoping Aizawa would be alone today. And now, not only was he not alone, but there was a new face and Izuku didn’t really know what to do or how to bow out.

“HEEEEY!” Hizashi cuts in when Izuku makes eye contact, not worried about hiding anymore, and Aizawa rolls his eyes skyward, shaking his head. Hizashi trots up, shoving past Aizawa so he can crouch down in front of Izuku. “My favorite kiddo!”

“Hello,” Izuku offers politely, voice low as he pears up at Hizashi apprehensively. The man was kind, and Izuku liked him, but he also never really knew what to do with him.

“Hizashi, give him space,” Aizawa growls, grabbing the blonde’s arm and forcefully dragging him backwards. Hizashi keeps smiling, obviously not at all troubled by his friend’s manhandling of him, and the tired man turns back towards Izuku. “Come on,” he finally says, motioning for Izuku to come inside. There was no point trying to avoid his friends, and no point just standing at the door, and Izuku knew this, but he still felt awkward as he scuffled towards the couch.

“So who is this little peach?” the woman finally speaks up and Izuku looks towards her nervously. She was a very pretty woman, Izuku knows that, but still, he notes, that he has no real reaction beyond recognizing that. No bubbly feeling in his gut or flutters in his chest. Nothing.

“This little guy is Izuku!” Hizashi cuts in as Aizawa pushes past him, tossing a jelly pack at Izuku, who instinctively catches it and busies himself with opening it so he doesn’t have to look up at the adults.

“Ohhh? The one I’ve been hearing so much about?” the woman coo’s and Izuku feels himself twitch. They were talking about him? In what way? Was it bad? Was it complaining? Was it that he was weird and quirkless?
A hand on top of his head cuts off his thoughts and he glances up at the owner. Aizawa’s expression is blank, nothing to read, as he looks back, standing between Izuku and the blabbering adults behind him. He gives the green curls a ruffle then releases the boy and Izuku takes a deep breath and relaxes. It was okay. It was fine. If Aizawa had something to say he would have said it already.

The tired man waits a moment longer before stepping to the side and looking back at the other two, waving a hand towards the woman. “This is Kayama Nemuri,” he introduces with no real interest in his voice but Izuku still nods. With Aizawa taking charge he was already beginning to feel more at ease.

The woman, Nemuri, stops talking with Hizashi to look over again and smile. She’s wearing a cozy looking sweater and jeans, Izuku notes, but it doesn’t take away from her looks. “Hello there~ I’m an old friend of these two. It’s nice to finally meet you!” Nemuri says, walking over and plopping down on the couch beside the boy, crossing her legs and smiling down at him. She was intimidating, Izuku decided, but also seemed very kind. Nothing about her screamed danger or deceit.

“I-hi… I’m Aizawa-san’s neighbor,” Izuku says, nodding up towards her, shy at meeting someone new but already beginning to feel a little better.

Suddenly Hizashi makes a loud snort and, while grinning, rolls his eyes. “More like family, if you ask me!” the blonde laughs loudly and Aizawa kicks at his shin, making him yelp and hop away. The two men stare at each other for a moment, gauging the next move, then simultaneously relax.

Nemuri is shaking her head in disbelief. “Those two…” she mumbles and Izuku can’t help the tiny smile that forms as he begins snacking on his jelly pack. “It is going to be some kind of hell working with them both.” That last part, however, has Izuku’s eyes snapping up towards the woman beside him.

“Working…?” he mumbles back and she looks back down to him. “You all… work the night shift together…?” To be honest, he had no idea what Aizawa did for a living. He knew it was at night and it was exhausting, but Aizawa didn’t like talking about it. On multiple occasions Izuku, Inko, and even Mashi had attempted to weasel the answer out of him, but with no luck. He swore up and down that it was entirely legal, but that it was tricky. Inko had eventually accepted it, so Izuku kind of had to as well. If she was okay with it, than so was he.

“Oh! No, no, you see we will all be teaching together at a very prestigious, but very secretive,” Nemuri raises her finger to her lips in a shush gesture, “school. Starting this upcoming year, anyway.” She’s smiling slyly as she now winks, loving having Izuku’s full attention on her. “It took forever to convince our Aizawa-kun to apply.”

“I didn’t,” Aizawa cuts in, his voice mostly bland save for a small undercurrent of frustration. “You just sent in an application for me.”

Nemuri doesn’t seem bothered at all by the man’s icy stare, shrugging like it’s nothing. “Oh come now, you’ll make a great teacher! And you could have opted out at any time.”

“Too much hassle,” Aizawa replies, crossing his arms, and Nemuri snorts, not having any of that.

“And teaching isn’t?”

“Hey, kiddo, you okay over there?” At Hizashi’s sudden question the other two adults pause their conversation and look to the boy on the couch. Izuku had fallen silent once Nemuri had explained what was going on, staring down at the jelly pack still in his small hands. She had said a secretive school, which Izuku would just have to accept he would never find anything out about it from
Aizawa, but that wasn’t what had made him halt.

“I knew it…” he whispers and Hizashi just about hops over the table to crouch in front of the couch to look up at Izuku. It was the blonde’s favorite spot, sitting on the floor.

“What was that?” Nemuri asks before Hizashi can yell something in concern. Izuku shakes his head, gathering himself in a single moment, and points his flesh finger at Aizawa, eye intense, making all the adults’ eyes widen in surprise. But Izuku is grinning.

“I knew it!” he exclaims and Aizawa’s expression morphs to confusion so Izuku iterates. “I TOLD you that you would be a great teacher!” Realization dawns on the tired man’s face and then he’s bringing a hand up to hold his head like he has a sudden migraine, which he very well could. Hizashi wastes no time in bursting into laughter and Nemuri throws her head back to cackle, though not near as loud as the blonde.

“I can’t believe this…” Aizawa grumbles to himself, scowling when Hizashi hops up beside him and begins poking his side. The exhausted man swats at him and it looks like his cheeks might be a little pink from embarrassment, which Nemuri has no problem pointing out.

“Aww! You made him blush!” she squeals, mischievous mirth in her eyes. She shows no fear as Aizawa turns his glare on her.

The man growls in frustration as it appears nothing is going to make his friends stop teasing him, so instead he goes to change the subject. “Kid, didn’t you have a question or something?”

Izuku, who had been grinning and giggling behind his hands as he watched the adults mess around, freezes in an instant, his eye going wide and smile dropping. His reaction is enough to make the mood in the room shift, all three of the adults frowning and giving him varying looks of concern. In the teasing and playing around Izuku had managed to forget what he had come to talk to Aizawa about. It wasn’t bad, but now that he had the opportunity to pose the question he felt unprepared and nervous with all the eyes on him.

“Kiddo?” Hizashi prompts, his “quiet” voice in use, and Izuku begins to fidget. He glances up at Aizawa again, then ducks his head. He should just get it over with, right? Why was this so hard, anyway? He could invent all sorts of things but the moment a life experience question presented itself he felt like he was out in the ocean without a paddle. And there were sharks circling him. Well, maybe not sharks, sharks were pretty cool and nice and living their lives. Maybe an orca, those guys are mean.

Izuku shakes his head when he realizes his internal babbling is just his own way of avoiding the subject. He takes a deep, bracing breath then says in a rush, “Have you ever had a crush before?” He squeezes his eye shut, terrified and wanting to just sink into the earth. The room is entirely silent around him, not even Hizashi able to make a noise, and slowly Izuku peaks his eye open.

All three adults are staring at him, dumbfounded and obviously not prepared for that question at all, but Izuku looking at them, eye pleading and lost, seems to jar them back into action.

And action for Nemuri seems to be squealing in excitement and shuffling on the couch so she is sitting with her legs criss cross, facing the boy fully, her eyes sparkling and joyous. “Ohhh! Do you have a little crush, cutie pie??” she asks and Hizashi isn’t far behind in the joyous reaction, hopping over again to kneel in front of Izuku, grinning up at him.

Suddenly Izuku feels suffocated, Aizawa’s friends talking too loud and too quickly and they’re too close and asking questions he has no answers to. At his silence they think he must have a crush on a
boy, that it’s embarrassing to him, and they are so kind and accepting but that isn’t it either and Izuku wants them to just listen to him instead of assuming.

Hizashi is being yanked away in a blink and Izuku stares at the spot he once filled. Nemuri isn’t moved but when the young boy looks up he sees Aizawa sending her a dangerous glare to tell her to stop talking. The woman pouts, but this time scoots away and lets Aizawa do his thing.

Izuku looks up at the man, his eye watery, but he isn’t crying. He feels stressed and anxious from the bombardment of questions, and now that they’ve stopped he can finally breathe again. Aizawa is staring back down at him, expression unreadable.

“Why do you want to know if I have had a crush before?” he asks simply and Izuku recognizes the tone, his whole body relaxing. Aizawa wasn’t going to mince words or make assumptions, he was going to ask for the facts and get a proper answer so that he can give a proper response.

Izuku takes another deep breath. “Today Mashi told me about getting all… giddy when she’s around girls and she said that it was ‘normal,’ but…” Behind Aizawa Hizashi’s eyes widen, realization dawning on his own face as the boy begins to talk, but Aizawa doesn’t jump in or interrupt. He just waits for Izuku to finish. “I don’t think I’ve ever felt that way before… is that weird?”

Aizawa sighs, shutting his eyes and reaching up to run a hand through his hair. He looks more tired than usual in that moment. “No, it isn’t weird,” Aizawa says simply and it’s enough for some of the panic in Izuku to dissipate.

“Listen…” the dark-haired man shifts on his feet and he opens his eyes to give Izuku a serious expression, expecting full attention, which the boy gives him. Whatever they were about to talk about must be serious. “There are all kinds of ways people identify themselves. People who like the opposite gender are heterosexual, people who like the same gender are homosexual—”

“Like Mashi?” Izuku cuts in as he listens, his ears open and his eye wide in rapt interest.

Aizawa nods once then points to Nemuri, who smiles and leans forward so Izuku can see her better. “You can like both genders and be called bisexual, like me!” she says cheerfully, but her tone is much calmer now.

“Or like all genders like me! That’s called pansexual!” Hizashi exclaims, throwing his hand up. He’s still sitting on the floor, legs crossed, looking like a child.

Aizawa nods to both of his friends then turns back to Izuku. There’s a more meaningful look about him now as he crouches down to finally be on eye level with the boy. “Or… you don’t like any gender and are called asexual, like me.”

Izuku’s eye widens in shock, mouth hanging open. Wait, that sounded like what he had explained for himself, but Aizawa was like that too? Really? He… hadn’t been expecting that. He had just assumed Aizawa would have an answer, like he always did, not that they appeared to feel the same way.

“Now hold on a second,” Nemuri sing songs, tapping Izuku’s head to get his attention. He tries not to grumble about her nails being sharp. “These are all very broad categories, okay? There’s all kinds more terms out there so don’t feel like you HAVE to be one right now, or think it can’t change later on. You’re still young, cutie pie, and who knows? Something could change or click into place in the future you weren’t expecting.”

Izuku stares at the woman for a long, baffled moment. She seemed to know what she was talking
about, similar to Aizawa. He decided he quite liked her, but at the moment he was still focused in on his neighbor and he turns back to him.

“So you’ve… never had a crush?” he whispers, amazed. He had been so worried he might be broken in some other manner, that he had yet another thing to keep close to his chest and worry someone would judge him on. But if Aizawa was the same than it must be okay, right?

“Yes and no,” the tired man replies and he seems more relaxed now that Izuku is too. “There’s also romantic attraction, which can differ for some people. For instance, I am homoromantic.”

Izuku’s brow furrows, confused again, and Nemuri is there to help out, her tone light and happy. “Think of that as more of an innocent, fluffy attraction, the romantic stuff. Usually if someone tells you their sexuality they’ll tack on if they have a different romantic attraction as well.”

At Izuku’s mounting confusion Hizashi finally cuts back in, grin big and hands moving excitedly. “Don’t worry so much about that! Actually, don’t worry too much about labels at all!” Hizashi flips around his hands then points dramatically at Izuku with both pointer fingers. “What YOU need to know is that there’s ALLLLLL KIIIIIINDS of people out there liking and loving, or not liking and loving, all kinds of different people! So whatever you end up feeling, you won’t be the first or the last!”

“And we’ll be here if you need us!” Nemuri adds on, smiling big. “Yes, I will definitely be dropping by more often just so I can see this adorable face,” the woman tacks on with a coo and reaches out to pinch Izuku’s cheek. The boy blushes quickly and squirms away, flustered with embarrassment at the treatment.

This was… a lot to take in, and none of it would be easy for him. Science and numbers were easy. They had laws and rules and were the same no matter where you went. But all of this was different. None of it had any rules, and that was the beauty of it, but also where the difficulties arose for the boy. This was raw and emotional and complex.

Yet, despite how confused he was, he felt relieved. Hizashi was right. There were all kinds of people out there, feeling all kinds of different ways, but no one was alone either. Izuku wasn’t alone. He had so many people there looking after him, people who understood or at least tried to understand him. People who cared and wanted to see him grow and improve. People he loved and who loved him back.

“Come on, I’m sure your mother is waiting for you,” Aizawa cuts in suddenly, standing and waving for Izuku to follow him out of the apartment. Izuku hobbles off of the couch, wishing Nemuri and Hizashi good-bye, not at all thrown by the tired man’s sudden change of topic. It wouldn’t be the first time Aizawa just suddenly decided to send him back to his own apartment seemingly out of nowhere.

When they are out in the hallway, however, now standing in front of Izuku’s door, a breeze ruffling their hair and clothes, they pause. It’s only now that the boy notices Aizawa is wearing his pink sweatpants and, not for the first time, Izuku wonders where he gets all his things.

The older man looks like he is about to say something else. Probably assure Izuku that he can come talk to him whenever, maybe apologize for Hizashi and Nemuri, but the boy silences him by rushing forward and hugging him. Izuku is tired and confused and aching, but he is mostly relieved. He’ll have a lot to think about, but none of that will lead to him thinking he may be broken somewhere else.

“Thanks,” is all Izuku mumbles before stepping back. He doubted Aizawa would want to hug too
long, he didn’t seem the type, and he smiles brightly up at his neighbor. The man’s hands are raised, like he hadn’t been sure what to do with them, and now he just lets them drop. His expression is carefully blank as he nods back, not saying a word.

That seems to be the end of it. A thank you and silent acceptance, but of course that can’t be because the Midoriya apartment door is opening with a snap, making both Izuku and Aizawa jump, and Inko stands there, an uncontrollable smile on her face.

“Good to see my boys getting along so well,” she says right off the bat and Aizawa clears his throat, straightening up. Izuku smiles at him. He always found the exhausted man’s reactions to Izuku’s mother incredibly entertaining. “Lunch is ready,” Inko continues, smiling down at her son, and Izuku smiles back, nodding. He hadn’t even realized how hungry he was, too wrapped up in his nerves. Inko then turns her smile to Aizawa, who looks a tad apprehensive. “You’ll be joining us, of course?” It is absolutely not a question even though it may sound like one. “Bring your friends with you.” She nods sideways and both Izuku and Aizawa glance over to see Hizashi and Nemuri peaking out around the door, grinning like fools.

Aizawa’s shoulders slump just a little. “Yes ma’am…” he replies eventually and Hizashi immediately whoops, jumping out and dashing over.

“Yes! Mom food is best food!” He cheers as he passes Inko, bowing to her politely, soon followed by Nemuri, who takes the shorter woman’s hand in greeting, introducing herself before also dashing in, excited for free food.

Izuku is giggling wildly, especially with the disgruntled look his neighbor is making. Aizawa looks over to the giggling boy, one brow arched, and Izuku squawks in indignation at the sudden hair ruffle the man subjects him to. “Come on, kid. Food,” he says simply and also walks into the apartment, immediately going to tell his friends to calm down, they were guests after all.

Inko smiles at the crowd, then turns to look at her son, her expression soft. “Quite the family we’ve built up,” she hums before giggling a little herself. Izuku nods in agreement, bliss filling up his body. This was his family, wasn’t it? A mixture of all kinds of people, all with good souls and good hearts.

“Were you able to talk to Aizawa-san about what you needed to?” Inko asks and her son nods, his mess of hair bobbing with the motion.

“Yes ma’am! I think… I have some stuff to sort out, but I feel a lot better,” he replies honestly. He still felt terrible about lying to his mother so much, namely with his robotic enhancements, so the least he could do was be honest with everything else.

“Will you tell me about it? After you have it sorted out, of course.”

Izuku looks up at his mother, he eyes so kind and patient. He knows he’s gone to Aizawa a lot recently for help, knows he’s tried to sort a lot of things out himself, but he hasn’t forgotten that the first person to ever be there for him and love him with every fiber of their being had been his mother.

He nods, smiling.

“Yes ma’am.”

The two Midoriya’s share a quiet, pleased moment before turning back around and joining in on their suddenly much busier family lunch.
A bit more of a relaxed chapter, more focus on Izuku's youth and growth as a regular kid rather than a genius. Sexuality is a complex subject, but I felt it appropriate for this.

Sexuality will not be too massive of a plot point in the story, though... I'm not too certain about including pairings, though I may lean towards some more than others. But if anyone is curious here are a few of the sexualities in this story. (just assume if I don't mention a romantic attraction that it matches their sexuality)

Izuku: demisexual
Aizawa: asexual, homoromantic
Mashi: homosexual
Katsuki: homosexual
Inko: heterosexual, biromanite
Mottai: bisexual
Nemuri: bisexual
Hizashi: pansexual

Chapter Song: Janelle Monae - Make Me Feel
When Izuku approached Inko and asked her if they could go visit the Bakugou’s one day soon she hadn’t been sure how she felt about it. She loved her son, and when he had explained himself and why he wanted to make the visit she had felt herself fill with pride.

She was still apprehensive, though.

After the last time Katsuki had visited Inko and Mitsuki had agreed that it would be best not to have the boys see each other again for a while. They weren’t sure if “a while” meant forever, or until their children had grown up enough they could be trusted together again. Inko had not anticipated her son would be the one to ask for another meet up, especially when it had been only a few months since the incident, and since he had been the victim in the situation Inko was all the more hesitant.

“I just want to talk to Kacchan,” Izuku had pleaded, looking up at her desperately. “I don’t want things to be left off the way they were. I… I don’t know I just…”

He wanted closure, and Inko could understand that. Too many things had happened to her son that were completely out of his control. Too many things he would never be able to get closure on even if he seemingly “repaired” them. He deserved to end things on his own terms. He deserved to have a chance to speak his mind and not hold anything in.

Which is why, after a call with Mitsuki, they had found themselves back in their old neighborhood standing at the Bakugou’s front door on a bleak Saturday afternoon. The sky was grey and it looked like rain would be coming soon and Inko prayed there would be no thunder, for her son’s sake.

Masaru is the one to open the door and usher them in. The house looks mostly the same with a few new decorations here and there. It’s been cleaned recently if the apparent lack of action figures laying around is any sign. Or perhaps Katsuki has stopped leaving a mess nowadays, but that seems unlikely.

Mitsuki and Katsuki are sitting in the living room together, Mitsuki’s eyes intense as she mumbles warnings to her son to behave or face her wrath, Katsuki sulking in complete silence instead of retorting. Masaru takes a seat on the other side of his son.

Izuku is shaking like a leaf at his mother’s side and she wants to scoop him up right there and leave. She did not trust Katsuki anymore. She had always been nervous about him and his “teasing,” but now she wanted no part of him. This wasn’t for her, however, and she forces herself to stay calm and collected. This was for Izuku and she would be there for him.

“It’s good to see you both again,” Mitsuki offers as the Midoriya’s enter. She smiles at Izuku then gives a bit more meaningful look towards Inko. Both of them were nervous about this.

Mitsuki and Masaru had both been incredibly apologetic after the incident, knowing full well that it was their son that had been out of line and wanting to make sure Izuku was doing okay. They would call often, asking after the green-haired boy, and chatting for a little bit with Inko. At one point Masaru even sent over a new drawing pad, the paper crisp and nice. Oddly enough Izuku didn’t fill it in with blueprints, but rather attempts at outfit and costume ideas for himself and a variety of other people.
“Hi, Auntie and Uncle,” Izuku mumbles, peaking up through his bangs, his arms stiff at his sides. Inko is mildly glad he isn’t moving around his robotic arm. It was a marvel, and worth admiration, if incredibly frightening when she had learned how it had been attached, but they weren’t here for that. The Bakugou’s could be amazed by her son later. After their boys got a chance to talk.

Katsuki still wasn’t looking over at them, his arms crossed and his face sullen. “Hi, Auntie,” he at least mumbles to Inko, which is a start.

For a long while nothing more is said, the parents waiting expectantly for their kids to greet each other, at least. Izuku is chancing glances over at Katsuki, who is pointedly ignoring everyone, and everything feels much too tense for two children. Inko lays a reassuring hand on her son’s shoulder, gripping it a little hard, and he looks up at her, his eye wide, but not uncertain. He knew what he wanted to do. It was just a matter of doing it.

“H-h-hi, Kacchan,” Izuku tries, looking back down towards the blond boy. Katsuki twitches, obviously having heard the boy, but doesn’t immediately respond. Inko feels her agitation beginning to mount. She very rarely got angry unless it was absolutely necessary, it was not a feeling she liked to harbor, but this was definitely an appropriate time to allow some of it out. Her eyes narrow and Mitsuki catches on and moves to smack her son’s head to get him to do something.

Luckily, at the very last second, Katsuki moves, and no obvious action needs to be taken. He slides off of the couch and steps around it to the back. “Hey brat! Where do you think you’re going??” Mitsuki snaps but is ultimately ignored. Katsuki isn’t leaving, however, and instead crouches down, rummages with something they can’t see, then comes walking back around. There’s something in his hands now and he still won’t look at anyone, glaring off to the side as he comes up to Izuku.

Inko feels her hackles rise, but with every last ounce of self control she keeps from pushing the blond away from her son and just manages to watch, waiting to see if she needs to step in.

Katsuki is silent, glaring harder and harder at where the wall meets the floor, and Izuku is staring back at him, shaking, but his eye wide in interest. Then Katsuki is shoving his hands, and whatever is in his hands, towards the smaller boy, making him flinch, but then nothing happens. No explosion, no screaming, no anything.

In his hands are what appear to be bracelets, but with all kinds of compartments around them. It looks like something Izuku may have built.

“The… Firework Flashers?” Izuku mumbles, his eye wide as he looks to the devices. Inko faintly recalled the name, but couldn’t place where they originated.

Katsuki’s shoulders are raising defensively, still glaring off at the wall. “Yeah, well… figured you’d want your them back, or whatever,” he grumbles just as Izuku is lifting his flesh hand to reach for the bracelets. The hand pauses, hesitant, then carefully lowers back to his side.

“It’s okay, you can keep them,” Izuku replies, voice quiet but steady now. At the offer, finally, Katsuki looks up at him, his own eyes widening around his glare. “I made them for you, right?” Izuku gives a small shrug and Katsuki is quickly back to scowling and glaring elsewhere. Inko lets out a breath, surprised but pleased at the turn this was taking. Perhaps it would actually go well after all.

Her son looks up at her now, more confidence in his presence, and asks, “Can we go outside?”

Despite how well things were going so far the concept of leaving the two boys alone still didn’t sit well with Inko, and by their expressions the same thoughts were going through Mitsuki and
Masaru’s heads as well. They exchange a few, nervous looks before they come up with a silent compromise.

“Okay, but only if you boys stay on the back porch where we can see you,” Masaru says, wagging a finger at them both, and Izuku offers a nod before heading to the backdoor. It is a glass sliding door, like the one at the Midoriya’s apartment. Izuku doesn’t wait for Katsuki, but it hardly matters because the blonde boy isn’t far behind, shoulders hunched up to his ears as he marches after Izuku.

Inko moves to take a seat in a reclining chair where she and the Bakugou’s can see the glass door. An uncomfortable lump has formed in her throat as the room lapses into silence. None of them are eager to fill the silence, too preoccupied in watching over the boys as they shut the back door and sit down on the ground, back to their parents.

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Katsuki wanted to hate Izuku.

He wanted to hate him for being smarter than Katsuki. He wanted to hate him for still wanting to be a hero even though he was quirkless and disabled. He wanted to hate him for getting hurt and disrupting their friendship, or whatever it was they had. He wanted to hate him for leaving and taking away a constant in Katsuki’s life that had always been there.

He wanted to hate him for so much in Katsuki’s life that didn’t go the way he had wanted, so why couldn’t he? Why was he, sitting here beside his childhood friend, not angry or filled with disgust or hatred?

“Why did you want to talk to me?” he asks finally when it doesn’t look like Izuku is going to say anything. He still won’t look at the other boy, just glares at the grass ahead of them. He hadn’t, and still didn’t, understand why the other boy would want to talk to him after what had happened. Katsuki had seen his face. Had seen as he just shut down, his scorched headband under Katsuki’s palm, right before that redhead came screeching at him. He didn’t think he’d ever see Izuku again after seeing that expression, after he had created that expression, and he had felt hate at that time, but not at Izuku. Not at that redhead either.

Izuku is staring at him, his one eye glued on him. “Maybe I wanted an apology,” he says finally and Katsuki feels himself scowl. Why should he apologize? The anger in his belly fizzles out quickly, however, when the image of Izuku’s dead eye pops back into his head. He knows why he should apologize. That doesn’t mean he will. “Mashi thinks you should.”

Now the anger builds and stays, his scowl deepening. At the mention of the other quirkless kid Katsuki feels his insides light on fire and he swings his head around to finally look at Izuku, glare intense and furious. “What the hell does she have to do with this, huh? Leave her outta this!” he snaps, his palms crackling.

Izuku leans away from the reaction, but his face is surprisingly blank, like he’d been expecting it. He stares back at Katsuki for a long moment before relaxing, certain he won’t be attacked. Katsuki watches him carefully.

“Yeah… That was an experiment,” he says and now it’s Katsuki’s turn to lean away, his brows creasing in confusion and defensive anger. “I wanted to see how you would react to me mentioning Mashi. You see, Kacchan, I can do experiments that have nothing to do with helping you.” The words are flat and near conversational, yet somehow that makes them worse and the blond actually flinches. Izuku pushes on. “Like this right here,” he says and suddenly his prosthetic, which looked fancy but Katsuki had assumed was no better than any of the genius’s others, lifts in a swift motion
and the hand flexes like it was made of flesh and bone.

Katsuki stares, his glare and anger gone to make way for the raw shock of witnessing such a machine. Izuku keeps moving it around for a while, letting the explosive boy see the range of motion it has, then he drops it back into his lap and keeps talking before Katsuki has a chance to respond.

“I mostly experiment for reasons beyond you,” he says and his voice is no longer blank. It’s raw and sad and his eye looks pleading as it falls on Katsuki, like he’s begging the boy to understand. “I want to be a hero for reasons beyond you, too.”

Katsuki looks away with a snap. He still felt the lingering remnants of awe, but now he was back to being angry. Beyond him? That was ridiculous. Izuku saw Katsuki as something low. Lower than low. So low that even he, a quirkless, disabled punk could surpass Katsuki. It was outrageous.

“Don’t fool yourself, shitty Deku,” Katsuki spits back and Izuku finally does flinch away from him, that calm presence from before gone. “You can’t be a—“

“A hero?” Izuku snaps, his eye flashing angrily and his shoulders rise. “I can’t be a hero? Is that what you were going to say?” he keeps going, not letting his childhood friend get another word in. “You want to know how I knew you were going to say that? Because you say it all the time, Kacchan, without once considering how terrible it is for me to hear it. Look at this!” Izuku raises his robotic hand again, shaking it pointedly in Katsuki’s blank face. “I was told I couldn’t do this, but I did it. I was told I would be nothing, but I’m proving everyone wrong. I was told I can’t be a hero, but I am going to be. For ME,” he slams his metal palm to his own chest, tears welling up in his eye, “and for everyone else who is told they can’t follow their dreams.”

Katsuki stares at Izuku as the boy breathes hard, his expression desperate, tears welling up but not spilling over. Not yet. “I was told,” Izuku’s voice cracks, the volume dropping once more, “that you weren’t worth my time. That what you did was unforgivable, but I wanted to talk to you. I wanted to understand what went wrong and why you hate me so much.”

They fall back into silence and Katsuki can’t keep staring at the other boy. He scowls deeply and turns away, angry and confused. He wanted to hate Midoriya Izuku so badly, but…

“I don’t… hate you, Deku,” he whispers.

Izuku squeaks and leans towards the blond, his own voice soft as he whispers back, “W-what…?” Katsuki’s shoulders push up into his ears and he wraps his arms around his knees, curling up and burying his face in his arms. How on earth was he supposed to explain something he hardly even understood himself? He was only coming to terms with it recently with everything that had happened.

“I don’t HATE you, damn it,” he snaps, not liking repeating himself. “I think you’re a fucking idiot for wanting to be a hero, for wanting to surpass ME even though my quirk is obviously superior!”

“Quirks aren’t everything, Kacchan,” Izuku mumbles and Katsuki turns on him.

Everyone made it clear that because of Katsuki’s quirk he was going to be something great. That his quirk was cool and flashy and perfect for hero work, but…

“I KNOW THAT!” He roars, but no explosions begin erupting and there are tears in the corners of his eyes and Izuku is staring back at him with a open, startled expression. “You wanna know how I know that??” he snarls, voice lowering in volume some. “Because you could always make these cool things even though you didn’t never had anything! Even though you were… were… worthless, you
still were smarter than me or the teachers or the parents, but nobody cared! You… you could do all this STUFF just because you were thinking about it and you wanted to, but you were worthless! You were worthless, that’s what everyone said!” Katsuki is jamming a finger at Izuku’s chest and he’s amazed their parents haven’t stopped them. Maybe because he hasn’t used any explosions yet.

“K-Kacchan, what…?”

Katsuki shakes his head and cuts the other boy off. No, it was his turn to talk now. “They said you were nothing, but they were WRONG, so what the hell would they know about me??” Everything was coming out. Things he had only thought in passing or subconsciously. Thoughts he refused to acknowledge were pouring out of his mouth and he couldn’t stop them now, even with Izuku’s shocked expression staring back at him. “If they were wrong about YOU, then they could be wrong about ME!! My quirk is amazing, but nobody cares about ME…” Katsuki hiccups and reaches up to viciously scrub at his face. “They only care about my quirk…”

He didn’t hate Izuku. He hated that if everyone was wrong about Izuku, then they could very likely be wrong about him. He hated that if Izuku really was so great than Katsuki would become nothing. He hated that Izuku was stepping further and further away from him, becoming something Katsuki didn’t fully understand, but knew it must be a threat. What else could it be? Why else would he not want Izuku to be gone? Why else would he be angry about that quirkless girl? Why else would he want Izuku to keep doing experiments with him instead of pursuing his own goals?

Some voice in Katsuki’s head tells him there’s more to it than that. He knows, deep down, he’s fooling himself. That, yes, if Izuku did pursue hero work and became a hero Katsuki could very well be seen as nothing, as the boy beaten out by a quirkless wannabe, but there was something else that was nagging Katsuki about the whole idea.

“I’m sorry I left you alone, Kacchan,” Izuku whispers and Katsuki’s head snaps up towards him. What? How had Izuku figured out that? That Katsuki, through all of this, through the frustration and the terror and the sadness, no matter what, he had always felt lonely.

No. No, he didn’t want that. He refused. He wasn’t lonely. He didn’t need Izuku, or anyone for that matter. “Shut up, Deku,” he hisses, but his voice is wobbly from crying, and Izuku doesn’t seem fazed. Actually, the green-haired boy is smiling at him now.

“Looks like we have a lot of people to prove wrong, huh?” the other boy pushes on, ignoring Katsuki’s snap. The blond hesitates then furrows his brow, glaring at Izuku suspiciously.

“The fuck do you mean?” he growls and Izuku shrugs like it’s nothing.

“Y’know… I have to prove that I can be a hero and be someone other quirkless and disabled people can look up to, and you have to prove that you make a good hero not because of your quirk, but because of who you are,” Izuku hums after he says that, thinking as he gives Katsuki a once over. “Though you may want to work on your attitude some, first.”

The explosive boy bares his teeth and snaps, “Fuck you, shitty Deku.”

Again it doesn’t warrant the desired effect as Izuku just smiles back at him. There are tears still burning the corners of his eyes, and the green-haired boy is still crying lightly, but neither feels sorrow anymore. Katsuki feels exhausted, and Izuku looks it, but no sorrow. No terror.

“I’m not going to let you surpass me, Deku,” the blond snaps. He may not be able to stop Izuku from aiming to be a hero, and maybe part of him doesn’t really want to anymore, a part that he pointedly ignores, but he still isn’t going to let anyone look down on him.
“Why don’t we aim for just…” Izuku waves his hands a little as he considers the right word, “walking side by side? No surpassing or falling behind… Deal?”

Katsuki stares at Izuku as the boy reaches out his robotic hand to shake. This wasn’t perfect. Katsuki was still angry and confused at the thoughts in his head, and Izuku was still quirkless and broken, but…

He didn’t hate Izuku, he reminds himself, so he reaches out and shakes the other boy’s hand.

“Deal.”

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Mashi’s shriek of joy has Izuku cringing and covering his ears almost immediately. The redhead is hopping around with what looks like a metal scepter in her hands. On the head end is a very obvious blaster and closer to the tail end, just under a rubber grip, is a trigger. The first ever gunstaff prototype.

Despite the surprise of the shriek and Izuku’s possible bleeding eardrums, he’s still happy to see his friend bouncing around like a maniac, hugging her new toy to her chest.

It had been months since his arm attachment and subsequent grounding. Now he was the ripe old age of ten and the winds were beginning to get chilly again in the middle of October.

During his time being grounded he had filled out a few patents for his Base and arm, as well as for the Equalizers, not ready to distribute them, but wanting to make sure no one could steal his ideas. He had also written to a few of the organizations in charge of support weaponry and hero work in hopes of getting his tools authorized for work outside of just experimentation. Those were still in the system, currently, but had evidently been doing well in the testing phase.

After he had gotten his soldering iron back he had gotten to work on arm improvements – he was already on to the next iteration of the mechanical limb – but also finally finishing up Mashi’s gunstaff. Well, it wasn’t quite a gunstaff. Not yet, anyway. It had a long ways to go to get to the point both she and Izuku wanted it to be, but it was at a good enough stage to finally present it to the redhead.

It had also been months since Izuku had reconnected with Katsuki. It was… awkward, to say the least. They had hardly met up since then save for a few lunches with both of their mothers present, most of their interactions back to being over chatrooms. They were trying, at least, and their conversations didn’t always turn into arguments like they had before, now that something of an understanding had been laid out for them both, but things took time.

Hopefully, though, today would be their next step, Izuku just needed to prepare everything.

“Zuzu! This is so fucking cooooool!” Mashi is chanting, her eyes sparkling as she jumps over to stand in front of Izuku. A clearing of someone’s throat has both children jumping and Mashi shoots an apologetic look back at Hizashi, who is standing a few paces away, a video camera in his hand, giving Mashi a disapproving look.

“Hey HEEEY! No cursing like that, okaaaaay?” the blond calls over, his voice echoing clear as day through the courtyard.

“Sorry,” the redhead mumbles, but little can keep down her excited jitters and soon she’s jumping around all over again. Hizashi laughs loudly at the girl before looking back down at the camera in his hand, pouting as he tries to figure it out. Hizashi, and Nemuri for that matter, had been a happy
surprise for today. Izuku had thought he would only be having Aizawa’s additional assistance but was eagerly mistaken.

Aizawa himself has taken to sitting in the grass between his and the Midoriya’s porch, leaning against the wall, buried in his sleeping bag, without the POMs, some of the stray cats taking to laying around him. Nemuri is inside with Inko at the moment, talking with the other woman about who knows what. The two had become pretty good friends these last few months, Inko happy to have another woman to talk to so freely again.

Izuku is busy setting up what looks like long and tall blocks of a dark grey material. It doesn’t look or feel like stone or wood or metal, in fact it mostly resembles plastics, but for the most part it cannot be identified. He sets multiple blocks up in a row across the courtyard, protective glass set up where necessary, Mashi helping with the heavy lifting when she isn’t gushing over her gunstaff prototype.

“So are these my targets or something??” Izuku’s friend asks at one point, smacking at the mystery material with the end of her staff. It gives a muffled “thunk” with each hit. Izuku looks up from where he’s preparing some tools and his notes behind his own safety glass.

“Yes, kind of,” he replies as he fishes out some extra safety glasses, thankfully some of the adult sizes. He then heads over to give one to Aizawa, who keeps pretending like he’s asleep so Izuku just slides them onto his face himself, then over to Hizashi, who is grumbling now at the camera.

“Remember that shock absorbing material I was working on?”

Mashi’s eyes widen and she looks to the material. There were five of the tall blocks set up and they weren’t small. They stood a good foot higher than Hizashi himself, actually. “You made ALL these?” she asks, amazed.

“Well… yeah. It was difficult, and I had to go on a few more runs to Hatsume-chan with mom, but I eventually was able to get a good shock absorbing material that expands while being made.”

“So… we arrrrre… testing my gunstaff AND this stuff?” the redhead hesitantly asks, glancing back at Izuku, uncertain if her assumption was true. She seems relieved when Izuku nods.

“Yeah, basically. I have some regular targets in my closet, though, for control tests, if you wanted to go get those,” he says and Mashi is already marching back towards the apartment, grin plastered on her face, before he can finish. When she’s gone it only takes a few seconds before Hizashi is walking over to Izuku’s side.

“You sure about this, kiddo? This all seems pretty… sketchy, from what I’ve heard,” the blond “whispers,” which could hardly be considered a whisper at all. Izuku looks up at him with a serious expression and nods.

“They may both be angry at me for this, but it makes logical sense to go about it. Kacchan is dealing with issues of abandonment and one solution that seems appropriate for his character is to face such issues head on. Meeting and working with me AND Mashi will help solidify the idea that he is not being replaced and that he is still important,” Izuku explains. He had done his research, tons of it, to hopefully help his friends get to a better place and understanding. He wasn’t sure if Katsuki and Mashi would ever be close, but maybe they could reach an understanding like Izuku and Katsuki had.

“Y’know, people aren’t like those reports you’re always reading,” Hizashi says, his voice normal volume for him, but now, instead, he’s speaking entirely in English. When both he and Izuku had discovered that both were fluent in English they had quickly taken to having entire conversations in the language, so as to practice and to be able to talk about anything anywhere. Nemuri hated it,
certain they were being brats and spreading rumors.

“It is literally reports ON people,” Izuku mumbles back as he begins putting together a few data reader machines. He pauses, cringes at himself, and offers an apologetic look up at the blonde for his rude tone. “But, yes, I am aware. And I know that there is a lot more to both Kacchan and Mashi than just some psychological theories, but I also know that this is going to be a great place to start because I am familiar with them beyond the reports.”

Izuku pauses, his fingers stilling on tightening a bolt, the robotic ones finally able to deal with more complex motions, partially from the upgrades, partially from practice. “But mistakes are made within the realms of experiments, in fact they are expected, which is why we make sure to prepare for… problems,” Izuku looks up at Hizashi, then back at Aizawa. Yes, originally he had planned on just Aizawa being nearby to keep things under control while their mothers watched a little farther back from the porch, but it was so nice having Hizashi and Nemuri here for extra back up. And Hizashi was even willing to film the experiments for Izuku, which was another bonus.

Before more can be said, however, a loud scream lets loose from back in the apartment. It sounded like a mixture of voices, two to be exact. Two Izuku could immediately identify.

“What the hell are you doing here??” Mashi and Katsuki scream in unison. So Katsuki had finally arrived? Perhaps Izuku shouldn’t have sent Mashi inside to get the control targets. That had been a bit foolish on his part, but it was done now and he would just have to roll with it.

The sliding doors open again and Mitsuki comes marching out with Katsuki’s ear between her fingers, yanking him along, and behind her comes Nemuri, who has taken Mashi’s bicep, and is dragging her too. Mitsuki releases her son when she reaches Izuku and Hizashi, the blond man obviously trying to hold back laughter at the sight of the unruly children.

“Alright, brat, behave!” Mitsuki snaps down to her son, who is rubbing at his ear, grumbling terrible things under his breath. The blond woman then turns and gives a sweet smile down to Izuku, saying, “You do your thing, Izuku-kun. We’ll be watching from over there,” and she turns to head back to the porch, where Inko has also appeared, looking worried.

Nemuri drops Mashi a few paces to the side of Katsuki, the redhead, in her squirming, loses her footing and flops onto the ground with a thud. She scurries back onto her feet a second later, her now low hanging pony tail just about falling apart, stray hairs in her face. “You behave too, alright?” the woman says down to the redhead, who is pouting angrily down at the ground. Nemuri smiles at Izuku sweetly and nods before going back to join the two mothers.

“What the hell, Deku? Why is SHE here??” Katsuki snaps and Izuku, having been preparing for these kinds of reactions, doesn’t flinch away or step back. He keeps his cool and looks between the two other children.

“I have a challenge for you,” he says in way of explanation, which immediately gets their attention. He knew it would.

Katsuki straightens up, his eyes widening in immediate interest, and Mashi perks up as well, a grin forming on her face. “A challenge??” she asks eagerly. Both Katsuki and Mashi loved a good challenge, sometimes taking it a little too far. Izuku had always known that challenging Katsuki could mean danger, and he had learned never to play competitive video games against Mashi ever again, but this situation was different. This was controlled, safe, and would hopefully be fun as well.

“Yep! See those over there??” Izuku turns and points at the shock absorbing blocks. Mashi nods
while Katsuki takes a moment to look at them, examining them from a distance. “Those are made of my prototype viscoelastic, shock absorbing material, name currently pending. After you, Mashi,” the redhead straightens up when she’s addressed, “go through your control tests for your gunstaff, both of you will compete to see who can do the most damage to this material.”

Katsuki and Mashi look to each other, expressions suddenly hot and dangerous, both of them grinning like maniacs. Well, that was a tad creepy, Izuku had to admit, but he would push past that for now.

“A competition? Against this quirkless chick? Easy win!” Katsuki laughs, crossing his arms and puffing out his chest a little.

“Don’t forget this ‘quirkless chick’ totally kicked your ass already,” Mashi retorts, making Katsuki’s smile drop into a furious scowl. He began leaning towards Mashi, ready to fight, and Izuku had seen this coming and came prepared.

A loud, ear splitting alarm suddenly erupts from his person and both of his chaotic guests leap back, eyes wide in panicked shock, looking to Izuku as the boy just stares back at them, his own expression blank. The alarm cuts off quickly and he turns his right shoulder so they can see the outside of his robotic arm, a circular device, not very big, built in there.

“Shoulder Speaker,” is all Izuku says and Katsuki looks furious while Mashi looks like she’s about to begin gushing, but Izuku cuts her off. He was flattered, but they had work to do. “There will be no fighting between the both of you, only science,” he says then points to Mashi again. “Did you find the control targets?”

The redhead jumps at being addressed then nods and quickly turns around to go back and grab what she had left behind, leaving the two boys alone. Well, not really alone. There were adults everywhere and some of the neighbors were beginning to file outside to get a view of the experiments.

Izuku turns to Katsuki now, who is glaring hotly back at him. “This is a dirty trick, Deku, not telling me that… THAT would be here, too,” he growls and Izuku tilts his head.

“So you don’t think you can beat her?”

“Of course I can!! Don’t say stupid shit!”

Izuku smiles to himself when he turns away. It was surprisingly easy to deal with the explosive boy when he was prepared ahead of time for it. He heads back over to his tools and pulls out Katsuki’s safety goggles, little explosions painted on the sides showing they were his, and tosses them over in silence, then also pulls out Mashi’s, which she had insisted be made with green glass.

Mashi returns, Nemuri also helping carry some of the wooden planks with targets spray painted onto them, and everyone helps set them up as quickly as possible. Izuku gets the sensors he needs in place while Mashi gets on her safety glasses as well as a jacket to help protect her from any flying wood.

“I promise! It uses a combination of compressed air and pyrotechnics to create a short, wide, concussive blast. The jacket is strong enough to handle any debris gone projectile, too. It’s still in the beginning stages, though, so we’ll
It’s just enough for Nemuri, who is always baffled by what Izuku could come up with and that he had a good enough track record that everyone just let him do his experiments with little fuss. Well, for the most part. Apparently after his whole arm fiasco he had been a LOT more limited in what he was allowed to do, but he had worked hard to earn back his trust.

She walks back to the other women as finally everything seems to be set up and prepared.

Izuku and Katsuki sit behind their safety glass, Hizashi over on the other side of the redhead, also protected, and camera finally up and ready. Mashi looks like she may vibrate out of her skin as she stands in front of the targets a few paces away, gunstaff held up in her hands like a shotgun. When Izuku gives the go and the camera is rolling Mashi presses the trigger.

Katsuki begins laughing immediately as the force of the blast sends Mashi backwards, feet thrown off the ground, and she topples into the grass. Izuku hops up and limps over to her, concerned until she’s popping back up almost immediately, eyes wide and dazed, her ponytail finally having come undone and her long hair everywhere. She looks up at her friend as he makes it to her, Hizashi not far behind.

“You okay there, Mashi?” Hizashi asks, crouching down and laying a hand on the girl’s shoulder as Izuku picks up the gunstaff from where it had dropped. The redhead stays sitting and turns her wide eyes to the blond man beside her.

“That was AWESOME!” she exclaims. Katsuki is still laughing over at Izuku’s little station. Hizashi laughs at the reaction and ruffles the girl’s messed up hair, then hands her a spare hair tie of his.

Izuku gets busy doing a few adjustments to the gunstaff in the meantime. The blast had looked good, a wide spray of fiery energy erupting from the barrel, the loud bang sounding natural with no worrisome clicks or whirring. He just needed to adjust the force so the rebound wasn’t knocking Mashi off her feet. She would also know to steady her stance a bit more on the next one.

They reset once everything is ready and Mashi has been checked over. Izuku notices that Nemuri, sitting in the kitchen chairs that have been pulled out for the women on the porch, is holding up her phone to film, Mitsuki is red in the face from probably laughing as well, and Inko looks worried but is still trying to smile when her son looks over. If things got too dicey for anyone they would step in. Aizawa is still leaning against the wall, both eyes closed, but there is no way he’s asleep.

This time when Mashi pulls the trigger she wobbles, but doesn’t fall over. She rolls her shoulder and looks to the target, pouting at the tiny bit of charring on the wood. The blast wasn’t meant to be long-range, perhaps another version would, but this one was meant to be close and personal, like Mashi herself.

“Step closer and let’s go again!” Izuku calls. Katsuki hasn’t stopped cackling since Mashi had fallen over, but at least now he’s helping with recording the readings on the sensors while Izuku jots down his own personal observations.

Again they reset and Mashi steps closer to a new target, the other one set aside for recording purposes. This time when she fires the scorch marks are much bigger, a circular shape of mildly smoking wood, some of it blistering in an outward motion from the center. Izuku makes note of that. The center seemed to have the strongest impact force, rippling outward, but most of the burning and heat was happening on the outer edges of the blast.

They try again, even closer this time, and this time the target splinters and shatters in a sudden
explosion of wood and fire. Mashi and Hizashi both yell in excitement and Izuku hears Nemuri, Mitsuki, and Inko cheering behind him along with some clapping. Mashi is dancing up and down, looking to the blond man with the camera and asking, “Did you see that?? Did you see that??”

Izuku smiles at the display then looks to his right at Katsuki. His childhood friend looks sour, now, glaring at the redhead. Izuku didn’t know what was going on through the other boy’s head, but he could guess it wasn’t good or healthy for anyone involved. Heaving a sigh Izuku decides to push forward. Talking in this situation wouldn’t help. Actions would.

They repeat the gunstaff test a few more times, making sure to have successive records, then finally move on to the next experiment. Mashi keeps on her safety gear but adds on a helmet when handed one by Izuku. It was just a simple, white biking helmet, but Mashi still glares at it and mumbles something about coloring it later.

Izuku then goes to Katsuki, who is ready to give the shock absorbing material the first go. He holds out an identical helmet, eye pleading the boy to put it on, but Katsuki gives it and then Izuku a look of disgust. “You can’t be serious,” he rumbles, a storm on the horizon. “I’m not putting that stupid thing on. I don’t need it!”

Izuku gives Katsuki a disapproving look, ready to retort, but then stops himself. No, words still weren’t going to help here. Action would. So he shrugs. “Okay,” and he turns and goes back to his station, Mashi now sitting on the grass beside him.

The sensors are set up now for their little competition, and Izuku thinks Mashi is great, but she’s terrible at taking notes on the readings, so he takes up the notebook Katsuki had previously been using.

“All right, Kacchan! You’re job is to try and destroy that material as much as you can! So just do whatever, I’m not picky!” Izuku calls and Katsuki turns a glare on him. Apparently he’d taken his safety goggles off as well. Izuku groans in mild frustration.

“I fucking know that! Let’s go already!”

Mashi is scowling now, tapping her gunstaff into her palm a few times. “Well…” she grumbles as Izuku preps the final touches of his gear, “At least he didn’t call you ‘Deku,’ or whatever that shit is.”

“I really don’t mind him calling me Deku anymore,” Izuku replied absently, glancing up at his readings and making sure they’re all at their starting places. He can feel the redhead giving him a ‘Look’ and he glances over nervously. “R-really! I don’t!” She doesn’t look like she believes him. “It’s a mean name, sure, but if I kept letting it get to me than I’d only be giving Kacchan the satisfaction and… besides…” Izuku ducks his head and stares at his notebook, flesh hand wiggling his pencil. “He’s said it so much now it just feels more like he can’t help using it.”

“I still think you should tell him to stop,” Mashi huffs and Izuku chuckles sadly.

“One step at a time,” he mumbles back and forces himself back into the experiment. They were ready to go.

Hizashi raises the camera, Nemuri and Mitsuki both have their phones out now, also filming, Aizawa has a single eye open, Inko is leaning forward nervously in her chair, and Izuku gives the okay.

Katsuki yells a battle cry as he lets loose explosions from his palms, sending himself rocketing forward towards the blocks of shock absorbing material. He’s like a blur, creating a blast of wind as
he passes. A few moments before reaching the material he turns his hands forward instead and begins letting loose rapid fire explosions, fully prepared to break down the material and then go barreling through it. “DIE!!” he yells a moment before—

THWUNK!!

Now it’s Mashi’s turn to begin howling with laughter, the redhead falling backward into the grass in her mirth. Even Izuku has to stifle the desire to crack up when the smoke clears and he sees his childhood friend momentarily suspended off the ground, smacked right into the block, before flopping off and onto the ground below. Mitsuki has fallen off of her chair as she laughs over on the porch and Nemuri is grinning like a madwoman, phone still up. Inko has both hands over her mouth, eyes wide, and Aizawa has buried his face into his scarf, but it looks like his shoulders might be shaking under the sleeping bag.

It’s a little cruel, just letting Katsuki do that, but Izuku thinks maybe, even after all their talk, he deserves it. Just a little bit.

Hizashi is giggling and laughing as he wobbles over to the fallen boy, offering to help him up, but Katsuki smacks his hand away and gets onto his feet himself. His nose isn’t bleeding, but his entire face is red from the impact and the embarrassment. He scowls viciously over at the green-haired boy.

“Give me the stupid, fucking helmet already!”

Izuku tries not to smile in victory.

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By the end of the day Katsuki and Mashi are exhausted, Izuku has spectacular notes, and the five blocks of his shock absorbing material stand completely unmarred save for some scorch and dirt marks that can easily just be brushed off.

Hizashi is handing over the camera to Izuku, his grin big and happy, then heading over to the other adults to give the kids a little space. Mashi and Katsuki lay on the grass, too tired to yell or be angry at each other, and Izuku sits cross-legged beside them. He looks over the recordings on the camera, he’ll download them to his computer later, and compares a few things to his notes and findings. The experiment had been a great success, for multiple reasons.

“I… totally… did more damage, Wannabe,” Katsuki heaves between breathes. Izuku glances up towards the two then back down at his notes, letting them talk.

“Oh… whatever… no one did… any damage, Street flare,” Mashi retorts, just as out of breath.

“She isn’t wrong,” Izuku mumbles absently and at Katsuki’s irritated huff Mashi cackles. They fall back into tired silence a second later.

“Next time… I will win,” Katsuki finally growls and this time Izuku looks up and keeps his eye on his friends splayed out in front of him. “Next time”? Katsuki wanted to do this again? Well… that was definitely a good sign.

“That’s… preservative of you,” Mashi growls back, a smirk on her face.

“Presumptuous,” Izuku corrects and Mashi pouts when Katsuki cackles at her.

“Yeah… that…” the redhead grumbles.
“Please. You don’t stand a chance against ME,” Katsuki goes on and it sounds like he’s finally caught his breath again, his chest not heaving so much. Mashi scowls and sits up, also looking more aware and raring to go.

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah!”

“How about we go ahead and find out, then—“

Both Mashi and Katsuki yelp in surprise as Izuku plays his Shoulder Speaker alarm for a second. When it clicks off his friends are both turning on him, yelling about how uncool that was and cursing up a storm, but they aren’t fighting each other anymore.

So, despite the yelling duo in front of him, Izuku can’t help but grin and laugh.

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Five months.

Somehow they had survived five months of inconsistent experiments and meet ups.

Izuku was officially amazed. He could have never seen this coming. Mashi and Katsuki weren’t close, they were hardly friends, but they didn’t try and kill each other anymore whenever they saw each other, which had slowly become more and more often.

Making the experiments competitions, when they could be, had been a great way to get great results from them, but also a great way to get the two destructive kids to bond, in some way. They argued constantly, and Izuku often had to step in to get them to relax a little, but that was usually it.

Usually.

Occasionally things would get out of hand and they would end up rolling on the ground trying to rip each other’s hair out. It was usually short lived, thankfully, and easy for Izuku to break up, especially with his much stronger, upgraded arm. He could lift both of them up with ease, now, and put these fights to an end in a snap.

Their parents had also begun trusting them to hang out alone again, after months of behaving well. Inko had rightfully been anxious about it, Izuku had been too if he was honest, but over time she too had her worries mollified enough to allow them short hang outs alone.

Such as today.

Mashi had been the one to invite the two boys out, Katsuki complaining viciously about being the only one that had to travel far as his mother and Inko sat down at the apartment to catch up a little. Mashi and Izuku had ignored the blonde boy for the most part as the trio headed out to begin walking around the neighborhood, following Mashi’s directions, her giddy energy everywhere

“What’s with the hair, Deku?” Katsuki snaps at some point when Mashi seems too high on energy to hold a proper conversation. In the past few months Izuku and Katsuki had also had plenty of time to just talk, a difficult thing for them, but a necessary thing. The name “Deku” had been brought up on a few occasions and despite not being able to break the explosive boy of the nickname, he at least didn’t precede it with “shitty” anymore. It was just Deku now.

Baby steps, indeed.
Izuku hums in question, looking up at the boy to his left, Mashi on his right. Katsuki rolls his red eyes and scowls. “The hair, Deku, the hair! You haven’t cut it. You always cut it.”

Izuku’s eye widens marginally in understanding and he nods. “Oh, right! That,” he reaches up with his metal fingers to twirl some of his curly hair. It was getting a little longer. Long enough he could probably pull it back into a very tight and puffy bun. “Yeah, Mashi’s growing her hair out now—“

“Can’t stop, won’t stop!” Mashi cheers loudly, pumping a fist into the air. Izuku pauses to let her speak but for the most part ignores her.

“So I decided to do it too! I’ve always kind of not liked how normal my hair looked. I thought maybe I would grow it out a little bit and see how it looks?” He didn’t tell Katsuki that he secretly also liked the idea of having hair like Aizawa’s, who he always thought looked really cool with the messy, black hair falling onto his shoulders and in his face. He didn’t plan on letting it get too long or fall in his face like Aizawa, Mashi, and even Hizashi let happen, though. He did still need to do his experiments and that just wouldn’t do.

Katsuki huffs and crosses his arms, looking away and ending the conversation there, apparently not caring anymore. He did that sometimes, just abruptly ended conversations when he got bored or, recently, frustrated, which was good since he at least wasn’t screaming.

“Where the hell are we going, Wannabe??” the blond snaps instead, glaring around Izuku at the redhead on the other side. Mashi hums cheerfully, not at all fazed, which Izuku finds equal parts admirable and concerning.

“I already told you, Street flare, it’s a surprise!” Mashi replies, grinning and turning a devilish look on the blond, not at all fazed, which Izuku finds equal parts admirable and concerning.

It is thankfully not a long walk, Izuku beginning to feel the echoing, rippling ache in his back, a twitchy near-numbness along his spine in the middle of his back. As they reach their destination he gets to settle against a nearby lamppost, breathing deeply, his eye shut.

“What… the fuck is this?” Katsuki questions after a long silence and Izuku reopens his eyes, having caught his breath, and gets a good look at where Mashi has brought them. It looks like an old facility of some sort, long abandoned and forgotten, falling apart everywhere Izuku looks. The land around it is dead save for a plethora of weeds, concrete paths cracked and brittle looking, and concrete walls surrounding all sides but so crumpled from age they hardly serve any purpose now. The buildings nearest are across the street, and those, while inhabited, look near abandoned as well, and to the sides there are buildings much farther down the street where people do still mill about.

Izuku stares for a long time at the decrepit building. It’s two stories tall, and it looks like he should know what it used to be, but nothing is ringing a bell. It just has an odd, familiar feel about it that makes his skin crawl.

“This,” Mashi says, hopping in front of the entryway in the wall, the arch above long since fallen away, getting both boys’ attention, and spreading her arms wide as she does jazz hands, “is an abandoned building!”

“Yeah, no shit,” Katsuki snaps, but it doesn’t seem to deter Mashi’s mood, her grin wide and giddy.

“Yeah, but, not only is it abandoned, it has no plans to be knocked down!”

“And how would you know that?” Katsuki sneers, crossing his arms and offering a smug and haughty look.
Izuku doesn’t like that look, and he definitely knows neither does Mashi, so he cuts in quickly before anything can escalate, “Her mom does.” It was true. Haganehato Mottai knew a lot of odd people around town, all because of her scrapyard. She knew all kinds of people and places to get scrap metal from, including from demolition sights. She was the one people talked to when there were metal beams and garbage to be taken away and hopefully managed and even recycled.

She was always in the know on when a building was or wasn’t going to be taken down. She had actually brought Izuku and Mashi in the past to a few of the controlled demolitions just to watch.

“District doesn’t have enough money to waste on this building. Too far out, too inconvenient a location, too much money for nothing, so it’s going to stay up for a loooooong time!” Mashi explains, gesturing wildly back at the broken down building.

“Fine, okay, whatever, it isn’t getting destroyed – which is boring by the way,” Katsuki shakes his head, growling viciously as he glares back and forth between Mashi and Izuku. “What the hell does that have to do with us, though??”

Izuku shrugs when the explosive boy looks directly at him. He had no idea what was going on, he had just learned that sometimes it was easier to go with the flow when it came to Mashi. Both boys instead turn to the redhead, waiting for an answer.

Mashi keeps grinning, her mouth will probably hurt from that later, then stomps her foot and lays her hands on her hips in a wide stance. “Ladies!” she nods to Katsuki, “and Gentlemen!” she nods to Izuku and Katsuki is already roaring in fury, but is ignored.

“I would like to introduce you to our very own, not so new, clubhouse!”

Chapter End Notes

Kacchan's baaaaaaack! And not being a total shit! I like writing their relationship as something still complex but DIFFERENT! It's really fun! Thanks to Izuku being so smart and already being so impressive and making Katsuki question shit they get to have their important heart to heart much earlier in their lives! Kind of...

Also long-haired Izuku? Yes please!! I mostly was inspired by this but I also like Izuku having Danny Sexbang hair. Just a mess of curls!

Hope y'all enjoy!

Chapter Song: Betty Hutton and Howard Keel - Anything you can do I can do better
There's a bit of a Brooklyn Nine-Nine reference in this one~
Hope y'all enjoy!

“Mashi…” Izuku begins slowly, looking at the decrepit building before them for a long moment, then looking down at his redheaded friend. She was still grinning and bouncing in excitement as she looked to the two boys. “This is… so illegal.”

“What?? No it isn’t!!” Mashi’s smile drops and her shoulders sink and Izuku feels a little bad for wiping away her eager expression, but not too bad. This idea was just plain bad.

“Yeah, it is. It’s trespassing,” Izuku shakes his head and gives Mashi a disapproving look, making the girl shrink away a little.

“Like hell I’m letting you ruin my perfect record!” Katsuki finally cuts in, his teeth bared and his hands raised and flexed, explosions popping around his fingers. Mashi immediately switches gears and glares back at him, her own teeth bared, fists clenched.

“There is no way YOU have a perfect record!” Mashi snarls, taking a step towards the explosive boy.

“No, he does…” Izuku cuts in helpfully, making the girl splutter in surprise and look to him, then back at the now smug Katsuki, her green eyes wide. Izuku hadn’t really thought about it before, but it did seem unfair that Katsuki, the boy that was so cruel in their classrooms, who did whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted, somehow had a perfect record. If that wasn’t the perfect example of how broken the system was he wasn’t sure what was.

“But… guys, come on!” Mashi continues, sounding desperate now, and Izuku feels himself growing a bit concerned. “You guys are… always coming up with cool ideas and stuff, and I’m always just… along for the ride, and shit…”

“You came up with that staff gun—“

“Gunstaff,” Izuku corrects Katsuki quickly, who glares at him.

“Whatever! The stick that shoots stuff! So stop saying stupid shit!” the blond boy explodes and both Mashi and Izuku lean away a little until he settles. Mashi still doesn’t look convinced. It was true, usually she was there to help with experiments, but it was mostly Izuku and Katsuki who were actually coming up with the ideas. He hadn’t even thought that they may have been leaving her out this whole time, too wrapped up in the excitement to notice.

“I just thought maybe I could help…” the girl says, despondent and Izuku feels the guilt building. “It’s not like anyone cares about this place,” Mashi continues, trying desperately to convince them this was something they needed. “And you can do some really big experiments or builds here, Zuzu! There’s plenty of space for anything we’d like to do! No one would bother us!”
“And what happens when somebody sees a bunch of kids running around in a condemned building?” Katsuki snaps. He’s crossed his arms, which Izuku thinks is good since he’s no longer making tiny explosions.

Mashi scratches the back of her head, effectively yanking out some strands of hair from her ponytail. “I figured it would be a good challenge for Zuzu,” she mumbles through the side of her mouth, looking down at the sidewalk.

Izuku tilts his head in question, his brow furrowing, and he adjusts his footing to ease off his back a little. “What do you mean?”

Mashi looks up at him now, baffled as she is when asked to explain things, then begins to squirm uncomfortably as she thinks. “W-well… you know… maybe you could make a cloaking device? Hide us or something? Oh oh oh! Or a teleporter!” Mashi’s eyes are beginning to twinkle again, the thought of so many cool inventions making her giddy. “We could put it inside the building so no one ever sees us coming and going!”

Katsuki scoffs, which draws the redhead’s defensive glare. “How do you expect him to build stupid shit like that, huh??” he snaps, making Mashi straighten up fully. She wasn’t as tall as Katsuki, she was only an inch or two taller than Izuku, but her presence made her seem bigger than she really was.

“Well, I dunno! He’s the genius here, not me! And not you either!” she snaps back and Katsuki boils, hackles rising like an animal, ready to retort.

Izuku, however, isn’t listening anymore. He’s pulling at his bottom lip, muttering to himself, and thinking. Those kinds of inventions sounded like the science fiction movies Mashi always watched, which is probably where she got the ideas, but could they be built? So much of scientific research went into hero work, and only hero work, who knew what could be possible outside that realm? Who knew what options they had now?

“People have quirks that offer cloaking or teleportation,” he finally says, louder than his muttering, and the bickering duo in front of him pause. He hadn’t noticed they were nose to nose by now, ready to tear the other apart if necessary. They glance at him, leaning away from each other, confusion evident on their faces.

“That doesn’t mean you can make it, Deku,” Katsuki growls as if he can’t believe Izuku was even considering this. Mashi’s eyes, by contrast, are slowly beginning to sparkle again in hope.

“But those people with those quirks… there must be a scientific explanation for how they work… An explanation that can then be observed and recreated,” Izuku explains, still not looking at anything, his eye dazed as he thinks about the possibilities, but then he looks up at Mashi, startling her with the intensity in his gaze. “I’ve told you that if we want equality for the quirkless we can’t be working alone or dividing us from those with quirks,” he says and Mashi slowly nods. He mentioned it a lot in his occasional rants or observations on the state of society and how they dealt with people like them. Mashi rarely understood it all, but it usually made sense. “We need to be working together with quirks, becoming a system that relies on each other. So… This could be the first step!”

“You can’t be serious!” Katsuki cuts in loudly, stepping closer to Izuku so suddenly it makes the green-haired boy stumble. Mashi is at his side quickly, helping keep him steady, and glaring death at Katsuki. She was still protective of her friend when it came to the explosive boy, that hadn’t changed in their time getting to know each other.

“I’m entirely serious!” Izuku retorts. Despite the fumble he’s now too eager to get started. He had
been working hard on his arm, spine, and eye, as well as the few minor inventions here and there. He hadn’t even thought of employing his capabilities in recreating quirks, he had just been doing things on his own with inspiration from media and suggestions from his friends. If he could find a way to recreate quirks, however, there was no telling what he could do.

“I’ll need to find people with these quirks first, though,” he begins saying, mostly to himself, and he starts walking towards the run down building. “Mashi, you’re right, this is a GREAT opportunity!” he says as an afterthought back to the redhead, who beams proudly before following after him.

“We’ll need to clean up a bunch inside,” Mashi says, walking beside the limping but energized genius, a skip in her step.

“Agreed. It must be a mess inside. We’ll need plenty of safety gear,” Izuku nods. The two having matching twinkles in their green eyes.

“I can blow garbage up…” the sullen words make them pause and turn around and look at Katsuki. The boy has followed a bit after, but stayed behind, his hands in his pockets, slouching and looking off to the side, an angry pout on his face.

“I thought you didn’t want to do this,” Mashi retorts, still testy with him, her eyes narrowing dangerously. Katsuki’s pout deepens and he shoots a glare out of the corner of his eyes back at Mashi.

“Yeah, well… if you manage to keep it a secret, I guess it’s fine,” he retorts and Izuku thinks he sees a dull, but eager twinkle in his red eyes as well. He probably still wasn’t so sure about this, didn’t believe Izuku could do it, but the very concept and possibility of it all must have excited him too.

“And you both would probably die without me, anyway!”

Katsuki puffs out his chest a little and smirks and Mashi is back to scowling at him. “Oh, whatever! We’ll probably die QUICKER with you around!” The blond’s hands come back out, explosions ripping through the air as the two begin bickering once more.

Izuku decides to let them get this one out of their system and turns away, walking again towards the building. The front entryway is up a few steps and once had columns holding up a small roof over the porch, but now the roof has collapsed and only a few columns remain. Izuku steps around the debris carefully up to the double doors. They looked nice, even in their old age, with curved, golden doorknobs.

Izuku raises his robotic hand and takes hold of one of the knobs, pulling carefully at it. The door makes a cracking, squealing noise, but doesn’t budge. It has probably fused somewhere with the doorframe, Izuku imagines, so he increases the strength in his arm and, with one more tug, the door is ripped open in a spray of dust, splinters, and debris.

Izuku squeezes his eye shut and flinches away from the cloud, coughing when he breathes in some of the dirt. He wipes at his face with his flesh hand, trying to rid it of the soot that is certainly caked onto it now, and blinks his eye open slowly.

Beyond the door is a large entrance room that appears to be as tall as both floors, double, curving staircases on the far side leading up to a hall just visible from where Izuku stands. Another pair of double doors sits between the staircases, ornate-looking as well, and a series of single doors line the walls to the left and right.

Everything is falling apart, and there is no way Izuku is climbing those stairs any time soon until repairs can be made. The roof has holes in it that sunlight bleeds through, showing all the dirt
dancing through the air, and it smells like rot and wet wood.

Izuku can’t help but love it.

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Izuku puts his work on his eye and spine on hold. There was a lot he needed to begin researching in order to get the clubhouse ready. He needed to learn how to safely build and repair buildings, needing to develop a plan specifically for the clubhouse, needed to find a way to implement said plan, and, first and foremost, he needed to develop machines to hide himself and his friends from the outside world.

Basically he needed to make a scientific invention that didn’t exist yet. Not even a variation of it. Sure, no one had built an arm like his, but there were prosthetics he had researched prior to everything, and robotics that had already been made to work similarly to human movements. A cloaking device like the one they needed, something that would basically make the building look untouched to everyone that saw it from the outside, or a teleportation device were both inventions people had only ever dreamed of.

Like Izuku had said, though, there was still hope. Science had to do with a lot of observations. The more you could observe, the better you could do. Sure, people had developed math theories and builds before from nearly nothing, but it had taken them much longer than Izuku thinks he has time for at the moment. With the use of quirks that did create the effects he was after he would actually have a way of observing these traits and developing ways to mimic them.

Which was how Izuku and his mother had found themselves at the park, waiting for volunteers. It had been difficult to convince Inko of his idea, that he wanted to send out an online ad looking for volunteers for a science experiment, but after bouncing the idea off her a few times they decided that it could be done if she was present and that it was at a public location, like the park.

It wasn’t the first time Izuku had searched for volunteers for experiments, but it was the first time he was using the internet to ask for specific people with specific quirks. Inko took over with that part, wording it in such a way it seemed like it might be an experiment for school, even though she knew her son was just on another one of his genius ventures.

So they sit on a park bench, with all kinds of equipment at the ready, Inko smiling down at her son as he accounts a resent All Might battle he had seen on TV, when a couple walks up to them. The man is tall, taller than most humans, with long, spindly fingers and a wide smile. The woman is average sized, and a little average looking, save for her baldhead.

“Excuse me, are you the Midoriya’s? The one’s needing help on a science experiment?” the woman asks, the man at her side tilting his head as if to emphasize the question.

Inko turns to them and smiles kindly, nodding. “That’s us. I am Midoriya Inko. My little Izuku, here, is a genius, but he needed some help with some of his work,” she explains, polite and formal. The couple seems to take to the kind tone well, taking a few steps closer now that they knew they were talking to the right people.

“We’re the Nakahara’s. My husband was online the other night and saw your request and, after reading your plea, and knowing we would be around today, we thought we would drop by and be of some assistance. Will this take long?” The woman asks, looking between the mother and son.

Izuku is vibrating in his seat, eager to get started, his eye wide, and he hops off the bench quickly, notebook in hand. “No ma’am!” he says immediately, looking up at her. “I just need to ask some
questions and run a few test and that’s it!” He opens up his notebook to a new page and begins
writing down a few things, preparing to ask his necessary questions, when the man makes a noise of
intrigue. The green-haired boy looks up, curious, and finds the spindly man wordlessly looking
between his wife and Izuku, a finger raised and pointing at the robotic arm.

“Oh WOW!” the woman responds, eyes widening in amazement, looking now to the arm. “I’ve
never seen such an arm!”

“He built it himself,” Inko cuts in, holding her own chin high in pride. There were times Izuku
captured his mother looking at his arm with an unreadable expression, like she wasn’t sure what to
think of it and how it was connected to her son, but over time the looks began to diminish. Izuku
knew they would never go away entirely, but he was happy that now his mother was much more
eager to show off her son’s invention with pride.

“H-himself??” the woman questions, straightening up and looking to Inko with wide, surprised eyes.
Her husband makes a noise of awe, still staring at the arm, and Izuku blushes deeply, squirming
under the attention.

“Y-yes ma’am,” he mumbles, ducking his head quickly to go back to the notes.

“If that’s true why would you ever need our help to do anything?” the woman pushes on, now
focusing on the young boy. “It looks like you could be set for anything!” she glances back to her
husband and mouths the word “wow” to him.

“Th-that’s not true!” Izuku quickly cuts in, straightening too fast and making his back spasm. He
crigles and shuffles backwards to sit back on the bench, Inko quickly laying her hands over his back
and gently massaging, her eyes worried but she stays silent. She didn’t need to voice anything, this
song and dance was an old one by now.

“Science is an ever changing, ever growing field!” Izuku continues, his eye turning back to the
couple, expression open and raw as he speaks. “You can never be ‘set,’ because if you are you are
lying and have stalled. I… I want to do so much. I have so many ideas, but… I’m also quirkless,” the
boy ducks his head and bites his lip. He was trying to be more confident. Trying to be sure of himself
and his abilities, to show people that he was so much more than an extra joint in his pinky toe, but
every time he told someone he was quirkless he couldn’t help the instinctive flinch as he waits for
their judgment.

Inko doesn’t let the Nakahara’s judge, if they were, and decides to continue for her son, her
massaging a little firmer as she tries to reassure him through her touch. “He was hoping to observe
people with certain quirks in hopes to see if he could recreate them in some way, or… to at least
record them.”

“Not many people record specific quirks…” Izuku mumbles, head still low, “So… whatever I am
able to find will be beneficial somewhere…”

The only sounds in the air are birds and cars driving by. A few of the younger kids over by the
playground scream while playing a game, but the Nakahara’s aren’t talking. Slowly, that instinctive
flinch still playing on Izuku’s mind, the young boy peaks up through his bangs to find the couple just
standing, flabbergasted and staring, but not disgusted.

“That is… really amazing,” the woman says after a long moment of gathering her bearings, and
Izuku straightens a little in his seat, his mother’s hand helping support his still twitchy back. The man
nods in agreement with his wife, who is now smiling down at the Midoriya’s. “So… what do you
need me to do, Izuku-san?”
Izuku straightens entirely, eye wide. No one had ever used the “san” honorific with him before. It made him feel… important.

He grins up at the woman and reopens his notebook. He doesn’t get up this time as he starts asking questions about the woman and her quirk. It turns out her hair itself is invisible, which she demonstrates by letting Izuku reach up towards her head with his flesh hand. He feels strands of hair, but doesn’t see them. Izuku sheepishly, and politely as he can, asks for a few strands that he can look at later in his “lab.” He doesn’t tell them his makeshift lab is his room. She seems almost eager to agree and he slips the strands into a vile that he marks and then slips into a nearby container.

He runs a few small tests he thinks might help, mostly to do with light and particle readings, and as they are wrapping things up he offers over a cotton swab. He looks sheepish again.

“This… may sound kind of weird… but you know those ancestry tests people can do?” Izuku’s right hand is holding the notebook still while his left moves around frantically, pencil in his grip.

“Do you need me to swab my mouth?” the woman finishes for him, finding Izuku’s easy to fluster nature cute by now.

The boy ducks his head, ears red, and nods. “Yes ma’am…” he suddenly looks up, eye wide, panicked. “B-but only if you want to!” he quickly adds. The woman laughs brightly while her husband makes the motion of laughter but no real noise comes out but some breathes of air.

“I don’t mind,” she says cheerfully, “Anything for science and an adorable boy, right?”

So that’s how the day goes. A few people with cloaking related quirks, and even fewer with teleportation quirks of some manner, show up, mostly out of curiosity, to help. Inko keeps a close eye on them all, while Izuku asks questions and runs his tests. When a sample can be taken Izuku always asks and, usually, gets one, like the invisible hair, and at the end of each he nervously asks them all to swab their own mouths. Some people agree to the last part, some don’t, and Izuku makes sure to be respectful to all of them.

By the end of the day Izuku is just about skipping, if he could, back to the apartment, his notes tucked under his left arm while his right lifts and carries the heavy equipment with ease. Inko hasn’t stopped smiling at him, happy the experiments went well and the volunteers were gracious. She has a few bags over her own shoulder too.

Izuku can hardly stop talking about the possibilities he now has with all of this research, and how he’ll get even more when he begins examining all the samples and genetic material in his possession.

“Now since when have you been an expert in genetics?” Inko asks like she’s teasing a little, fond eyes on her son as she unlocks their apartment door.

“Last night!” Izuku chirps absently before continuing with explaining his plans to his mother. Inko very obviously tries not to laugh. “Oh! Can I invite Mashi over to talk about this?” Izuku asks at some point as he returns his gear to his room.

Inko smiles at him and nabs him as he passes, hugging him close and ducking down to press a raspberry to her son’s neck. Izuku squeals in surprise before giggling uncontrollably and his mother kisses his cheek. He whines for her to stop, that she was being embarrassing, but he’s smiling wide and hardly pushing away.

When he’s finally released Inko is grinning back at him, laughing at her son, and nods. “Of course you can invite her over, sweetie.”
Izuku smiles brightly up at her, gives her a tight hug around the middle, then wobbles with all his speed back to his room for his phone.

He sets up his compound microscope on the coffee table in preparation for Mashi, the fancy thing a huge splurge of money, but so worth it. He had been saving up allowance money and with a little extra cash from helping fix a few appliances around the apartment complex he had enough to buy it instead of make it. He probably could have made it, sure, but it had enough complex, tiny parts that it would have taken a lot of time. Time he could be using for so many other things.

It hooks up to his laptop, which is his favorite part, and can even record what it sees.

Mashi eventually shows up, happy and out of breathe from running straight from her house and finds Izuku already examining the first few samples with the microscope. She plops down on the floor across the coffee table, eagerly waiting for Izuku to explain what he’s managed to do. They hardly even greet each other; just jump right into everything with ease.

“Well… The teleportation thing probably isn’t going to play out,” he admits first, making Mashi pout and rest her chin on the coffee table where there aren’t any notes or tools strewn about. “But I may have something going with a possible cloaking device. I have a lot to go off of, and mom and I will need to do this a few more times, but… I may have something?”

“You don’t sound so sure,” Mashi grumbles, chin still on the table making it harder to speak, and Izuku sighs, leaning back in the couch.

“It’s still early, is the thing, and this is brand new science, even with examples to play off of. I don’t know what may come of this…” the boy looks to his laptop screen, face pinched as the excitement of the day begins to bleed out of him and the nerves kick in. He thinks about how much trial and error this is still going to be. He thinks about how likely he was to fail. It wasn’t like anyone else had ever succeeded with anything like this, so what chance did he have?

“Probably something awesome,” Mashi decides after a moment of watching her friend. Izuku looks up to her to find her sitting up straight, her arms crossed and nodding sagely. “I mean it’s not like anybody has ever done this before. Whatever you make, even if it isn’t what we wanted, it’s probably still gonna be badass.”

Izuku looks again at his screen. It was true. No one had ever really done this. With the fall of society upon the discovery of quirks not much research or funding had gone into just understanding them beyond the necessary amount. It was seen as too big of an effort to try and understand individual quirks when there were so many available and when most funding went to keeping the peace or the hero program.

Mashi was right, whatever Izuku discovered or developed, it was bound to be new and important. Maybe not revolutionary, but they would have to see when they got there.

“I’ll work hard,” Izuku promises, smiling to himself, and Mashi grins brightly across at him, pleased by this, and they soon fall into their usual conversations on Izuku’s inventions, Mashi asking questions and Izuku answering as clearly as he can.

The two don’t remain alone for long when Inko goes to answer the front door when there is a series of knocks. There are familiar voices from the entry hall and suddenly Hizashi is hopping into view.

“HEY HEEEEEEEY!” he greets immediately, Izuku smiling up at him as Mashi leaps up to greet him, the two doing some kind of loud cheer that Izuku doesn’t recognize that they’ve probably rehearsed, pumping their fists into the air a few times.
Behind Hizashi comes Nemuri, who is dressed in a baggy, lavender shirt with shorts underneath, a pair of slightly thicker rimmed glasses on her face and a satchel over her shoulder. She pinches Mashi’s cheek as she passes, smirking and giggling at the redhead’s squawk of indignation, then goes over to greet Izuku. He braces himself for the inevitable as she leans down and squishes his face between her palms, shaking his cheeks and laughing as he whines. “Hi there, cutie pie!” she coos, as she often does, and when she releases his face he pouts, rubbing his cheeks like they’re sore.

“Hi Kayama-san,” he greets with a bow of his head, his own little payback to the face squishing as the woman whines immediately, poking at Izuku’s cheek and telling him to call her “Nemuri-san” already. Hizashi laughs over at her expense.

Aizawa is next to slink into the room, a folder under one arm, slouched forward, looking as exhausted as ever. He moves around his friends and plops down on the couch a few feet to Izuku’s left. He hardly greets anyone, just knows where to go.

This was a common occurrence; Aizawa dropping by a lot more regularly to have dinner or just grade papers. Often times Hizashi would join him and, more recently so would Nemuri. The visits were random but never unwelcome.

Izuku adjusts some of his own notes on the coffee table to leave an empty space for Aizawa to put down his folder of papers, the man grunting a “thanks,” the actions by this point natural and familiar. Nemuri goes over to sit at the kitchen table, setting out her own bag and pulling out some papers, while Hizashi plops onto the floor beside Mashi and Inko goes to make everyone something to drink.

Common and comfortable. Izuku loved these surprise evenings and he smiles as he goes back to examining his findings, Mashi now busy chatting with Hizashi. Apparently she had let him borrow her favorite movies, both the Alien and the Predator series, and he had finally watched them.

“What did you think when the xenomorph popped out?? Did you think it was cool?? Did it scare you??” the redhead is asking eagerly, and Hizashi scoffs, smiling wide and confident.

“Scare me?? Are you kidding me? Of course not! It was so intense, and had me on the edge of my seat, but I didn’t—“

“He screamed like a little girl!” Nemuri calls over loudly from her seat, grinning at the blond when he shoots her an angry pout. Mashi shrieks with laughter immediately.

“Why is a ten-year-old watching those movies anyway?” Aizawa mumbles, partially to himself. The others don’t notice but Izuku looks over to him.

“Aizawa grunts again, not happy but accepting that, before turning back to his papers. When Izuku glances over he sees a report covered in red marks and he momentarily feels pity for the student. Izuku had never had a very strict teacher, at least, not one that felt strict to him. Mashi, Katsuki, and Mei all had teachers they thought of as cruel or strict, but when Izuku experienced them or heard about them they sounded fine. What was so wrong with a ten-page paper on the evolution of slugs and snails and how it impacted the environment? That sounded interesting to him.

Mashi and Hizashi chatter on, moving on to the Predator franchise at some point, Hizashi seeming to like them a bit better. Inko brings out tea for everyone, knowing exactly who likes what and making it perfect every time, even if it takes a little extra time.
Nemuri smiles gratefully when she is handed her pretty, pink rose tea, squeezing Inko’s hand in thanks before letting her go and getting back to work. The two women had grown close quickly. Izuku assumed it was due to Inko not having as many close, nearby friends in their current apartment, and Nemuri having mostly male friends. Or perhaps it was just that they got along well and that was it. Either way, Izuku was happy for his mother.

Hizashi gets a glass of iced, lychee black tea, the ice clinking with every movement, and he whoops excitedly when handed it, sniffing at the pleasant aroma and thanking Inko profusely.

Mashi, surprisingly, likes tea as well, which had surprised Izuku when he had found out. She didn’t seem the type to drink tea, but she grins excitedly when handed her cup of cinnamon tea. She goes to take a big swig and yelps at the heat, sticking her tongue out as Hizashi cackles at her and lets her take a sip of his iced tea to cool it.

Izuku doesn’t like tea. He never did. The flavor usually too bitter or just off-putting to him, so his mother brings him out a black and blueberry smoothie. They always had some prepared in the fridge for him.

On Inko’s final trip from the kitchen she’s carrying both her own chamomile tea, sweetened with a ridiculous amount of honey, and Aizawa’s mug of coffee. Aizawa didn’t like tea either, but he sure did love coffee. He would drink just about any kind, too, so Inko liked to mix it up and bring him all kinds of variations and flavors whenever she made his.

Aizawa absently takes the mug when it is handed to him and he takes a careful sip, sighing pleasantly, and setting it on the coffee table. He keeps his eyes on his work as he says, “Thank you, mom.”

The room goes deathly silent.

All eyes are now on Aizawa as he writes a few notes on another student’s paper. After a short period of silence the tired man seems to realize that he’s being stared at and he looks up in disinterest. He glances around at everyone, taking in their wide eyes, then decides to focus on Hizashi.

“What?”

“Dude…” the blond begins, his voice remarkably quiet in his shock. He raises a hand and points at Inko, then back at his best friend. “You just called Midoriya-san ‘mom.’”

Aizawa’s brows furrow and he shakes his head, but from Izuku’s vantage point he can just see his neck turning pink under his ever-present scarf. “What? No I didn’t,” he replies, voice bored and sounding not at all in the mood for this.

“Dude…” Mashi mimics Hizashi, her lips very slowly turning more and more upward as everything begins to set in and the shock is shoved away to make room for humor. “You totally did. You said ‘Thank you, mom’ just like that.”

“I said ‘Thank you, ma’am,’” Aizawa immediately retorts, his voice still blank save for the slight undertone of irritation. The blush has grown onto his face now and there is officially no hiding. He knows he’s made a mistake and there’s no getting around it.

“OHHHH my god!” Nemuri finally breaks, laughing loudly, “You see Midoriya-san as a mother-figure!”

“No I don’t!” Aizawa snaps at her but is cut off as Inko steps forward, laying a delicate hand on his shoulder. He deflates a little, unable to be angry with the kind woman, and looks up at her. Her eyes
are sparkling and brimming with tears, her smile wide and happy.

Everyone watches as she takes in a shaky breath and says, “I am honored that you see me as something like your mother…” she sniffs and tilts her head, a bit of humor in her eyes. “Even if it was just an accident. It makes me very happy, and I would be proud to consider you as a second son.”

The fight seems to go out of Aizawa entirely as Inko pats his shoulder then steps away, giving him space and taking a seat at the kitchen table. No one says anything as he buries his face a little further into his scarf and runs a hand through his hair. He’s beet red but he isn’t denying anything anymore.

Izuku reaches over and taps his arm lightly, getting his attention. He looks over and the boy offers a kind smile. “I think it was nice, too, so don’t worry too much…” Izuku’s smile, in a rare show, turns mischievous as he pauses. “Niichan.”

The room erupts with the barely held laughter and Aizawa groans, rolling his eyes skyward at the irrational, ridiculous situation he has found himself in.

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Izuku had hit a roadblock. It wasn’t uncommon, he hit roadblocks in his work all the time, but this one was particularly frustrating because it wasn’t just one. He had run into issues with his quirk research and had moved on to work on planning the actual clubhouse repair, but now there was the issue of how to go about doing it all.

Katsuki was eleven and Izuku and Mashi were ten. How were they supposed to refurbish an entire building, or even just the necessary rooms, on their own? Katsuki was tallest, but he was hardly tall enough for it to be considered helpful. Izuku had his robotic arm, but that could only go so far. Mashi was strong, but not strong enough to deal with the majority of the work.

Izuku had snarled and turned to working now on his spine, which was mostly already planned out so it was just the handy work now. Katsuki was over, but they weren’t really doing anything. They had already tested a new upgrade for Izuku’s arm – a system in the forearm that could set up Equalizers on Izuku’s neurological command and then fire them from atop said forearm – but that had been over and done with for some time and now they sat in Izuku’s room.

Katsuki would probably get bored soon and head home, but for now he sits on Izuku’s bed, looking through one of his older notebooks with a bored expression while Izuku grumbles over his metal spine.

Their mothers sit outside in the living room, talking and laughing. Despite gaining more trust in the explosive boy, on experiment days both mothers were always nearby.

“Would you quit with the muttering?” Katsuki finally snaps after a while and Izuku jumps. He hadn’t realized how much he had actually been verbalizing, nor how loud he may have gotten, but he also is too frazzled to feel too much sympathy.

“I’m just frustrated…” Izuku admits, glaring down at his build. There are small bags beginning to form under his one eye. He hadn’t been sleeping much due to all the things on his plate, in addition to his usual nightmares, and that certainly wasn’t helping his mood. He realizes that this may be why Aizawa may always seem so grouchy.

“No shit,” Katsuki huffs and Izuku finally turns his chair around and faces him, bracing both of his hands on his knees. Katsuki’s arms are crossed now as he looks down his nose at the green-haired
boy – Izuku really hated that look – but he had an expectant look in his red eyes.

Izuku realizes belatedly he’s waiting for the genius to explain. ‘I’ve... found a way to observe the quirks...’ he admits slowly. He had written a few reports on his findings and been working on possible articles he could hopefully send into science committees to get them published. Whether he got to building the cloaking device or not, this would be a huge step forward in the realm of quirk research, even if the funding for it was hardly present. “I started having issues with developing some kind of device to mimic the quirks, so I moved to work on something else, like I always do.”

“That dart thing we just used?” Katsuki questions, his eyes narrowing, “Why the fuck would that be pissing you off? It worked fine, even if your detonations on impact are shit.” Izuku tries really hard not to snap at that. He may still be working on the actual Equalizers and their effect upon striking an opponent, but at least he had a decent system now installed in his arm to fire them.

“No, I did those in my spare time,” he admits, watching with no small amount of satisfaction as Katsuki clicks his tongue in sudden anger and snarls. It was obvious the explosive boy hated it when Izuku was so offhanded about some of his inventions. Usually the boy wouldn’t even mention how easy some things were, in fear of coming off as arrogant or disheartening someone, but sometimes he just had to remind Katsuki that he wasn’t messing around.

“The fuck is the problem, then??” Katsuki snaps, his patience gone, if he ever even had any.

Izuku schools his emotions and sighs, looking back at his blueprints on his hanging board. “I started researching how to fix up the clubhouse,” he explains, “which is the easy part, but... none of us can really do any of the heavy lifting. It’s dangerous in there right now, too, and we don’t have enough free time to do things ourselves...”

“We need workers,” Katsuki comments dryly.

Izuku glances up at him in surprise. That basically was it, wasn’t it? They couldn’t do it, but someone else could. There was just absolutely no way they could ever afford, or convince, anyone to do this for them.

“Who would ever do something like this for free, though?” Izuku huffs, obviously not expecting an answer. This was ridiculous. This was infuriating. Finally they had run into an issue that they could not fully fix simply because they were young and had no money.

“Oh my god, how are you so pathetic?” Katsuki suddenly groans and Izuku’s eye snaps up towards him, fiery in his impatience and frustration. He wasn’t in the mood to deal with the blonde’s cruelty today. The other boy just glares right back at him, however, not deterred at all as he says in a tone that suggests he thinks Izuku may actually be an idiot, “Just build the fucking workers, Deku, damn!”

Izuku blinks slowly at him, the anger vanishing, a little baffled by the notion. Build the workers?

“You didn’t have a laptop, so you built a laptop. You didn’t have a wheelchair, so you built a wheelchair. You didn’t have an ARM, so you built an ARM. Now we don’t have workers, so what the hell do you think you should do?” Katsuki looks furious that he has to be saying this, like it is the most obvious thing in the world, and Izuku shrinks back in his chair.

He... hadn’t been thinking of that. He had been so focused on observing this time around, on going off of what was already founded, he had somehow separated from his creative side. He was seeing things from two sides instead of as one, and that wasn’t going to help him. It’s probably why he was having so much trouble with recreating the quirks as well. He couldn’t work just inside the box, or
just outside. He needed both.

“Like a robot…?” he half asks himself. He isn’t looking at Katsuki anymore, too wrapped up in his own thoughts.

“Sure, why the fuck not? You made that thing back at my house, the one that brought us stuff,” the explosive boy recalls and Izuku slowly nods. He remembered that invention. He wasn’t sure where it was anymore, though. Probably broken apart for scrap, if he was being honest.

Izuku turns back to his desk, shifting the spine out of the way so he can pull over some scratch paper. He begins muttering to himself on what he would need to do. Sure, the actual builds shouldn’t be too difficult, he had already built a fully functional arm using both an understanding of robotics and human anatomy, but the problem that would arise would be how they functioned. They would need to think for themselves, they would need to process issues and roadblocks and work around them.

They would need AI.

He doesn’t care that he’s muttering again. Katsuki finally gets annoyed enough by it, and also recognizes he won’t be pulling Izuku out of this little episode, and decides to head out. Izuku only manages to offer an absent “good-bye” as he continues muttering and working.

Now how did he want to design these robots? He needed to be creative, but he also could pull from real life… He glances over to a bookshelf tucked away in the corner of his room right by his sliding back doors. On one of the shelves is a small handful of video games, one sticking out above all the others. His favorite.

Mashi had eventually accepted she wouldn’t be getting it back so she had allowed him to keep the copy of Horizon: Zero Dawn for himself. He thinks about all the machines in that, how they had been based off of the intricacy and near perfection of nature herself. Izuku would have a long way to go to ever get to that kind of intricacy, if it was possible, but it was certainly a good goal to set.

Izuku turns back to his plans, smiling excitedly, and starts sketching.

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Mashi stands on the sidewalk, leaning against a lamppost, waiting with her arms crossed for someone to show up. She had gotten a call from Izuku to meet up at the clubhouse, but she didn’t see him. Maybe he was taking a little longer thanks to his limp, or maybe Mashi was just a little too excitable and had rushed over too fast, but either way she was currently waiting and staring at the decrepit building.

It looked as broken down and sad as ever, but Mashi still couldn’t help being eager over its possibilities, even if it had dwindled a little lately.

It was late November now, getting closer to her own birthday, and she had hardly gotten to hang out with Izuku since he had begun his research on fixing up the building. It wasn’t uncommon for him to disappear for short periods of time, obsessively focusing on a certain idea, only to be seen at school, but this was certainly the longest wait Mashi had experienced and she was really missing her friend. They’d spent a little time together on his eleventh birthday, sure, but that was about it.

“Hey, quirkless wonder!”

Oh great, and now that guy was here? Mashi groans and looks up at the sky, begging any higher power to convince her not to punch Katsuki today, before turning to him. The boy is bundled up from the cold, more layers than are probably necessary, and glaring at the redhead as he approaches.
“Where the fuck is Deku?” the blond questions when he finally reaches Mashi, his hands stuffed in his pockets, and looking around for their third party member.

Mashi snarls at Katsuki, her eyes narrowed dangerously, as she growls, “ZUZU isn’t here yet. I guess he called you over too, huh, Pop Rocks?” Katsuki reels on her, his red eyes alight at the new nickname, very obviously raring to fight. Mashi straightens up, fists clenching at her side, ready to start swinging at the drop of a hat. If Katsuki wanted a fight, than she’d give him a fight.

“Mashi! Kacchan!” comes a familiar, much kinder voice to Mashi’s ears and she turns around, smiling and expecting to see Izuku hobbling up the sidewalk.

Except he’s standing right there, grinning, seemingly appeared out of nowhere. Mashi squeaks and hops back, bumping into an equally surprised Katsuki. They end up standing beside each other, staring at Izuku, eyes wide.

Katsuki is the first to find his voice, typically. “What the… Where the hell did you come from??” he squawks in a way Mashi would usually find funny. Now she can’t help but agree with the sentiment.

Izuku grins a little bigger, his eye sparkling. “So you didn’t notice me? Didn’t hear me or see me?” he questions, bobbing up and down in joy. Katsuki and Mashi share a confused look before looking back at the green-haired boy.

“Uh… no?” the redhead replies slowly, tilting her head. Izuku giggles and quickly turns to look at their future clubhouse, mismatched arms spread wide.

“It works!!” he cheers and Mashi scratches at her head, accidentally pulling out some strands of hair as she usually does.

“Fucking Deku, what are you talking about??” Katsuki snaps, thin patience officially run out, taking a step towards Izuku, but Mashi instinctively grabs him by the collar of his big jacket to drag him backwards, glaring hot fire at him. Katsuki glares back, ready to begin a verbal showdown, but both are halted by Izuku’s Shoulder Speaker releasing its alarm. They yelp and release each other, looking to Izuku in irritation as the alarm cuts off.

The boy has an unamused expression on his face as he looks at them, shaking his head mildly, then looks back at the building and smiles. “The cloaking device!” he announces and both of his friends freeze. Slowly they look back to the lot and the broken down building. It looked just like the last time they had seen it, nothing out of the ordinary at all. Even after staring at it for a long stretch of time nothing looked out of the ordinary.

“Come on, come on!” Izuku quickly shuffles behind them and begins pushing them towards the broken down archway between the broken down walls surrounding the lot. Mashi isn’t sure what she’s expecting, but suddenly having the world vibrate and shift like she’s breaking through a wall of static only to find a mess of machines milling around their clubhouse on the other side surely isn’t it.

Her eyes widen in shock. There are new sounds assaulting her ears now, the sounds of construction and gears clicking, which she definitely hadn’t been hearing earlier. She looks behind her. The sidewalk is still there, but now she can see a dome of faint, floating, twinkling hexagons. They’re small and fade in and out with a very slight blue tinge.

Mashi looks back to the machines. Most are small and just rolling around on wheels holding all kinds of tools in little claw appendages, but there are two that stand out. Two that are covered in much nicer metal, that are moving on four appendages that move similar to spider legs, that both possess four, long, snake-like extrusions. Each machine has a robotic hand on two of their appendages, a
clamp on one, and what looks like a nozzle on the last. They move around, clunky and clumsy, but still somehow precise as their appendages move through the air and work on the building, breaking off pieces, nailing new materials in place, and just doing general construction.

“Holy shit,” Katsuki hisses beside her. Even he is unable to contain the awe at the sight.

Izuku had made many things, many that blew Mashi’s mind, but they had mostly been small and personalized. This? This felt like it was a new step forward in his capabilities.

“It took a while to figure out,” Izuku begins saying as he walks them back towards the edge of the property. A black cube sits on the ground, no higher than Mashi’s knees, lights flashing on the sides and a big glass dome fixed to the top. Within the dome are all kinds of lenses and sensors and lights and things Mashi can’t understand. “But I did eventually figure out a way to mimic some of those cloaking quirks. So these,” Izuku motions around the lot and Mashi looks to find more of the boxes scattered all around the edges, creating the dome of twinkling hexagons, “are my Environmentally Adaptive Augmented Reality Domes. Or EAARD.” He pronounces the acronym like “aired.”

Izuku limps back towards the small group of robots currently roaming around. There are piles of materials that they’re using as well, which all look metallic or plastic in nature, so Mashi can only assume that Izuku has somehow found a way to create all of that.

It takes Katsuki and Mashi a second to shake out of their stupor and follow after their friend.

“The dome the EAARDs creates adapts according to the environment around them and changes the appearance of their projection accordingly. They have a constant, the building and lot in this case, and as, say, it turns to night or it rains it uses smart technology to adjust and make it all look consistent. The illusionary dome also utilizes wavelengths that capture sound from within, but allows sound to enter,” Izuku explains, grinning wide. Mashi’s brain isn’t fully following, even though she knows the boy is using slightly simpler terms to explain. She’s just too shell shocked.

This felt like one of her science fiction movies. This didn’t feel real at all, like any moment she would wake up in her bed and none of this really happened.

“There are certain cloaking techniques that were near impossible to recreate,” Izuku goes on, “but I hope to continue examining them. Mostly it’s making something that moves invisible, while this is a stationary illusion. The teleportation technology is also a long, long way off. Now… as for these robots? They’re pretty early models. All of them, even the Bendies,” he points to the larger bots working on the house, “can be folded into a more compact form for travel. I hope for them to get most of the preliminary repairs done first so I can build even better robots here in the future!”

Izuku is talking a mile a minute and it feels like Mashi and Katsuki are just along for the ride, looking around in shock and awe. This was amazing and exciting and… Mashi looks again at Izuku. Only now is she noticing the dark circles under his eye, his hair tangled and messy, his skin pale. He looks oddly like a younger, green-haired and one-eyed Aizawa…

“Zuzu…” she cuts in and Izuku stops and looks back at her. He is positively vibrating.

“Yes? Do you have a question?” he asks, eager to talk about what he’s made. He was pointing over towards the piles of materials, explaining how they were actually variations to his shock absorbing material and building process, but now he waits for Mashi to speak.

“This is… really intense,” she breathes, looking back up at the twinkling dome above their heads. “Like… holy shit, Zuzu, this is SO COOL, but, uh…” Mashi’s brows furrow and she forces down her desire to start gushing in favor of checking on her friend. “When was the last time you slept?”
Izuku hesitates, his smile dropping. He looks to her, then to Katsuki, who is being remarkably silent in the face of all this. “I’ve… slept…” he replies carefully, not sure how to answer, obviously not wanting to lie to them. “Recently…”

“How recently?” Mashi questions, her brows lowering. She didn’t like this. She was proud of her friend, and her amazement in him just kept growing and growing, but she didn’t like this.

“I… I don’t know…?” Izuku slowly admits, looking away and down. His fingers are twitching and now that it’s being pointed out to him he seems to also realize how exhausted he is. He sways momentarily on his feet before righting himself and shaking his head. “I just… I just really wanted to do this… There was… so much…” he mumbles as Mashi hurries over to him, taking hold of his arms to make sure he doesn’t collapse. The energy was collapsing fast.

“You don’t have to rush these things, Zuzu,” Mashi berates, but now she feels bad. She had been so excited and vocal about the clubhouse. Had she made Izuku feel like he had to do this? That he had to hurry? “You don’t… You don’t have to ALWAYS be inventing something,” she whispers.

“He’s always doing this,” Katsuki finally speaks up, appearing at their sides and looking his childhood friend over. Izuku flinches and looks away quickly. “He’s always rushing and getting absorbed with shit and working till he pukes. Haven’t you noticed, Wannabe?” the blonde snaps, glaring at Izuku and then at Mashi.

“Are…” Izuku mumbles then bites his lip. Tears are forming in his eye now and he tries valiantly to keep them in but they’re soon rolling over his cheeks. “Are you guys not happy with it?” he hiccups and Mashi leans away, eyes wide in surprise.

“W-what…?” she questions, unbelieving.

“What kind of stupid shit is this??” Katsuki snaps and Mashi releases one of Izuku’s arms to give a hard punch to the blond’s arm, glaring at him. Katsuki leans away from her, very pointedly not grabbing where she had punched hard enough to bruise, and focuses on Izuku instead. “You have to be kidding, this isn’t about whether we like your fucking inventions or not, it’s about you being stupid and not sleeping!”

“You…” Mashi eyes Katsuki oddly, not sure how she feels about his angry berating, “You can’t do this shit to yourself, Zuzu, you’re gonna hurt yourself… What you’ve done is crazy amazing, but…” Mashi glances again at Katsuki, who shrugs and stuffs his hands back in his pockets.

“Let’s just bring his shitty ass back to his apartment, already. How are you going to make any more cool shit if you keel over??”

Izuku glances over at his childhood friend, his eye widening behind his tears. Mashi feels a little shocked too. She’s never heard Katsuki refer to anything Izuku has made or done as “cool” before.

Izuku takes a deep, shaky breath, swiping quickly at his face to rid himself of some of his tears, but they won’t stop coming now. Mashi figures he has even less control over them than usual with how tired he must be. “Yeah,” he croaks and finally he sounds as exhausted as he looks. He nods and looks between Mashi and Katsuki. “Let’s go… This’ll be here when we get back…” he agrees and Mashi moves to walk at his side, hooking her arm with his robotic one.

They move slowly away, passing through the dome with ease, and Mashi has to glance back. The building looks normal, no machines or EAARDS to be seen, and it’s truly baffling, and she WILL be gushing about it later, but for now she has a best friend to be taking care of.
Katsuki doesn’t hook his arm with Izuku’s other one, but he does walk on the green-haired boy’s opposite side, offering protection from passersby for the extra wobbly boy.

They make it to the apartment after a while and Izuku, half asleep by now and red faced from crying, fumbles with the lock and they head in. It takes no effort at all to get Izuku into his bed and tucked in. He’s still in his day clothes, but it hardly matters. It’s not like any of them have the energy anymore to even consider getting him changed.

Mashi and Katsuki stand awkwardly beside each other, looking at their friend as he passes out the second his head hits his pillow.

“He’s an idiot,” Katsuki huffs finally, and Mashi can’t help but nod.

“Yeah… good thing we’re here, then,” she replies, her voice low for once. It feels a little odd to agree with the boy at her side, but in the wake of everything she figures it makes sense. They’re all tired and blown away.

The explosive boy scoffs, flicking his head to flip some of his spiky hair out of his face, and scowls. “He’d have gotten himself killed if we weren’t here.”

Mashi hums in agreement but cringes to herself. They really hadn’t helped at all, not until it was too late, and she was still pretty sure they may have been the one’s responsible for urging Izuku to this point. “We’re idiots, too,” she mumbles.

“Speak for yourself,” Katsuki snaps, but when Mashi doesn’t rise up to the angry tone, he seems to sober as well, looking away sharply and scowling to himself. “Yeah… guess we are…” he eventually whispers, like he didn’t really want to, but he couldn’t help it.

“We need to be better,” Mashi continues.

The silence stretches on for a long, long moment and it hurts a little, the waiting, but then Katsuki breathes out a small, “Yeah,” and Mashi’s shoulders relax. Both of them nod absently.

They needed to be better. They would be better. No matter what.

For now, though, they are tired too, and rest seems like a pretty good idea.

Later Inko would return home from work, tired and worn, and will go in to check on her son when he doesn’t answer her call.

She’ll find, instead, her son laying in the middle of his bed with Katsuki and Mashi on either side of him, Mashi snoring like a motorboat, Katsuki’s foot across Izuku and digging into the girl’s gut, and Izuku looking more serene than Inko has ever seen him.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, Izuku has officially made the next big step in his technological prowess!

Hope you all enjoyed! Let me know what you thought!

Chapter Song: Skillet - Feel Invincible
Chapter Notes

There's a... lot of talking? I'm really nervous y'all aren't going to like this chapter, but I hope you do!

Also? Guys, your comments and kudos and bookmarks and everything are so, so kind. It means the world to me whenever I get to read what y'all think, even if it's just a "I love this!" It means so much...

And everyone saying Izuku needs to start selling stuff? Shhhh it's okay, it will be addressed, I promiseeeeee

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I don’t wanna be your friend anymore,” Mashi groans as she lays on her back in Izuku’s living room, staring up at the ceiling fan as it lazily turns. Izuku sighs as he sits at his couch, watching his friend. Usually he would have teased her, smirked at her obvious not-threat, but this time he can’t find the will to do it.

Their fifth year in elementary school had just ended, which meant they had plenty of time to goof off and build between grades. The clubhouse was still a long way from being finished, the Bendy robots making progress, but slow progress, which meant Izuku could focus on his other, big projects.

His robotic spine and eye sit on a sterile sheet of cloth on the coffee table, completed and ready to be attached. It’s a Sunday and his mother is at work, just like last time, and the spike of guilt in Izuku’s system makes him nauseous, both for going behind everyone’s backs and for asking Mashi to go through with this again.

“This is…” Mashi raises her hands to scrub at her face, a loud groan escaping her throat. “This is so much worse than the arm. It HAS to be!”

“No, no!” Izuku waves his hands frantically, sliding off the couch to sit by Mashi’s head. “I made sure to test these just like I did the Base. Actually, I did it more, since these are more sensitive locations…”

“Sensitive locations…” Mashi repeats and turns her head to give Izuku an unimpressed look. “You call your spine and your eye ‘sensitive locations?’ Like they ain’t the most fuckin’ delicate parts of your fuckin’ body.” It’s amazing how she hasn’t begun yelling yet, Izuku notes, but she also looks like she’s just too tired to raise her voice right now.

“Mashi…” Izuku breathes sadly, lowering his head. The rings under his eye are thankfully gone now and his growing hair is pulled back into a small, but neat, bun. The fact he was taking better care of himself doesn’t seem to help his friend’s mood, however.

“Don’t you ‘Mashi’ me!” she snaps, lifting an arm to point at Izuku’s face, the finger only a centimeter from the boy’s nose, before she lets it flop down. She glares at him a moment longer before blowing out a long stream of air and sinking further into the floor. “Alright… just… tell me how they work first?”
This worked. Last time, after Izuku had gone into detail about his Base, assuring he knew exactly what he was doing and that it was safe, Mashi had been much more willing to help. Why should this time be any different?

“Well…” Izuku starts and looks over at the devices still propped on the table. “The spine has two components. First is the Bridge, which is the part that connects to the nerves.” Izuku shifts and slides off his baggy shirt in a quick movement. Mashi watches him curiously as he turns around on the floor so she can see his back. Markings have been drawn over his spine much like he had done over his stump when attaching the Base. Two very prominent ones are a pair of circles. One is placed just above his tailbone while the other sits between the bottom of his shoulder blades. There’s heavy scarring all over his back, but the most seems to be concentrated between the two circles.

“The Bridge will act as a… uh… well, a bridge. I’m not paralyzed, the pathway down my spine is still active, but it’s damaged. The Bridge will utilize that pathway, redirecting it over the damaged section, and reconnecting at the base. After that we set up the second piece, the Reinforcement, which is what the Bridge will pass through and will keep it safe as the vertebrae protect the spinal cord. Actually,” Izuku glances over at his devices, “it’ll be stronger than a regular spine. Once everything is attached my chances of getting a spine related injury will lower considerably compared to that of another hero.”

Mashi slowly sits up, eying Izuku as the boy grins. It had taken him the majority of his time to set that particular feature up. His spine replacement was going to sit outside of his body, so of course it needed to be strong and protected. He had been aiming to at least get it in range with a regular spine’s capabilities, but with his progress with his shock absorbing material he had been able to go far beyond.

“Plus, if somehow I do manage to get in a situation where enough damaging force is applied to it, both the Reinforcement and Bridge have releasing mechanisms that work within a few milliseconds leaving only the necessary connectors, making it so they take the brunt of the force, but that I still have a working spine and can just rebuild the necessary replacement pieces.”

Finally Mashi looks like she may be calming down, nodding slowly as Izuku speaks. She trusted Izuku not to lie to her about this, she probably would have been able to tell if he was anyway, and the fact he had considered all these safety precautions was assuring.

“The Bridge’s permanent connectors are like those disks under your Base, right?” she questions and Izuku nods. Right, he had to have a few things forever connected to him, but he made sure they were limited and small. Only the necessary parts. That way he could update things around them as needed.

“What about the Reinforcement?”

Izuku makes an “ah” sound, like he’d almost forgotten, and nods, shifting over towards the coffee table to pick up one of the devices and holds it up between his metal fingers. It’s small, maybe one or two inches long, made out of a slightly curved piece of black material and a curving, sharp hook on either end of the long piece. On the inside of all the pieces are itty-bitty dots and mechanics, and on the outside of the flatter piece is a long, oval indentation.

“These little things will latch onto a single vertebrae at a time, these hooks will curve safely around the lamina, er… the spiky part on the outside of the spine?” Mashi nods slowly, only slightly knowing what he’s talking about. “Then fuse with the body of the vertebrae, or the big, chunky part, and basically become part of the vertebrae. No mobility lost, no loose parts to cause damage, no cutting off any nerves, just a small extension of the bone for the Reinforcement to connect to.”

Mashi scoots closer to get a better look at the tiny device. Her eyes finally have a bit of a twinkle in
them, her amazement at the builds beginning to show.

“We’ll have to attach each one individually,” Izuku admits after a time. He’d made sure to mark where each one of the Extenders would go on his back, which had been a lot easier to do when he adjusted his robotic arm a bit to let it curve behind his back in a way that was definitely unnatural for a regular arm.

The redhead looks unsure again as she leans back and crosses her arms. “Aren’t there, like… a bunch of verte… vertie…”

“Vertebrae.”

“Yeah, that. In your spine? Won’t that take a while?”

Izuku hums and taps his chin in thought. “Not as long as you might think? I only am extending the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae. There are twelve thoracic, and five lumbar, that’s seventeen, and the Bridge electrodes are connected to the eighth thoracic and fourth lumbar vertebrae, so that’s actually fifteen Extenders needed and they do most of the work. You’ll just have to place them on the dots I’ve made.”

“I have no idea what you just said,” Mashi immediately deadpans and Izuku chuckles suddenly and sheepishly, slouching in on himself.

“Not too long. Don’t worry.” he clarifies a little and the redhead nods, then looks back at the devices on the coffee table. Sitting beside the spinal pieces, atop a small stand, is what looks like a short, hollow cylinder made up of a few disks and sheets of… something. It doesn’t look like metal or plastic, but they do look to have lines and dots all over the interior and exterior like computer chips.

“That’s the Artificial Orbit…” Izuku says softly. This, right here, was his true pride and joy. His arm had been huge, his spine had been tricky, but this? This was going to make the biggest difference of all. “It’ll go into my eye socket and latch onto interior walls. It isn’t ridged at all, it’s actually quite thin, it just looks frozen right now,” Izuku adds on the last part as an after thought.

“So… it’ll be where your new eye will go, right?” Mashi questions and Izuku shoots her a smile.

“Exactly!” he says and she beams, proud of herself. “It’ll connect to the remaining nerves still in there, as well as some of the nerves in my right eye to marginally piggy back off of their capabilities.” Mashi’s brows furrow and she tilts her head, confused, and Izuku hums, considering the best way to explain. “I based that part off of a particular hearing aid, actually. There are hearing aids out there for people who are deaf in one ear. They take in noise and send it through a laser to the other, working eardrum so it creates the illusion of surround sound.”

“Will you actually be able to see out of your new eye?” the redhead asks, glancing over at the Artificial Orbit again.

“Yes, it won’t be a full illusion like the hearing aid, it’ll just be less strenuous,” he replies with a nod, “Otherwise there would have been no room for the computer.”

Silence falls over the pair, Mashi still staring at the device, her expression blank. Slowly she turns to look back at Izuku, who is sitting with a nervous look in his eye, waiting for the reaction to what he had just said.

“I’m sorry… the what?” Mashi questions in a surprisingly quiet voice. Izuku gulps.

“Super computer, actually,” Izuku corrects himself, fidgeting with his hands in his lap.
“Zuzu…” Mashi takes a deep breath and leans towards her friend. The boy leans away from her, arms coming up to wrap awkwardly around his head as if to shield him from the girl’s eyes. “Why are you putting a super computer in your head?”

“W-well… uh… I was thinking ahead, right?” the green-haired boy stammers, shrinking in some, trying to appear smaller as Mashi just keeps staring at him. He didn’t like that he couldn’t read her expression. He could always read her expressions. “Each of my replacements gives me an edge, right? My arm will also house weaponry and is stronger than a regular arm. My spine will offer slightly increased mobility and also, hopefully, house some tools I’m considering. The eye, I figure, could be a lot more than just an eye, too…”

“So you decided to make it a super computer,” the girl clarifies, trying to make sure she understands this fully.

Izuku chews on his lip and curls his arms a little tighter around his head. “Yeah…?”

“So… what? You’ll be able to see a computer screen in front of your face?” Mashi continues, her eyes beginning to narrow, and Izuku shakes his head.

“No… well… I’ll be able to pull up aspects… It’s going to be connected directly to my brain, so it should, after practice, just become another part of myself. I hope to use it to control other devices wirelessly as well as… other stuff… I have a lot planned…” Izuku glances away.

He did have a lot planned, and it would all take a lot of getting used to. He was able to control the devices in his robotic arm pretty well, like it really was an extension of his body. It was all connected to his nervous system, meaning, after some practice, he could control it with his brain. The eye would be different, though, in that it was like a new body part all together. The devices in his arm were still connected to his arm, and despite the super computer being tied to his robotic eye; it was like it’s own entity. It was going to take a lot of practice, but Izuku was confident enough in himself, confident in his builds, that he knew this would work out.

“Zuzu…” Mashi begins slowly, leaning in closer and raising a finger to jab it into Izuku’s chest. Izuku squeaks, feeling like he was being broken apart by the girl’s glare. “How DARE you…” Izuku squeezes his eye shut. He should have known. He should have known he would push his friend too far. He had pushed her trust too far and now he had screwed up. What he was asking her to do, what he had planned, was too much and she had finally realized it and he should be ashamed of himself.

“How DARE you be so much cooler than I ever thought possible!”

“Eh?” Izuku straightens in surprise, eye opening and arms uncurling slightly from his head as he now looks at the grinning face of his friend.

Mashi takes one look at the boy’s surprised expression and lets out a very unladylike snort before throwing her head back and laughing. Izuku’s arms finally lower to his sides as he watches her laugh. She laughs so hard she snorts and falls backwards onto her back, legs kicking in the air.

“Oh god! You should see your face!!” she shrieks and Izuku deflates, pouting and glaring down at her as she roles around.

“Oh god! You should see your face!!” she shrieks and Izuku deflates, pouting and glaring down at her as she roles around.

That was just wrong,” he mumbles and she laughs a little harder. “Maybe I don’t want to be your friend now. Huh? Did you think of that?”

Mashi sits up, her smile big as she giggles and she wipes a tear from her face. “What a plot twist!”
she comments, not at all fazed, and Izuku huffs, looking at her with a very unpleasant expression. "Oh calm dooooooown!" she grins and reaches out to pat the top of his head, "It was getting too serious in here! You know I had toooooo."

Izuku huffs again and looks down, but now a small smile was forming on his lips. "You aren’t upset with me for asking you to do this again?" he whispers.

Mashi hums like she’s thinking about something trivial, swaying back and forth. "Nah, you know I got your back, no questions asked. I just don’t get any of this or how it works, but you obviously do and I trust you," she nods and finally looks at Izuku, who peaks up at her. They meet eyes, dark green to emerald, and Mashi smiles. "Y’know, I realized somethin’ real interesting about you, Zuzu. You’re heart is real reckless, but your brain is super cautious. And this shit? This is brain territory, so I know you’ve got everything covered. You’ve got the things that are covered, covered! Your covered covers are covered!! Your—"

“Okay!” Izuku cuts in, smiling and chuckling at his friend, who grins back at him, “I get it! Thank you.”

They smile at one another for a moment, giggling and basking in their trust for each other, before Mashi smacks her hands on her knees and nods, expression turning serious and devoted. “Okay! So what do we do first?”

Izuku points over to some folded clothes. “Change into those, please? I’ll meet you in the bathroom.”

Just like last time, he doesn’t add on, but Mashi seems to pick up on it. The atmosphere has quickly changed back to something solemn as the redhead grabs the clothes and hurries off to Izuku’s bedroom while he begins moving his devices to the bathroom.

The set up is a little more complex this time, with a few more sheets on the floor and a bowl of disinfectant. He lays the devices beside the tub and climbs in. He’s wearing swim trunks and has left his shirt out in the living room for now. He sits down in the tub, stretches his arms above his head for a moment, and settles, breathing as evenly as he can force himself.

Talking to Mashi had helped, but even so his own nerves were still rattled. ‘Just like last time,’ he thinks to himself yet again. It felt like so much was going the same way. Izuku was anxious but excited, sitting yet again in the bathroom, sound proofing in the walls turned on, devices at the ready, Mashi gathering her own nerves as she got dressed.

But things were different this go round, too. His Slumber had been modified profusely until it was able to cancel out pain receptors in the nerves, and only that, allowing for the devices to still be connected, but to keep them from hurting Izuku. There were more precautions with the connections as well, since there would be so many pieces, and it would rely heavily on Mashi’s help. Much more than last time.

No matter what, despite all the differences, Izuku had made sure to test the pieces extensively. Even more than his Base. He had made molds, just like last time, out of the records in his medical files on his injuries and had set them up as true to form as was possible. Where he had tested his Base a couple of hundred times, he had tested both the Spine and Orbit builds over a thousand, each. He was not going to make any mistakes. It just wasn’t going to happen.

He was going to be a hero, and this was how.

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Mashi crouches beside the tub, her hair tied into a new ponytail and a bandana tied over her head to
avoid loose strands. She has gloves on this time because she will apparently be a lot more active in this than last time.

Izuku has laid down on his front in the tub, a rolled up sheet under his face, his back and all the markings on it plain to see. He’s short, but he still has to bend his knees a little by the faucet. By his robotic hand on his far side from Mashi is a box control panel with a series of buttons running along two columns and his finger hovers over the top left one.

Mashi was in charge of lining up the Extenders on her friends back. Dots had been placed along Izuku’s spine, and Mashi knows he managed it by adjusting the joint in his robotic arm, but it still feels odd to think he did this to himself. The dots come in pairs, one on either side of his spine, perfectly aligned, looking like the eyelets in sneakers.

Izuku had everything laid out in the right order for Mashi. She would be taking one Extender at a time in the order they’re laid out, place the two little pointy hooks to a pair of dots, moving from top to bottom, and once they were perfect Izuku would tap to corresponding button on his panel and the Extenders would take over. After all the Extenders were placed then they would do the exact same thing but with the two connecters for the Bridge.

Mashi picks up the first Extender, dips it quickly into the disinfectant, and in the other hand uses a wipe also covered in disinfectant to quickly swipe over the spot with the first two dots on her friend’s back. Izuku doesn’t even move despite how cold it must be, his back already numb from his Slumber injection.

“This feels so official,” Mashi comments. She was anxious, and nervous, but she trusted Izuku, and this did feel kind of fun. Like they were playing doctor except… actually playing the parts of doctors. Well, Izuku was. Mashi was more like his nurse, which she was cool with.

Izuku snorts as Mashi lines up the first Extender, taking her time to make extra sure it’s lined up perfectly. Izuku had made sure everything in his devices were safe and now was trusting that Mashi was just as safe as his tedious experimentation. She wasn’t going to be impatient and mess this up. It wasn’t an option.

“It kind of is. We’re taking inspiration from actual practices, in a way,” the boy replies quietly, voice muffled.

Mashi hums in agreement, but doesn’t answer, too focused on the task at hand.

Finally the Extender is perfect and she grunts, “Okay, first one’s ready.” Izuku doesn’t say a word, just stays still as he taps the first button. It takes a second for the little device to begin digging itself into Izuku’s back and Mashi no longer has to hold onto it. She watches in amazement as it moves on its own, wiggling itself into freckled skin, blood trickling from the points of entry but hardly anything. When the slightly curved top lays flat against Izuku’s skin, pressed close so it hardly raises much higher than his back, Mashi flinches away when she hears the muffled whirring and hissing and grinding as the Extender fuses to Izuku’s spine.

The noises hardly last a second, and Izuku doesn’t budge an inch, and once the Extender is fully settled and done the oval on the top begins to glow a faint blue.

“Whoa…” Mashi whispers in amazement, staring wide-eyed at the device now attached to her best friend.

“One down, fourteen more to go,” Izuku says, still muffled, but as a reminder to Mashi to not stop now. They needed to keep moving.
They do it again. And again. And again. Eventually they get into a rhythm where Mashi begins lining up the next Extender while the last one is still attaching. She wipes off blood periodically, dips the devices into the disinfectant, wipes off Izuku’s back, it’s going well. She even knows when they begin connecting to lumbar vertebrae because the Extenders are just a tiny bit longer.

By the time all the Extenders have been attached it has been about thirty minutes and Izuku has a line of lights going up his spine and Mashi now has one of the Bridge devices in hand. The circles have markings around them in different colors to show exactly where to place the disks and in what configuration.

They both take a moment to breathe, done with one task, and very much exhausted, but not done with everything yet.

Mashi leans back forward over the tub and lays the disk where it needs to. This really was so much easier to do without Izuku screaming his head off, but all the Extenders didn’t connect directly to the nerves. The Bridge connections would be the true test that Izuku’s new variation of Slumber worked.

Mashi could feel herself shaking and she leans away to shake out her arms and stretch her neck. This was fine. This was totally fine. She was just an eleven-year-old performing surgical-like procedures on her best friend’s spine. Totally normal.

She gulps and lays out the disk again, making absolutely sure it’s perfect, before giving Izuku the okay. He hits one of the last two buttons on his panel and the connector begins to whir. A tiny stream of blood trickles to the side, just like the Extenders, and Mashi chews on her lip as she waits and watches.

She doesn’t know how this will work, and part of her doesn’t want to know. There’s the now familiar sound of the device fusing to the vertebrae and then—

Izuku’s back spasms and Mashi jumps back in shock, eyes wide in terror as he twitches and squirms. “Zuzu?? Oh fuck, what?? Does it hurt??” She questions loudly, hands hovering out, not sure what she needed to do. He isn’t screaming, he’s hardly even grunting, but that could mean anything and Mashi wouldn’t know.

“I’m fine!” Izuku suddenly manages just as the spasming settles down and all that is left is for his back muscles to twitch. Mashi crouches down closer to her friend’s head as he turns it enough to look up at her. He looks ruffled, but not panicked. “I’m fine. I promise,” he says as calmly as he can and offers up a smile. “It was just the nerves firing. Nothing dangerous.” When Mashi still doesn’t calm down or look convinced he shifts to reach up with his flesh hand and take one of hers, squeezing it.

“Mashi, I swear to you, that wasn’t a bad thing. It actually means the nerves are doing what they need to,” he says softly and Mashi gulps but nods. Okay. If he was sure, than she would listen. She has to shake herself out again before crouching back down for the last piece to Izuku’s spine.

As she’s lining it up she has a moment of awareness that this all seems so ridiculous, that they have to do this in secret, but she supposes it makes some sense too. If they tried to do it officially they may end up having to wait years and years before they could get permission to do it, and even then someone else in the process may screw up Izuku’s work and ruin everything.

She shakes her head out of her thoughts and focuses on the present. She lines up the second Bridge device perfectly and gives the okay.

This time, when Izuku spasms, Mashi doesn’t leap away, but she does cringe as she watches. It
looked painful, even if Izuku’s face is calm when she spots it for a second, and he had assured her it was fine and expected.

When he settles he’s breathing heavy and Mashi lets out a held breath. “Y’know… you could have warned me about that,” she grumbles and Izuku very tentatively sits up. He leans back against the wall of the tub, facing his friend, and nods, his eye guilty.

“I’m sorry… I got so caught up with the mechanics I forgot…” he whispers and he sounds terrible. He must think Mashi is mad at him, and a little part of her wants to be, but she just can’t do it.

“It’s done now, so whatever,” she shrugs, trying to sound nonchalant about it all. Izuku keeps staring at her, eye sad and guilty, and she waves him off a little more vehemently. “Seriously, quit it with the look! You’re fine,” she grumbles. She felt tired, this whole thing much more controlled than the Base, but still a draining experience. When they were done she was going to take the longest nap ever.

“What do you need me to do for the, uh… Orb thing?”

Izu finally, finally, offers a smile and ducks his head. “The Orbit?”

“Yeah, that thingy.”

“Actually… you don’t have to do much. I have two hands now, after all. You… If you want to step outside, you can,” his smile drops and he whispers the last part, but Mashi is already shaking her head.

“Noooo. Nope. Nu-uh. Nada. No way. You asked me to be here, so I’m staying here. End of story. Now hurry up and let’s get this thing in!” she turns and lifts up the Artificial Orbit as delicately as she can while Izuku quietly slips on gloves of his own. Before he takes the Orbit he slides off his eye patch and Mashi freezes.

She had never, in all her years knowing Izuku, seen him with his eye patch off. He didn’t take it off often, apparently only to clean, and Mashi had never asked. That was personal stuff, after all.

Seeing it now she can understand why Izuku kept it to himself. The left side of his face is covered with scars, a few chunks of hair on his eyebrow still present. Stripes of scar tissue streak back towards his ear and his jaw, like something had hit him directly in the eye and scrapped onward past the side of his head.

The bones of his eye socket are pronounced around the tissue and Mashi sees that he has miraculously still got his eyelids, even if the bottom one has a prominent, healed split in it. They hang limply over his empty socket, no eye behind them.

“Gross, huh?” Izuku mumbles and he’s smiling, but it isn’t a happy smile. Tears are beginning to form in his one eye and Mashi looks to it instead of the scar. “I hate it. Even when I have the new eye the scar will still be there…” he whispers.

Mashi stares at him for a long moment before shaking her head and glaring at him. “I was surprised, is all! Don’t go putting feelings in my head or something! I’ve never seen it before, so it was surprising, but who gives a shit about a scar? You’re going to have an actual, working eye in it in a second! WITH a computer! Like, damn, who gives a fuck about scarring, right??”

Izuku is watching her, his smile dropped as he keeps tearing up. “Yeah…?” he whispers and she grins easily at him, confident in her answer.
“Fuck yeah!”

Izuku snorts and looks away, wiping at his tears as he composes himself. Mashi wasn’t going to let him feel bad about something outside of his control, not on her watch.

“Now take your thingy and do your thingy!” she laughs a little, offering out the Artificial Orbit. Her friend tries for a weak smile, which doesn’t quite reach his eye, but at least he’s trying, and gently takes the Orbit for himself.

He doesn’t waste any time, holding one end of the device in his robotic hand and holding his eyelids open even further than normal. Mashi is surprised he can still open his eyelids at all, let alone to their original capabilities, but Izuku has probably been working on that prior to all this. Maybe he had been working the muscles in his free time. He really was prepared for anything.

She watches in awe and morbid fascination as Izuku lines up the short cylinder to his empty socket and finally pushes it in. His wrist begins twisting the device back and forth in a way only a robotic wrist could, pushing it slowly, carefully, in. It isn’t that long a device, but at the speed he’s taking it feels like the insertion takes forever.

Once it appears to be placed in the necessary spot Izuku presses a small button on the part of the cylinder he’s holding, a ring of sorts, which releases immediately as the rest of the device does its job.

The sound of whirring and squishing and sizzling reaches Mashi’s ears and she thinks she smells a little smoke, and when she turns concerned eyes to her friend, he holds up a hand to stop her. “Totally normal. It’ll be harder to drain out the blood so this burns some of it. It’ll hurt a little more later, but it’s better.”

Mashi cringes and sits back. Yet again, she trusts Izuku’s intellect, but still it made her a little nauseous.

The muscles in Izuku’s face twitch like his back muscles had, but there is no screaming or crying or anything bad and soon the sounds are stopping and Izuku is letting out a long sigh of relief.

He turns to Mashi, his eyelid held open on its own, and she can just barely see a few, faint lights within the empty cavern and it’s both creepy and amazing.

“We’re done,” he says breathlessly and Mashi deflates, relieved and exhausted.

They get to cleaning when they finally find the energy to do so. Izuku takes the showerhead and washes himself off of any remaining blood, turning away to clean his eye socket, still not comfortable letting people see it, then helping clean or dispose of what is needed to in the bathroom. He also goes and changes into some of his All Might sweat pants at some point, going out and burning the shorts he’d worn like Mashi had done last time.

The Slumber had worked wonders. Certainly he had felt pressure and known something was going on, but even when the nerves were connected he had felt no pain. Instead he had spasmed, but it was a small price to pay. If anything it had felt more like someone poking him somewhere ticklish and his instinctive reaction to squirm away.

The Slumber is technically still in effect, but he could still wobble around, if a little slower than usual.

“Why are you still walking funny? Did it not work?” Mashi questions as they move back into the
living room, her eyes mildly panicked, but mostly tired.

“No, these were just the connectors, remember? I have to attach the Reinforcement for the connection to pass through,” he explains, feeling about as tired as Mashi looked. This was a lot for both of them, but despite the exhaustion, the sense of accomplishment was much greater. They were more confident in themselves, more aware, and it was paying off.

“How are you gonna attach it?” Mashi questions carefully, brow arched.

“Same as the arm to the Base. Magnetic field and microscopic attachments around the magnets,” he replies. He turns to the coffee table. He had left out a few of his devices and now it was time to attach them and see that they worked.

The first looks like a segmented snake, long with multiple, interlocking pieces. It’s black and fancy, not shiny, but not dull either.

Izuku lifts it up by the top, where it’s thinner, and shows that the underbelly is covered in one, long glowing light similar to the ones on his Base and Extenders. He holds it in his robotic hand, which then turns on the Base in a way that no human arm can so that it can now curve towards his back. He does it so absently that he forgets to warn Mashi, who gasps in amazement.

He looks to the redhead. “This is the Reinforcement. You ready to test it out?” he questions, smirking a little with giddy energy. Mashi grins right back.

“Shit yeah I am! Do it!” she laughs excitedly, clapping her hands as she stands to the side. Izuku giggles a little at her then shifts his feet and brings the Reinforcement towards his back. The magnets whirl to life and suddenly the device is being pulled from his hand and clamping straight onto his back. He loses his footing a little from the sudden impact. The breath knocked out of him, and Mashi’s hands grab at his arm to keep him standing.

He feels the nerves coming alive in their attachment, just like how his arm had done when he had first attached it, but he knows from experience that the ache won’t last. He knows that for the next week he’ll hurt, but after that he should be fine.

Izuku stands frozen for a while, letting Mashi keep him steady as he feels out the Artificial Spine. Despite the nerve ache he doesn’t feel any residual pain. In fact, he hardly feels any pain at all. He moves his hips a little then stands up straight and twists back and forth. He feels his tears beginning to well up as he begins to, very slowly, do stretches he once was unable to do. Finally, he stands up straight as he can and begins to walk forward.

He chokes on his tears as he walks across the room with no limp and Mashi lets out an excited whoop. He turns and walks back the way he came, tears rushing down the one side of his face, Mashi cheering him on the entire time.

He’s walking. He’s actually walking. Not wobbling or limping or scuffling. Walking. No pain or anything.

“Oh my god! Oh my GOD!” Mashi goes on ecstatically, jumping up and down as Izuku walks around her, at some point picking up into a small jog around the house and when he finally comes to a stop in front of his friend there is no pain beside the healing nerves.

“I can walk,” Izuku wheezes around his tears as Mashi wraps her strong arms around him, hugging him tightly. “I can walk.”

“You can walk!” she laughs brightly, but her voice is a little wobbly too. She buries her face in the
boy’s shoulder and he can feel her tears on his bare skin. He doesn’t mind, not at all, and he wraps his arms around her as well.

They stand like that for a while, just hugging and crying in joy. It had worked. It had actually worked. But this wasn’t the only thing they needed to test. They weren’t done yet.

Mashi lets go first and they move to sit on the couch. Despite not being in any pain from moving too quickly, Izuku’s legs are still weak and have grown accustomed to a certain way of walking. He feels tired already and will need to exercise them more, he knows.

“Next, the eye,” he says quietly, looking to the last remaining device on the table. He reaches out with his robotic hand and picks up the delicate piece. He holds the eye between his fingers, the sphere made out of a pure white material, too white to look natural, with obvious lines from the build here and there. The iris is a circular indent, covered by a clear dome, with a main sensor in the middle and two more sensors, like tiny camera lenses, along the upper right part, still inside the iris. The backside of the eyeball has an extended piece made up of stiff wires and spots where it will be able to connect with the Orbit inside his socket.

Izuku looks to Mashi, who is just about bouncing in her seat, waiting expectantly. She looks more excited than Izuku and he’s the one who’s getting new, mechanical replacement parts. It seemed almost appropriate, though, knowing her.

He smiles at her, nods, then opens his eyelids wide and uses his flesh hand to pull the left ones open even wider. He slides the eye in in the appropriate configuration and there is a whirring and clicking sound as it snaps right into place.

The twinge of pain this one gives him is much worse than the spine. He can feel the migraine coming on almost immediately and he squeezes his eyelids shut, nerves coming alive. He notes that his left eyelid slides perfectly over the new eye, which is a great sign, and forces himself to sit up and open his eyelids again.

For a few seconds things are blurry. The robotic eye’s lenses whir as they readjust to the world and slowly everything comes into focus. Izuku stares ahead of himself for a long moment. He can tell things are different, but he’s almost too shocked to really process them. He lifts up his hands and looks at them and for once he can actually determine their depth of field. It’s… It’s amazing and beautiful and it doesn’t feel real. It feels harder to believe than the spine.

He looks around, the new eye moving with ease, no noises as it turns and moves. Izuku swallows. Was this for real?

He takes a deep breath and, in an impulsive move, he crosses his eyes. They uncross quickly as finally he begins to cry. He had seen two, crossed images of his nose, he had had two points of view, he had two working eyes!

Mashi lays her arm around his shoulder as he cries anew, curling in on himself and his shoulders shaking. He had two eyes again. He actually had two working eyes! He didn’t even care about the migraine now, it was pushed to the back of his mind. He had a new EYE!

He can’t speak this time as he cries, but his friend whispers kind, proud words to him to ease him back. He wheezes as he straightens up, uncurling and taking deep, uneven breathes.

When he’s finally breathing evenly again, a few stray tears still falling, he decides to try his hand at one of the eye’s features and turns his head to look out the back, glass door. It takes a second for him to sort through his brain and figure out the right message to give his eye, but suddenly his vision is
zooming in and he grins brightly, his face still red from crying.

“The telescopic vision works!” he laughs brightly as he readjusts the zoom to normal depth. It felt odd, having only one part of his vision zooming in, however, so he would need to consider a way of fixing that. His real eye obviously couldn’t zoom in, but maybe, using that connection to it through the Artificial Orbit, he could create some kind of illusionary effect, or maybe dim it so it didn’t distract him.

“Cooooool,” Mashi says, leaning around him to peak at the robotic eye. “It’s blue!” she comments after watching Izuku move it around some, and he nods.

“Yeah, all my other lights are blue everywhere else, I just thought it would be appropriate to keep it consistent. It can glow, too! If I want it to,” the boy replies and Mashi actually wiggles in her seat in excitement.

“So so cool!” she half whispers and Izuku giggles, flustered by her praise. Even after so long he wasn’t used to anyone being so eager about his inventions, not like she was. “What about the computer? Can you see stuff? Is it in the eye?”

She leans closer and closer until Izuku blows a raspberry at her and pushes her off. “No, it isn’t on right now. It’s actually in the Orbit, not the eye,” the green-haired boy sits back in the couch, giddiness setting in. His back ached and his head was pounding, but he just didn’t care. This was all too good! “I was going to test the computer last.”

“Then do it already! Come on come on come on!” Mashi chants and Izuku gives her a look, one brow arched, and he can actually do that now, his large eye patch no longer covering up half his face. His right brow raises and the left, heavily scarred and only a bit of hair on it, stretches the tissue over it as it lowers.

“Calm down and give me a second,” Izuku snorts and, when the redhead leans away to wait, jittery in her seat, he leans his head back and shuts his eyes.

The final test. The computer was the final thing he needed to check today, and it was one of the most intense in terms of technological prowess. This was going to be like attaching a new limb altogether and it was going to be intense and take a lot of practice, but he was stubborn and he would master it.

Similar to the zoom in his eye he digs around in his own brain to work out the proper command and signal. It takes a while, but it’s in there now, he just has to find it, and when it does it snaps on with a mental hum.

He opens his eyes again and from the slight reflection he sees on his nose he knows his eye is glowing blue, as it should be. His vision is fine for a moment, until suddenly a floating, light blue gear appears in his field of vision, slowly clicking in a circle; a loading icon. Izuku can almost feel his brain working in tandem with the Orbit and the super computer as icons begin to appear in his line of vision, moving with every turn of his eye. They’re out of the way, not obstructing his view at all, but he already notes a few ways he can improve the appearance.

He feels his head beginning to ache a bit more and rolls his neck before focusing on what he was doing. Okay, it appeared to be working, but he would need to make sure it was actually following his commands.

He has to dig in his brain again, which seems harder this time around, and… did his vision just flicker? In both eyes? That couldn’t be right.
He tries to push past it, too stubborn to get this right, and thinking perhaps it’s only a one time thing, but as he tries to work his internal computer his vision begins to blur at the edges and he straightens up. He could actually feel his brain getting overworked, could feel the aura coming on, and even though he had only read about them he knew what was coming.

He looks to Mashi with wide eyes, and she looks back at him, concern written all over her face when she sees his expression is anything but excited. His muscles are twitching beneath his skin and his awareness is slipping quickly.

“Seizure,” is all he manages to get out before he’s falling side ways onto the couch, Mashi calling out to him in panic, the world going black.

Chapter End Notes

Please don't kill me

Edit: Some people were asking for references for the builds since they're a little harder to picture so here ya go!

**Spine:** looks something like a black version of that, with more segments and a bit more angular.

**Eye Iris** and **Eye Sclera:** Imagine the iris is a much more vibrant, artificial blue that glows and only has two extra lenses instead of three.

Chapter Song: **Halsey - Castle**
Slowly, ever so slowly, Izuku wakes up.

He recognizes a hospital room when he sees one, the environment familiar despite it having been years since he’s been in one. He isn’t groggy as he wakes, not like he can’t form thoughts or control his brain, but he is sore. His back still aches and his head is pounding, but he feels otherwise fine.

Why was he here again?

He had done something wrong. He had screwed up somewhere. His eagerness finally getting the best of him and overriding his caution. But what was it?

The sight of little logos in his vision catches his attention and he remembers.

He’d given himself a seizure.

He’d given himself a seizure and left Mashi to deal with it and now he was in a hospital room with no clue how long it had been. He swallows and tries to look around. He still had his headache, but it appeared the super computer was working now without any adverse effects.

“Izuku?” comes a voice to his left and he looks over. His mother is rising from a chair she had pulled closer to the bed. Her face is red and her eyes are swollen from weeping and immediately Izuku feels a dreadful stab of guilt through his heart. He’d done that. He had made his mother cry again.

“Oh thank you god!” Inko cries out, lurching forward to wrap her arms around Izuku’s shoulders, squeezing him close as she can. An IV is stuck into the inside of his elbow on his left arm and he’s wearing a hospital gown now, but other than that he seems to be fine now.

“What happened?” Izuku whispers, reaching up to hug his mother back. He felt shaken, like he knew he’d done something wrong, and he knows what it was, but the gravity of it all wasn’t fully setting in yet.

“You had a seizure,” comes a deep voice at the foot of the bed and Izuku has to turn his head an awkward way to get a look around his mother. Dr. Kenta is there, and beside him stands a not so happy Sunny and Aizawa. The doctor keeps his face and tone level as Inko releases her son just enough so they can look at him. “Your friend called an ambulance and told us what happened. You put her through a lot, today,” Dr. Kenta explains and Izuku cringes, quickly ducking his head.

So it was still the same day, he notes, but it really doesn’t matter. He knew he’d messed up with Mashi. He had assured her it was all safe and she had trusted him, had been excited and eager to go
through with it, and he’d ruined it. He wouldn’t be surprised if she never wanted to see him again.

“She told us what it is you did, that you tried to…” Dr. Kenta looks down at his notes, like he can’t fully believe it and he has to make sure he’s saying it right. “You tried to activate a… super computer? In your brain?” Everyone is staring at Izuku now and he feels sick. He feels terrible and guilty and like he may want to just disappear for a little while.

“Yes sir,” he mumbles instead, voice cracking.

“Yes, well,” Dr. Kenta sighs, moving on, “It appears that the sudden unexpected, new activity in your brain was too much for it and you had an epileptic seizure. Now, however… It appears your brain has actually calmed down and gotten accustomed to this… super computer.”

This feels oddly surreal and Izuku really wishes someone else would say something already. He hated how they were all just staring and saying nothing.

“We’ll do another scan, make some last minute checks. You’ll be given a Depakote prescription for home and will have to speak to a neurologist for a follow up appointment,” Dr. Kenta looks again at his notes. His expression is still hard to read. Izuku thinks he must be upset but is keeping things as professional as possible. “I don’t know how you did it, the science is beyond me, but your new ‘implants,’” the doctor turns a hard eye on Izuku at the word and he shrinks back, “are perfectly healthy. For now, though, I’m sure your family would like to speak with you.”

That’s it. Nothing more to it. Dr. Kenta just nods, turns around, and leaves the room. Sunny gives Izuku one more disapproving glare before storming out after him, not a single word uttered.

When it’s just Izuku, Inko, and Aizawa the crushing exhaustion and guilt and panic sets in and Izuku begins to shake. His mother’s hands are still on him, and they squeeze a little harder when he begins shaking in his spot, but her expression, the evident sadness and exhaustion in her eyes, makes Izuku just feels worse. He looks instead to Aizawa to find him glaring, not like he usually does, but with very obvious anger, sadness also lingering in his gaze.

Izuku chokes on a sob, tears running down the one side of his face. “Y-y-you hate me,” he stutters and Inko moves into his sight again, her distress not all the way gone, but a very persistent look to her face.

“No,” she says firmly, holding both of her son’s arms, shaking him just a tiny bit to make sure he’s listening. His breath stutters over another sob as he looks to her, confused.

“W-why??” He near begs for an answer, “You sh-should.” They should. They should hate him. He had been so eager, so excited to get to the next step, that he’d thought ONLY with his head, not his heart. Logically, if he wanted to be ready for hero training by high school, yes, he needed to do this on his own, but what did that mean for the people around him? What did it mean when they found out?

“We love you, Izuku, we could never hate you,” Inko presses, sliding up onto the hospital bed so she can pull her son tight to her side. Finally Aizawa walks over as well and stands to Izuku’s right, looking him over as Inko continues. “That’s why we’re so upset. We care so much about you, and you…” Frustration is trickling into Inko’s words and Izuku braces himself. He deserved this, for scaring his mother all over again.

“We trusted you to never do what you did to your arm again,” Aizawa cuts in, voice controlled but blunt. He never was one to hold back his opinion after all. “You broke that trust. How did you think it felt waking up to Mashi nearly breaking down my door asking for help? Or for your mother to get
a call at work that you were suddenly being brought to the hospital?"

Izuku shrinks in where he sits but forces himself to keep looking up at his neighbor. He felt nauseous, and a tiny bit elated that his vision was so much wider, but mostly nauseous. The tears are still rolling down one side of his face, but he buries the sobs deep in his chest. They would do him no good now, and he didn’t want them to think he was trying to get pity from them.

“Pretty bad…?” he whispers when he realizes Aizawa wants him to reply and not just sit there.

The man shakes his head and runs a hand through his hair. He looks more exhausted than usual, like every ounce of life has been drained out of him, and Izuku hates himself even more. He had done that too.

“Izuku…” Inko begins, voice quiet and sad, and she leans away so she can look down at Izuku’s face. Her eyes catch on Izuku’s new eye and the scar around it and she shakes her head. “Why? Why did you feel the need to do this? Why didn’t you talk to someone?”

Izuku tries, he really does, not to look away, but after a few moments of opening and closing his mouth and no words coming out he looks away, ashamed of himself. “I…” he stops himself and quickly rubs under his eye with a robotic finger. “I… I had to hurry…” he whispers and Inko is shaking her head again.

“Why would you need to hurry?” she asks in disbelief and Izuku finds he suddenly can’t answer her.

Aizawa isn’t having that issue, however. “He wants to be a hero,” he says simply and Izuku looks up to him with a snap of his head, expression betrayed by the easy admittance of his secret. The dark-haired man, however, gives him a warning glare that has him shrinking away again. “Don’t give me that look. You lost rights to that secret when you did this,” he snaps then stops himself, straightens up, and takes a deep breath to calm himself. He seemed so rattled, it was an odd sight.

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“I-I was thinking of m-my well being the whole time,” he says quietly, afraid to shatter the tension now building in the room. “I tested everything the same as any professional would. I made sure it was safe. And, yes, I want be a hero, and I wouldn’t be ready for any hero school if I waited for other people to do the exact same thing I’ve been doing, but slower and with more paperwork!”

Izuku shakes his head. He can tell he’s growing hysterical but he can’t seem to stop it. “Why are my tests so insufficient for everyone? Why does nobody trust MY science?”

“You’re eleven, Izuku,” Aizawa says, his eyes narrowed, but a hand still raised as if to placate the frantic boy.

Izuku shakes his head and looks at him. The tears are thick as they roll down his face and he breathes
heavy. The heart rate monitor behind him is beginning to speed up. “SO?? Why does that matter? I can do stuff adults can’t. Why does my age determine how reliable my technology is?? You and everybody else always see my inventions as cute parlor tricks or a quirky part of my personality, but they aren’t! I can do this! I can DO this!!”

“Izuku, enough,” Inko says it calmly and quietly but it shuts Izuku up immediately. He’s breathing ragged and uneven and she hugs him tightly. Out of the corner of his eye he sees Sunny step inside, having seen the spike in his vitals at her station, but Aizawa moves over to whisper to her what happened and when she sees he’s beginning to calm down she begrudgingly steps back out.

Aizawa returns and lays a hand on Izuku’s knee, squeezing it as he comes down from what was most definitely a panic attack.

Inko is rocking her son lightly in her arms as she speaks, her voice calm and loving but still so sad. “We believe in you, Izuku. I… believe in you.” Izuku hiccups on another sob at the words, his fingers curling tighter into his mother’s scrubs. She must have come straight from work, he realizes absently. “I don’t think I’ve made it very clear how much I believe in you, and that’s on me, but this isn’t about what you can build and what you can test. This is about instinct, common sense, and awareness, and you develop these things not from an IQ, but by living. By growing and experiencing life.

“You are a genius, my sweet boy, but you are still a child, and there are still so many things left for you to learn outside of the world of inventions.” Inko squeezes Izuku a little tighter.

“Most kids your age are off being rebellious and breaking bones or scraping knees,” Aizawa comments dryly, lifting his hand from Izuku’s knee to scratch under his own eye. “But YOU had to go above and beyond and surgically implant a new spine, eyeball, and computer. Congrats, kid, you’re insane.”

Izuku can’t help the wet giggle that bubbles up from his tears as he looks back to the man. “Thanks, Aizawa-nii,” he mumbles and the man grumbles and rolls his eyes skyward at the honorific. It had been Hizashi’s suggestion Izuku keep up the game, and he had for some time, until it just became instinctive. Plus, he liked getting to see the usually stoic man get frustrated and flustered at the whole thing.

“Izuku…” Inko pulls her son’s attention back to her and she looks distant and exhausted. “You can’t do this to us again. Ever,” she orders and there’s a plea in her voice that makes Izuku’s guts twist. He doesn’t tell her he won’t need to do it again. He doesn’t tell her that he’s done everything he needs to his body. He doesn’t tell her he’s done with all of that and ready to move on. He just nods assuredly and says, as honest as he possibly can, “Yes, ma’am.”

Inko stares at his face for a long time, looking for any signs of deceit, and Izuku hates that she feels the need to, but he understands why. Finally she nods back and leans in to press a kiss to her son’s forehead, right next to one of his stray scars.

“My baby…” she whispers, half to herself. “You terrified me, but look at you…” She raises a hand to run over Izuku’s scarred cheek and he doesn’t flinch away. He’s never felt the need to when it came to his mother. Her thumb rubs over his cheekbone right beneath the new robotic eye as she looks at it. “Does… Does it hurt?”

“I have a headache… but that’s all,” Izuku replies honestly. He couldn’t be keeping secrets anymore. It made him nauseous as he looked back on all the things he’d kept from his mother, on all the things he’d felt he had to, and he just couldn’t do it again. She loved him, and she believed in him, he was
safe.

“Does it work?” Aizawa questions, leaning down a little with his left hand in his pocket, the other moving to wiggle his fingers on the left side of Izuku’s face. The boy giggles, still watery from tears, and nods.

“Yeah, it does,” he says and Inko makes a noise of amazement, a choked sound. Tears are forming in her eyes again and Izuku keeps smiling as he says, “I-I… I can walk normal, too.” Inko lets out a sob as she hugs her son closer yet again, crying freely at last. Aizawa stands up straight and crosses his arms, shaking his head in disbelief.

“You’re something else, kid,” he comments but he’s doing that toothy smirk that makes Izuku laugh. For a while they ask questions about his eye and spine, wanting to know as many details as possible, and Izuku forces himself not to mince words. On not just one occasion he says something was simple or words something in a less scary way and has to backtrack and admit he’s not being fully truthful. They don’t like everything they hear, and Izuku supposes he can’t blame them, but they seem relieved he’s being honest.

Eventually the fluids drip connected to his IV runs dry and Dr. Kenta and Sunny return. They look to Inko and Aizawa, as if expecting something, and receive a nod. “We’ve spoken to him, it’s okay,” Inko assures and the two medical officials nod.

Immediately after that Sunny is marching over with a fire in her eyes. “Midoriya Izuku, don’t you EVER scare us like that again!” she’s saying as she stops at his side and wraps him up in a tight hug. He squeaks in surprise and sees Dr. Kenta over her shoulder, with his arms crossed and foot tapping.

“I expect to never see you here in this hospital ever again thanks to some stunt you pull. Am I understood?” he says roughly, finally some emotion in his voice.

“Y-yes, sir,” the boy heaves around Sunny’s crushing hug.

They take him to get a CT scan, and he assures them that none of the bits in his head, once he removes his eye, are made of any kind of metal that will disrupt the scan.

When he returns to his room and things are being prepped for him to go home Aizawa has already left. He still had to go to work, after all, and apparently he was actually a little late from waiting for Izuku to wake up. That, of course, made another stab of guilt go straight through the green-haired boy’s heart.

“Mom…” Izuku begins quietly when he and his mother are alone again, waiting for paperwork to be brought in.

“Yes, sweetie?” Inko urges her son on when he doesn’t continue. She looks terrible. Exhausted, hair a mess, face still red and tear stained. She’s gained some weight, Izuku also realizes after a while. He hadn’t noticed, but now, with the image of her when they had first been in the hospital playing in his head nonstop, he realizes she has. He wonders if that’s his fault too.

“How grounded am I?” he finally asks. He knew he was still in trouble, serious trouble, and he knew he deserved anything his mother dished out.

Inko sighs deeply and leans back in her chair, hands clasped together in her lap. “Izuku…” she begins slowly, “I think you’ve had enough for today, so I won’t berate you more until later, but you betrayed a lot of people’s trust and not for the first time. I’m afraid you’re going to have to be grounded until I feel I can trust you again.”
Izuku looks down at his lap. The idea made him feel awful, for many reasons, but he couldn’t blame her. “Yes, ma’am. I understand,” he says quietly with a nod. He wouldn’t argue. He wouldn’t.

“You won’t be allowed to be alone for some time,” Inko continues, “and you owe Mashi-chan a big apology.” The boy flinches and nods again. That was an understatement. He wished the girl was still here, but she had been picked up by her mother at some point and had been dragged home to probably be grounded herself. “And I’ll need to be taking some of your tools.”

Izuku sighs miserably this time, but still nods. No arguing. “Yes, ma’am.”

Inko stares at her son for a long moment, gauging his responses, then sighs as well. “I love you, Izuku,” is all she whispers and Izuku looks up at her finally. There are tears in her eyes again and Izuku deflates a little.

“I love you too, mom,” he whispers back. She smiles sadly at him and nods. He was being punished, and for good reason, but it was going to be okay. He was loved and his actions hadn’t changed that.

Now all he had to do was talk to Mashi.

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The next day is a school day, the first day of his sixth year in elementary, but Izuku doesn’t go. He has the doctor’s orders to take it easy, and the school is so confident in Izuku’s intellect they have no issue, and Inko gets off work to stay home with him. She takes some of his tools and locks them away in a corner of her own closet. His door is to remain open at all times and he won’t be allowed alone at all. When he returns to school in a few days he will be walked there by his mother, and when he leaves he will wait to be picked up by either Aizawa, Hizashi, Nemuri, or some combination of the three. They were gracious enough to offer to help.

He would be given back freedoms as time went on as Inko deemed him worthy of them.

Despite all the ground rules and the stern talks and the guilt and the tears, Izuku and Inko still end up sitting, relaxed on the couch watching television. Finally everything was settled and they were home and resting properly. The night before had been rough, exhaustion just enough to knock them both out, Izuku crawling in to sleep with his mother, but not enough to really put them at ease.

They were working on that now.

Izuku was grounded from a few television channels, but not all of them, and he was fine with that because the ones he was still allowed to watch he loved. Science Channel, National Geographic, Discovery, and a few of the news channels. Inko had said that it felt counter productive to deny a child access to educational programming, and she didn’t want to make her son miserable. Punish him, yes, but misery just wasn’t something she could inflict.

Izuku watches in rapt attention as they watch reruns of the show Cosmos with one of his favorite scientists, despite him being long gone by now, Carl Sagan. He loves his kind nature and his ease with passing on information without making anyone feel inferior or dumb. He simply wanted to teach the world.

They nibble on some cookies Leanne had brought over earlier in the day and Izuku is pressed to his mother’s side, one of her arms holding him close.

He still felt tired, and he’d taken off his Reinforcement and his Eye to get rid of the incessant nerve ache and just let them heal. He could still tell the super computer was working, but he couldn’t really access and practice with it without use of his Eye. He was just happy it wasn’t causing him anymore
seizures.

As Dr. Kenta had said, the sudden neurological addition of the computer was what set off the epileptic seizure. While the brain could handle a lot, the abrupt activity from an entirely new entity was enough for his brain to throw a momentary fit before getting accustomed to the new signals and paths.

He would be practicing a lot with his new implants in the coming future, making sure it all worked, testing some of the few minor features already installed in them, but mostly getting used to them and learning how to manage the computer now built into his head.

The other thing he was going to be doing was just taking a break from inventing. It hurt his soul a little bit, but he needed to. Inko had left him with a few minor tools he could use to make small, simple devices, but after all this he needed a break. So instead he planned to put a bit more focus on his other passion: heroes.

He’d been putting off his hero research while he built and planned and he felt a little ashamed of himself. He needed to catch up on hero activities outside of All Might – he was always caught up with him – and look at some of the new heroes in the spotlight. Apparently Mashi had a big crush on one named “Midnight,” and when Izuku had looked her up he could see why. She looked oddly familiar, too, but he couldn’t place why.

For now, though, it was relaxing time.

A little later in the afternoon there’s a knock at the door. Izuku doesn’t know what time it is but his mother doesn’t seem that surprised by the noise. She gets up from the couch and heads over. There’s some more knocking, louder this time, and Izuku shuffles off of the couch to peak at who it is, wondering who would be so frantic at their door.

Inko hardly has the door open for two seconds when a red blur comes shooting into the apartment and latches onto Izuku with a vice-like grip. Izuku yelps in surprise and stumbles, his balance back to being terrible without his reinforcement, but Mashi, because that’s who this obviously has to be, lifts him up to keep him from falling. She hugs him tight, letting him put his feet back onto the ground, and has her face buried in his shoulder.

Izuku’s arms raise to wrap around her slowly, his brow furrowed and confused. Was she shaking?

“I-I-I’m s-so GLAD you’re o-okay!” Mashi cries and Izuku freezes. He had seen Mashi cry before, seen her get upset, but to weep like this? This was new for him. And she was crying because of him? Tears were beginning to form in his own eye as she cries against his shoulder and he squeezes her a little tighter. Why wasn’t she yelling at him? Why wasn’t she furious? He didn’t understand. “I’m so sorry, Mashi,” he says. “I’m so sorry I did this and scared you and ruined everything.”

Mashi is silent for a moment beyond her crying. Finally she leans back to actually look Izuku in the eye, her face red, tears smearing her cheeks, and some snot dripping from her nose. “What...?” she whispers. She looks lost now, confused by what Izuku has said.

“I ruined it,” Izuku says again, shaking his head and looking down. “I made you trust me and now I ruined it.”

Mashi keeps staring at him for a long moment before taking one of her hands to scrub at her face. “You d-didn’t make my do anything, Zuzu, I w-wanted to help,” she mumbles, “I still trust you and you’re still the coolest person I know...” The redhead trails off and Izuku peaks up at her when she
doesn’t continue. Her lip is quivering and her brows are quivering like she’s trying hard to hold in her tears.

“That was scary, Zuzu… I don’t want to do it again…” Mashi whimpers and Izuku feels his stomach churn with guilt and he’s surging forward to hug Mashi tight again. She curls her arms back around Izuku as well, the two just hugging each other as tight as they can.

Izuku hadn’t thought Mashi wouldn’t be mad at him. He had thought he had ruined their friendship, that Mashi would be angry with him over what he had done. He hadn’t expected her to come to him crying and upset not out of fury, but out of compassion for him.

He was sure he would lose her, but he was wrong, and he was so happy he was wrong.

Inko had been silent through the exchange and now steps forward and lays a hand on Izuku’s head, getting him to look up at her through his tears. She smiles down at him, loving and apologetic for interrupting, and then turns her head instead to the redhead. “Mashi-chan, why don’t you and Izuku go sit and watch some TV. I’ll get you both some water,” she says gently as Mashi looks up at her. After a few seconds the girl nods, sniffling, and the two children make their way over to the couch.

Izuku changes the channel to the news so they can hopefully catch some hero battle coverage and they press close to each other. The idea of being apart scared Izuku suddenly, even just a little bit. He knows he’d get over it, but for now the realization that he had been expecting to lose Mashi, and now he wasn’t, made him want to hold on to make sure it wasn’t all a dream.

Inko brings in two glasses of water for the kids and sits down on Izuku’s other side, absently running her hand through her son’s growing hair. It felt nice and serene, like things were going back to the way they should be and Izuku never wanted to let go.

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“Do you think if I met Midnight she’d give me an autograph?” Mashi asks a few days later as school is getting out. It was the Friday after his seizure and school was going well. Izuku was still letting his nerves heal before reattaching his Reinforcement and Eye, so he was wobbling at the moment, his eye patch back in place.

School was easier nowadays. Kaito had been suspended back when he had been bullying them and got Mashi hurt and ever since he was under orders to leave them alone or else he would be expelled altogether. They used that to their advantage to keep Hayashi safe as well.

Kaito had no issue bullying the shy, gorilla-armed boy, so Mashi and Izuku made sure to gravitate towards him often to make the bully go away. They and Hayashi weren’t really that close, not like they would hang out after school, but they were all friends within the confines of the school.

“You’d have to be able to speak to her first,” Hayashi whispers, his voice always so quiet and gentle that often times they have to ask him to repeat himself.

Izuku snickers at that while Mashi huffs, blushing but trying to be tough. “Whatever! I could totally do that!” she says confidently, but as the two boys look at her she shrinks in on herself and looks over at the green-haired boy to her left. “Zuzu, can you ask her for an autograph if we ever meet her?”

Izuku lets out a happy laugh and nods. “Sure, sure, I’ll ask!” he agrees with a nods, but Hayashi speaks up again.

“If you can keep your otaku self in check.”
Now both Mashi and Izuku are pouting and Hayashi smiles a tiny, happy smile.

“HEY HEEEEEEYYYY!” The three kids look up to the front gate they’re approaching at the loud words. Mashi immediately lets out a happy yell and bolts forward when they see Hizashi and Nemuri standing there to pick Izuku, and by extension Mashi, up. Mashi skids to a stop in front of the loud blond and they do their regular, rehearsed greeting.

“H-hello Yamada-san, Kayama-san,” Hayashi greets when they reach them and bows politely.

“What were y’all going on about??” Hizashi questions after he throws a peace sign at the gorilla-armed boy.

“Heroes!” Mashi says brightly, grinning up at the two adults.

“Mashi has a big fat crush on Midnight,” Izuku adds on dryly, voice blunt, and Mashi swings around, red in the face, and gives him a betrayed look.

“ZUZU!” she shrieks and Izuku just smiles back at her. It was fun messing with her sometimes, never cruelly.

“Midnight…?” Nemuri asks slowly and they look back at her, “You like her?” Her brows are raised in surprise and Izuku thinks maybe she has a bit of a flush to her cheeks, but it’s so small he can’t be sure.

“Like the hero?” Hizashi asks and he’s grinning huge and glancing back at his companion like he’s giddy. For once it’s Izuku that notices the odd social cues and not Mashi, as the redhead is too busy getting flustered.

“W-well… yeah? I mean…” Mashi pokes her fingers together and squirms, pouting. “I know she’s only recently come into the spotlight in terms of heroes but… she’s… REALLY pretty, and her quirk is cool, and…”

Hizashi is cackling, which Mashi takes as him laughing at her, and she glares up at him, while Nemuri covers her mouth, seeming to be hiding a smile. “Hey! It’s not funny!” Hizashi keeps cackling but holds his hands up in a placating motion from the girl.

“It’s okay, Mashi-chan,” Nemuri cuts in, stepping around Hizashi and shoving him back by his face, leaning down to be more on level with the redhead, and Mashi flushes more. The girl had been incredibly flustered around Nemuri at first, but nowadays she could hold a decent enough conversation. “Midnight is my favorite, too.”

“Really??” the redhead questions, eyes widening and twinkling in excitement, and Nemuri nods with a smile.

“She shows a lot of skin,” Izuku comments and Mashi immediately groans.

“Oh give it a rest, Zuzu, PLEASE!” she whines and Hayashi giggles behind his large hand.

“Doesn’t Midnight need to show skin in order to use her quirk, though?” Nemuri asks with a smirk, straightening up and tilting her head towards Izuku.

“Don’t encourage hiiiiiiiiiiim!” the redhead whines but is ultimately ignored.

“Uh, guys?” Hayashi cuts in quickly and they all look at him, surprised at being torn from the subject at hand. “I, uh… My dad is waiting at home? I, uh… really got to go?”
The group gives him a range of smiles and Izuku nods at him. Izuku hadn’t expected to like Hayashi so much, after everything that had happened, but the boy was kind and shy and had a nature that never made Izuku feel anxious. He showed he was honestly remorseful for hurting Mashi and wanted to make amends.

“Alright. We’ll see you on Monday, Hayashi-kun,” Izuku says and Mashi hops over and gives the boy a sudden hug around the neck, dangling there because he’s so tall.

“Bye-bye, King Kong!” she says loudly and Hayashi blushes but laughs at the nickname. He heads out with a wave to the adults, who wish him good-bye as well, and finally the remaining four are walking towards Izuku’s apartment.

“Anyway, as I was saying,” Izuku says almost immediately and Mashi curses under her breath. She had probably been hoping Izuku had gotten distracted. The boy shoots her a smirk and she blows a raspberry at him.

“Midnight’s theme is to pretty and…” Izuku looks around them then leans towards Nemuri beside him, who leans towards him curiously to hear what he needs to say. “Sexy,” he whispers, like it’s a bad word, and Nemuri and Hizashi both simultaneously hold back a snort. Izuku pointedly ignores that. “So her showing skin fits both for her theme and her quirk, but… It’s dangerous too!” Izuku waves his hands around to emphasize his points. He had already done that, using his hands as he spoke, but he’s noticed he’s begun incorporating some of Hizashi’s movements into his own lately.

“Oh, so her defenses?” Nemuri asks for clarification, still smiling, and Izuku nods.

“Yes, precisely! I wish I could somehow speak to her agency or her specifically to show her my designs… they’d be so helpful!” The boy deflates a little, head drooping sadly and hair falling around him.

There’s a long silence before Hizashi questions, voice oddly eager, “Designs?” and Izuku stiffens. Oops, he hadn’t meant to let that slide.

“Zuzu designs possible ideas for tools heroes could use,” Mashi cuts in, “And since me and him—“

“Him and I,” Izuku corrects on instinct and Mashi elbows his robotic arm.

“Yeah, sure, whatever, since ME AND HIM are super grounded he’s been, like… major focused on hero stuff.”

“You design stuff for heroes?” Nemuri questions, asking for clarification, her eyes wide and twinkling with intrigue. Izuku looks up at her, then at Hizashi, and then slowly nods.

“Yes, ma’am… I don’t show them to many people. They’re all hypothetical and people always tease me for being so into heroes…” the boy admits, twiddling his thumbs together.

“We’d never tease you, kiddo! You’re way too special a kid for that!” Hizashi comments with a big grin as he reaches around Nemuri to ruffle Izuku’s mess of hair. The boy giggles at the action, reaching up to straighten his now messy hair.

“I would love to see some of these ideas!” Nemuri says and Izuku looks up at her, gauging her words and honesty.

“Yeah?”

“Youuuuu betcha!” Hizashi says in English and gives Izuku double finger guns. The boy giggles
again then, slowly, he reaches back towards his backpack and digs out one of his many notebooks. “Tools for Heroes #6” is written on the front and he takes a moment to flip through and find his page on Midnight.

On it is a sketch of a woman, mostly just an average figure, nothing special, with a slightly different costume than the one Midnight currently wore. It’s still very much sexy, showing bare arms and legs and squeezing tight to show off her figure. It’s a one piece made of a black material that Izuku has written is a variation of his shock absorbing material, and the collar reaches up high on her neck. A small window is cut out for cleavage, keeping true with the sex appeal, but on multiple parts of her suit, mostly around her midriff and the sides, are scales that are noted to open up and allow plenty of sleeping aroma to come through.

Red jewels still decorate the one piece, as well as on a few bands that run up high on her right thigh, her wrists, and around both ankles. These jewels are noted to be able to absorb the sleeping agent and then be removed and thrown at enemies, exploding on impact.

The heels on her feet are a tad thicker, for better mobility, but also to hide a blade that can come in and out with a specific flex of leg muscles.

The whip is still present, but has more features, like electrification, bladed tips, and a sound wave blast when the whip cracks.

The group has stopping walking, Nemuri holding the notebook as she and Hizashi look at the page with wide, focused eyes. Nemuri seems the most enraptured as Hizashi pokes his head up to look at Izuku, who is fidgeting, waiting for a response.

“You could build all this?” he questions in obvious awe.

“Of course he can! He’s Zuzu!” Mashi jumps in to defend her friend and Izuku is grateful, but he needs to clarify.

“Theoretically, yes. Some pieces are easier than others, and I have a few things already made that BASICALLY work like those, but it’d take a lot of practice, a lot of training, and a lot of work.”

The blond shakes his head like he can’t believe it and looks back down at the notes and drawings. “So you do this for a lot of heroes?” he questions next and Izuku scratches the back of his head, nodding even though the adults aren’t looking at him.

“As many as I can. I have another notebook just examining quirks of all varieties.”

“Out of curiosity… Do you have MY favorite hero in here?” Hizashi peaks over the top of the book to look again at the kids. Mashi tilts her head and Izuku’s brows furrows.

“Whose you’re favorite hero?” the redhead asks, obviously intrigued to find out what the loud man would consider his favorite hero.

Nemuri looks now over at her companion, who grins brightly and says, in a flourish of his arms, “PRESENT MIC, OF COURSE!” Izuku and Mashi blink up at him then at each other. “I can do a really good impression of him, too!” Hizashi continues, getting the kids’ attentions back. He takes a deep breath and puts on a more announcer-like voice, showier than his normal voice, and a slightly different inflection, “HEY THERE, YOUNG LISTENERS!!”

Izuku and Mashi gasp in surprise then are grinning up at him. It made sense that the loud, boisterous man would like the Voice Hero, and his impression was spot on. Mostly. It was partially hard to tell since he didn’t have the distortion that came with speaking over the radio or on television.
“That was amazing!” Izuku says, clapping his hands together as if to applaud Hizashi, who puffs out his chest, proud of himself. Nemuri is giving him the side-eye, however, so Izuku guesses that maybe he’s done this to her enough times it’s gotten old for her.

“Thank you, thank you,” the blond bows deeply a few times, his voice back to the more relaxed, but still loud, tone. “So… What do you kids think of Present Mic?”

Mashi opens her mouth to reply immediately, “He reminds me of a cockatoo!!”

Nemuri nearly spits with her snort and following laughter while Hizashi seems to freeze, smile still in place but only out of shock. It looks like maybe his soul has left his body. Izuku can understand that. Mashi made a comment once that All Might looked like a big bunny and he’d been shocked speechless too.

Nemuri is bent over in her laughter as Hizashi finally clears his throat and adjusts his feet. He moves his hands a few times, not sure what to do with them, before finally just crossing his arms and tucking them into his armpits. “R-really…? A cockatoo, you say?”

“Yeah! Because of his hair and his screaming!” Mashi nods, then tilts her head at the man, taking note of his reactions. “Don’t be sad, I like cockatoos!”

“I thought you were a dog person,” Hizashi grumbles, straightening his back and very obviously pouting.

Mashi pouts back, but more in frustration. “I’m an ANIMAL person, Hizashi-san,” she says like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “Why raven hole—“

“Pigeon hole.”

“—Pigeon hole myself into just liking one animal when there are all kinds of creatures I could be petting and loving! I mean have you SEEN how cute cats are? Or otters? Or skinks? Those all ain’t dogs, and I love them!!”

Nemuri has finished laughing by now as Mashi and Hizashi have their back and forth, now skimming through Izuku’s notebook. “Aha!” she exclaims and holds open the book towards Hizashi, “Here’s Present Mic!”

“There’s not as much on him!” the blond whines and Izuku giggles. This was turning out to be a lot funnier than he’d expected this all to be.

“Well, yeah. Present Mic already has some pretty good gear. It could be improved, but not too much. Like…” the boy steps over and takes back his notebook so he can point at things on the page. The sketch here is of an average male figure, dressed in Present Mic’s normal costume, but with a few additions. Izuku points to the speaker system around the hero’s neck. “This already can send Present Mic’s screams in different directions, but not backwards, so maybe an upgrade that allows that. Also a system in the speakers that allows an alteration in pitch that the human voice can’t reach. Maybe a pitch that only affects a certain age group—“

“That’s a thing??” Hizashi questions, brows shooting above his aviator sunglasses.

Izuku nods. “Yep, some pitches only younger people can hear. Or maybe something like a dog whistle? I don’t know, there could be a couple things this could be used for…”

“Isn’t there a note that makes you poop???” Mashi questions, an eager look in her eyes, and Izuku sighs like he might be a little distressed and exhausted by her.
“You mean the ‘brown note’?” Mashi giggles immaturely and Izuku rolls his eye. “No, the brown note doesn’t exist. It’s only a myth.”

“Awwww,” both Mashi and Hizashi say in unison, pouting, and Izuku and Nemuri give them an uncertain look.

The four start walking again, Izuku flipping through his notebook to find heroes he’s asked about and reading out a few of his ideas. He hadn’t expected Nemuri and Hizashi to be so intrigued by his ideas and what a happy surprise this is.

“What about you, cutie pie?” Nemuri asks at one point and Izuku’s rambling stops, his smile dropping. He looks up at the woman with a confused look in his eye and she gives a sweet little giggle. “What kind of tools are you planning to make for yourself?”

“M-me?” he whispers and his eye widens as he realizes what is being asked. Nemuri was asking about his plans on becoming a hero. “I thought… after everything that happened… You guys wouldn’t want me to be a hero anymore…” Izuku looks down and away and Mashi steps a little closer to him, their shoulders bumping.

Inko hadn’t mentioned anything about Izuku wanting to be a hero since the hospital. She hadn’t brought it up and he hadn’t asked. He was too scared of the answer he expected, that his mother would be too upset with what he had done, and worried about her handicapped son getting hurt, that she would forbid him from pursuing his dream. She would want him to do some desk job, or inventing job, where he would be safer and away from the action. Izuku was sure of it.

“What are you talking about?” Hizashi questions, brows pinching together behind his sunglasses, and Izuku slowly looks up at him.

“Aren’t you guys mad at me…?”

“We’re pretty disappointed,” Nemuri says easily enough and Izuku flinches, but one of the woman’s hands, with her perfectly done nails, reaches down and tilts his chin up to look at her, “But that doesn’t mean we’re going to destroy your dream.”

“But… I lied… And I broke everyone’s trust… and I hurt myself…” Izuku begins listing off and Mashi is taking hold of his robotic hand. He can’t feel it like he can feel his real hand, but the pressure receptors pick up what she’s doing.

“And you’re a kid that’s learning and knows now never to do that again,” Nemuri finishes for him, her eyes serious, leaving no room for argument, and Izuku snaps his mouth shut. Tears are beginning to prickle at the corner of his eye. “No one should ever be punished for the rest of their lives for their mistakes. You’re being punished now, but you’re learning and growing everyday. You’ll look back on this one day and think yourself a fool, I promise you that.”

“I already do…” Izuku mumbles and Hizashi throws his arms out to the sides behind Nemuri.

“SEE? So why would you continue to be punished for something even you now see as wrong? That wouldn’t help anybody!!” the man says with gusto. “Actually, I think it would be hurting people in your case! We’d be losing out on one spectacular hero!”

Izuku chokes on a sob and he covers his mouth with his flesh hand. He has to stop walking to compose himself and Nemuri and Hizashi both crouch down in front of him after it’s obvious he needs a moment. “D-d-do y-you really m-m-mean that?” He whimpers quietly around his crying and both adults nod as Mashi lays her head on Izuku’s shoulder, her messy hair tickling his neck. She
probably wanted to say something, and would later, but for now she remains quiet to let the adults talk.

“Your mother and I spoke,” Nemuri says slowly, planning the words out and making sure Izuku is listening. The boy looks to her, sniffing, and the woman reaches out to wipe away some tears. “She’s scared for you, and she’s sad you didn’t feel like you could tell her about your dreams, but mostly she’s really proud of you, cutie pie. You’ve been through so much no person, let alone a child should deal with, and to come out on the other side more determined than ever? That’s something you should be proud of, and I know for a fact that we all are.”

“And there’s no doubt in any of our minds that you’d make a great hero with that brain and heart of yours,” Hizashi grins, “Seriously! Even Shouta-kun believes it!”

“Is that… Is that not normal…?” Izuku whispers, looking now to Hizashi with a furrow in his brow, and both adults chuckle a little.

“You know how critical your dear, sweet ‘brother’ is, right?” Hizashi asks with a knowing smirk and Izuku blushes, but nods. “And you know he doesn’t exactly have the most love for the hero system as it is.” Another nod. “And how he says exactly what he’s thinking.” Yet another nod. “Well, Shouta-kun is a firm believer in telling people their dreams are garbage if he thinks they are.

“One time he made us sit through an entire one man band performance at some café just so he could go up to them afterwards and tell them all the reasons they were awful and to find a new line of work,” Nemuri adds dryly with a roll of her eyes and Mashi giggles under her breath.

“Really…?” Izuku asks and both adults nod.

“If he thinks that your goals aren’t going to pan out, he’ll tell you so. He doesn’t like the idea of people hurting themselves as they pursue something he thinks they’d fail at. It’s for an honestly good reason, if a bit of a cruel way of going about it.” Nemuri adjusts her glasses as she speaks.

“And as I recall, you asked him once if he thought you could be a hero,” Hizashi smiles at Izuku then falls silent, waiting for Izuku to remember this event.

It had been right after Mashi had been hurt at school, the day after getting his arm attached, and he’d broken down in front of both Aizawa and Hizashi, admitting everything.

“He said he believed I could,” Izuku whispers in realization and Hizashi nods sagely.

“Yes sir he did!” he says in English, then bounces back to Japanese. “He doesn’t lie, kiddo, not about important stuff. We talked about it later, too. He’s known you longer than me and Nemuri, here. He’s told us how devoted you are, how you don’t give up no matter what, and how you care about others. He’s also seen what you’re capable of when you were only in single digits with all those gadgets! If HE thinks you can be a hero, you better believe you can be!”

Izuku sniffs and ducks his head, wiping at his face to try and rid himself of some of the tears. He had already felt special and happy that Aizawa believed in him, his opinion meant so much to Izuku and he was the first adult to honestly say he could be a hero, but this put it all into a whole new perspective.

“You’re still in deep trouble for scaring us with that seizure, though,” Nemuri adds on and Izuku lets out a surprised laugh.

“Yes, ma’am,” he replies, nodding in agreement around his crying.
“Good, just wanted to make sure you didn’t forget about that.”

“So! Now that THAT’S outta the way!” Hizashi says loudly, turning around where he crouches and putting his hands behind him in a motion Izuku has begun to become familiar with. The boy giggles and wobbles over and Hizashi stands with the boy now on his shoulders. Mashi is quick to hop over and begin climbing and clambering over the blond man, who grunts at the weight, but is accustomed to the girl using him as a jungle gym. She eventually settles with hanging over Hizashi’s right shoulder, slightly on top of Izuku’s leg, and Hizashi begins wobbling down the sidewalk, grunting from the weight, Nemuri by his side, laughing.

“Tell us what you plan for your hero stuff!” Hizashi finishes his thought and Izuku smiles. This time he’s much more eager to share his ideas.

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ItsgonnabeMei: what do you guys think of my new username

ItsgonnabeMei: ???

Izuku lays in his bed later that night, his Eye finally reattached to the Artificial Orbit. He couldn’t stop smiling as he looked around, the feel of two eyeballs moving behind his eyelids feeling spectacular. The nerve ache was still very slightly present, but not close to being a migraine. More like a bruise he could partially ignore.

He had been very, very slowly activating features on his super computer with his mother present the past week. There was no getting around the fact he had it in him now, and now his brain was used to the new activity, so the chances of a seizure were nearly 0%.

Izuku wasn’t going to leave his mother out again, though. Whether the chances for damage were near zero, or nonexistent altogether, he wasn’t going to do anything that had to do with his body without his mother, or an adult he trusted, present again.

Today he had activated the chatroom feature and played around a little with messaging his mother’s account. It worked perfectly and so now Izuku, giddy and happy and jittery in his bed, Pumpkin currently curled up on his chest, was having a group chat conversation with Mei, Katsuki, and Mashi.

AlienXpert: i luv it !

Izuku chuckles at Mashi’s immediate response, his eyes shut. He needed to work a little on how he saw his super computer parts, but currently it was much easier to see everything if his eyes were shut and he was looking at everything on the back of his eyelids.

AllRightAllMight01001001: Of course you do.

KingKill: Do you even know the fucking reference?

AlienXpert: wat reference ?

ItsgonnabeMei: from nsync

ItsgonnabeMei: come on you seriously don’t know

ItsgonnabeMei: ???
KingKill: Aren’t you supposed to be the old timey nerd or some shit???

AlienXpert: WATEVER NVM

Izuku smirks as Mashi and Katsuki proceed to begin a battle with caps lock and he and Mei stay out of it, just enjoying the two’s bickering. They felt oddly like an old married couple, even though Mashi didn’t like boys and Katsuki, Izuku had recently found out, didn’t like girls.

Now was the only time they could all chat. With her grounding Mashi wasn’t aloud to get on her house computer except for a small, hour-long window in the evening. Izuku technically wasn’t aloud to do anything on his laptop, but this wasn’t his laptop, was it? And his mother had been witness to how easily everything worked.

AllRightAllMight01001001: Hey, I actually had an idea Hatsume reminded me of.

ItsgonnabeMei: I am a great source of inspiration

KingKill: Shut the fuck up, nerd!!

AlienXpert: wats yur idea zuzu ?

Izuku pauses, humming, eyes still shut, then mentally “types” out his draft. He goes over it, makes sure it’s what he wants, and when he’s satisfied he sends it off. It felt odd, controlling all this with his mind, and it would take a lot of practice to get perfect, but this part with the chatroom was at least getting easy quickly.

AllRightAllMight01001001: We should bounce our hero name ideas off of each other.

With the talk Izuku had with Nemuri and Hizashi today, Izuku had realized something rather bothersome.

Every idea he had for himself and his future hero persona was currently All Might themed. Sure, his tech was unique, but his costume and his planned hero names were all obviously originating with All Might in mind.

He couldn’t help it! All Might was remarkable, and he looked up to him, it seemed natural to want to base things off of him, but Izuku wasn’t All Might. He was going to be a hero of a whole new breed, standing for things not even All Might stood for. He needed to be thinking in terms of himself, be confident in himself, not base everything off someone else’s success.

KingKill: EASY!! I WILL BE KING EXPLODO-KILL!!

Izuku actually snorts out loud when he reads that.

AlienXpert: street flare u r alwys told u r rite by evry1 around u so let me b the voice of reality here

AlienXpert: that is THE DUMBEST name evur

Izuku snorts again, even louder.

KingKill: WHAT THE FUCK SCREW YOU IT'S PERFECT!!

ItsgonnabeMei: he’s not wrong

ItsgonnabeMei: it is perfect
ItsgonnabeMei: it’s a dumb name

ItsgonnabeMei: he’s a dumb guy

KingKill: SCREW YOU TAFFY HAIR

AlienXpert: i like taffy!

Izuku runs a hand through Pumpkin’s fur. His back door was open, allowing in some fresh air. By now his mother knew about the terrible-at-being-a-stray stray cat that adored jumping in on Izuku now and again. She didn’t mind, surprisingly, and would sometimes come in to give the cat a few head scratches when she noticed he was there.

AllRightAllMight01001001: Kacchan, I think maybe that name is a bit of a mouthful, don’t you?

Izuku cuts into the mounting argument, trying to play the voice of reason.

KingKill: EHHH???

KingKill: SAY THAT TO MY FACE!!

Izuku opens his eyes for a moment just so he can roll them. Katsuki was brilliant, but sometimes, in his anger, he was a tiny bit stupid.

AllRightAllMight01001001: All I’m saying is you need something that will be easy for people to remember and say, but still holds the same impact and meaning as “King Explodo-Kill.”

AlienXpert: its gotta b top dog stuff cause u used king

ItsgonnabeMei: and be about explosions

AlienXpert: and death!

ItsgonnabeMei: maybe less that part

AllRightAllMight01001001: Right. So, something that is just as big as being a king. Something huge, and all about explosions and destruction.

KingKill: I can tell you already have an idea, Deku!

Izuku doesn’t reply after that, just waiting for Katsuki to clarify whether he wanted to hear the name or not. It was usually better to wait and see than to assume with Katsuki.

KingKill: WELL???? WHAT’S THE FUCKING STUPID IDEA???

AllRightAllMight01001001: The Explosion Hero, Armageddon.

When Izuku doesn’t get an immediate response he begins to worry and begins adding on more and more, frantic to make sure Katsuki understands.

AllRightAllMight01001001: See, because Armageddon is an apocalyptic event, making it massive, even bigger than a king, and it’s usually seen as an event that includes large, sudden destruction, like explosions.

AlienXpert: it has the word arm in it
AllRightAllMight01001001: It also insinuates you’ll destroy anything in your path, if you want. Enemies are basically facing their apocalypse.

AllRightAllMight01001001: And Armageddon also means the final battle between good and evil.

Izuku is writing the next long string of explanation when a new message pops up.

KingKill: I like it.

The green-haired boy thinks maybe he’s dreaming. Or the world has ended. Or that Katsuki has been kidnapped and someone else is talking to them right now.

Had Katsuki actually admitted to liking something Izuku had suggested? He never admitted to liking what Izuku did. Izuku usually had to just figure that out on his own by watching his childhood friend’s reactions.

AllRightAllMight01001001: Really?

KingKill: I SAID I LIKED IT, DIDN’T I???

Izuku stops petting Pumpkin just so he can cover his face with both his hands and giggle. This was making him so remarkably happy. He could have never expected Katsuki to actually like the idea. He had planned on just planting the seed and letting the explosive boy build a good name from there, but this was so much better.

AlienXpert: whoa

KingKill: Shut up!

ItsgonnabeMei: hey hate to interrupt but other people should have a turn coming up with a name too

AllRightAllMight01001001: I thought you didn’t want to be a hero, Hatsume?

ItsgonnabeMei: i don’t but you and mashi do

AlienXpert: oh me please !

AllRightAllMight01001001: Sure, go for it.

Izuku waits as Mashi types. It was taking a while, which probably meant she was trying to type with proper grammar this time.

Truthfully he didn’t know what Mashi wanted to name her hero persona. They usually spoke about how they were going to fight and what they were going to do, but he couldn’t remember her ever saying what she wanted to be addressed as.

When the chatroom dings with her message he feels giddy with excitement to see what she’s considered, but also a part of him is ready for the worst, like Katsuki’s.

AlienXpert: The Wild Hero, Apex!

AllRightAllMight01001001: Oh wow, Mashi!

ItsgonnabeMei: what a good choice

KingKill: How the hell did some wannabe like you come up with a name like that???
AlienXpert: mama says im a wild child n zuzu 1 time told me bout apex predators n that sounded cool lik the yautja in predator

Izuku is yet again amazed Mashi remembers the word “yautja” and hardly anything else, just like she remembers “xenomorph.” It was a mystery he didn’t think he would ever solve.

AllRightAllMight01001001: I’m really impressed, Mashi!

KingKill: He means “I expected something stupid but was wrong.”

AlienXpert: so u admit i have a cool name on my 1st try unlike u ?

KingKill: SCREW YOU!!!

ItsgonnabeMei: what about you midoriya

ItsgonnabeMei: ???

AlienXpert: YEAH ! wats ur idea ?

Izuku had been smiling as he watched his friends interact, laughing at them and enjoying the back and forth, but now his smile fades and he goes still. Right, he had started this conversation in hopes of figuring out his own hero name, but now he was scared to share how unprepared he was.

He pets Pumpkin’s back for a bit, letting his rumbling calm Izuku’s nerves, and takes a deep breath.

AllRightAllMight01001001: That’s the problem. I don’t have one anymore.

AllRightAllMight01001001: All my old ideas were based off of All Might, but…

ItsgonnabeMei: you need something original

AllRightAllMight01001001: Yeah.

AlienXpert: brainiac !

AllRightAllMight01001001: Nice try, but that sounds a little silly, or even insulting depending on the tone.

AlienXpert: u rite u rite

ItsgonnabeMei: it does need to be based off of your brains though

ItsgonnabeMei: or at least your builds

KingKill: You’re literally creating shit straight from your imagination!!

KingKill: Focus on that, idiot Deku!

Izuku’s brow furrows at Katsuki’s message. Focus on how he was creating things? He wasn’t sure what the other boy was trying to get at.

AllRightAllMight01001001: What do you mean?

KingKill: What else creates shit just because they want to???

KingKill: YOU’RE THE GENIUS, FIGURE IT OUT!!!
ItsgonnabeMei: are you suggesting he call himself god

ItsgonnabeMei: ???

Izuku opens his eyes and stares off at nothing, his brain working a mile a minute now at the suggestion. No, he wasn’t going to name himself “God the Hero,” that was a terrible idea, if also a little funny, but it did give him an idea to consider.

AllRightAllMight01001001: Why not A god? Like one from mythology?

AlienXpert: didnt they do tht in hzd ?

Izuku bites his lip. Oh yeah, they did do that in Horizon Zero Dawn… No wonder he thought it such a good plan…

AllRightAllMight01001001: No?

ItsgonnabeMei: you are such a nerd

KingKill: THAT’S WHAT I’VE BEEN SAYING!!!

Izuku pouts at how his friends are teaming up to pick on him now.

AllRightAllMight01001001: You said focus on the fact I am creating things, so I am. I will have to consider it, however. There are a lot of names to work with.

AlienXpert: dont use zeus

KingKill: USE ZEUS!!!

KingKill: COMPLETELY APPROPRIATE!!!

KingKill: HE’S DONE NOTHING WRONG EVER!!!

AlienXpert: ur awful

Izuku lets out a bark of laughter as the conversation quickly changes to that of mythology and gods and goddesses. It lasts for about ten more minutes before Mashi has to sign off and the rest of them decide it’s time for bed anyway.

Izuku removes his Eye and cleans it off before putting it in a specialized, sterile box on his workbench. He’ll eventually sleep with the Eye always in, but for now he wants to make sure the nerves are entirely healed.

He shuts the back door and lies on his bed, having to get at an odd angle since Pumpkin has taken possession of his usual head pillow and Izuku just can’t move him. What kind of hero would ever move a sleeping cat?

He had a few new ideas now for a hero name, thanks to his friends. He thinks “The Genius Hero” is a good opener, but he needed an actual name, now. He would do some research, look at possible gods in mythology, look up other creators, look up all kinds of terms for geniuses, and hopefully come up with an idea.

He didn’t have an idea what his hero name would be yet, but thanks to his friends he now had a starting point, and despite everything that had happened to him lately, he felt good.
Chapter End Notes

Heeeey it's the return of the chatroom! Look-y there~

I hope y'all enjoyed!

Also, don't forget you can check out Mashi and her future hero costume [here](#)

Oh! And I've seen some other people post at the end of their chapters a song name that they listened to while writing or that inspired them, and I love me some music! So here you go, a little extra if you'd like it! Check back on past chapters too cause I'm gonna add some to those too!

Chapter Song: [Sara Bareilles - You Matter to Me](#)
Hey again guys! Had the whole day off so I went ahead and got the next chapter done! I was super excited with it, and after everyone's guessing yesterday on some stuff I wanted to get a little clarification out there on some of these things people have been wondering about. No, Izuku's hero name still isn't revealed, it'll be some time before that. Sorry!

Another week after Izuku’s chat with his friends on hero names had him finally wearing his Reinforcement and Eye as a regular part of himself. His mother had cried anew when Izuku had waltzed out of his room for breakfast, walking steady and confident, smiling big.

In his down time he was either practicing with his Eye and internal computer, or he was developing his hero ideas. The name was still proving to be an issue. He liked the idea of dipping into mythology for his names, not just for himself, but also his inventions. The idea of mixing the realm of intellect with the realm of fantasy was a fun juxtaposition in his mind, and now he had a lot of ideas for naming his tools, but himself? It was still an issue. Everything was too specific or pigeon holed him into an image he didn’t want.

He was getting frustrated and a little stressed, but a solution presented itself soon after he began wearing his new parts.

Aizawa was still disappointed with him – which he had no issue in telling Izuku – and now he refused to return to their evening training sessions for the time being and insisted Izuku just focus on healing and being a kid. Now that Izuku was able to walk again, however, a new idea was posed. Technically it had been Hizashi’s idea, but Aizawa had agreed and taken over.

Every evening, and morning on weekends, they went out for a walk. Izuku, despite being able to move his legs, still needed to build up strength in them again, so regular walks became normal right after school. Sometimes Mashi joined them, sometimes Nemuri or Hizashi did, but no matter what it was always Izuku and Aizawa. Eventually it would morph into jogging, but Izuku needed to build up his strength first.

“Apollo,” Aizawa suggests, his voice bored, not really seeming to be part of this conversation at all, but Izuku doesn’t mind. They’re walking around their neighborhood, Izuku still in his school uniform and Aizawa in a pair of pink sweatpants, his big scarf, and a frumpy, black, long-sleeved shirt.

“God of the sun, knowledge, light, music, and… a whole lot of other stuff,” Izuku replies, looking ahead as they walk.

“Right. Knowledge. Perfect,” Aizawa shrugs and scratches under his eye. He never got out of breath on these walks.

Izuku sighs deeply and shakes his head. “No, he’s more known for the sun thing. Plus he’s known for having the ‘perfect body’ and I don’t much like that. And… I kind of wanted to name this
memory component I’m working on after Apollo, too. Keep all my files and studies in a safe place for myself.”

Aizawa grunts, sounding mildly irritated. Izuku knew he didn’t much care about this name thing, but he appreciated that the man was tolerating it for him.

“Hermes, then.”

Izuku looks up at him with furrowed brows. “Hermes? Why him?”

“He’s a messenger or whatever. You have a message. There. Perfect,” Aizawa waves a hand in Izuku’s direction like that was the end of it, no arguments, but Izuku is already shaking his head and the man sighs in defeat when the boy continues.

“No one would see that and you know it,” Izuku huffs and Aizawa just shrugs. “And I’m working on possible teleportation technology I’d like to call Hermes, anyway.”

Aizawa, after a second of processing, looks down at the green-haired boy finally, eyes just slightly bigger. “Teleportation…”

“It’s a work in progress,” Izuku says with a dismissive wave of his hand not too different than Aizawa’s own. The dark-haired man looks back forward with a shake of his head and a helpless shrug to himself. Figures that would be all he got.

“Fine. Ares.”

“Too violent, and planned to be the general term for future weapons systems. Nothing too dangerous! Promise!” Izuku actually seems to react to that, waving his hands frantically in front of him as he looks up at the man beside him, wanting to make it clear he was being safe.

“Dionysus, then.”

“God of wine, grapes, madness, and theatre…” Izuku says dryly, his panicked look dropping when he realizes Aizawa is ready to move on.

“Sounds good to me,” the man huffs and when Izuku shifts just right he can see the man smirking behind his scarf, all toothy. Izuku straightens his back and sticks his tongue out at the man, who ignores it and keeps walking. “You got some crazy invention in line to be named Dionysus, then?”

“No,” Izuku mumbles, catching up to his neighbor with little effort. “Give me a bit, I’ll figure it out.”

Aizawa snorts and shakes his head in mild disbelief. “What about that one with the weird name. The blacksmith.”

For a moment Izuku says nothing before offering, “Hephaestus.” The name makes the boy cringe and he looks down as he walks, the rhythm normal and without any hiccup to his step. “No thanks. Already have an idea for that name anyway.”

Izuku can feel Aizawa’s eyes on him now and he sighs. He knows a silent question when he feels one. “Mashi suggested that one, too, while I was researching all of the gods. I thought at first he was pretty cool. Inventor, builder, but… He was only there to build for the other gods. He was kind to mortals, sure…” Izuku scrubs at his face with his hands, suddenly tired as he explains what he had found. “There’s all kinds of gods of knowledge or invention, I have plenty to choose from, but the thing that made Hephaestus stand out was that he was ‘deformed.’”
They take a turn, their route memorized by now, and Izuku feels something boiling in his gut. Mashi had said the god was “just like you, Zuzu,” but that had made him feel sick. The big connecter between him and the god of fire was that they were both “deformed.” Not the intellect. Not the desire to help people.

“I don’t want to be the ‘deformed’ hero. I’m not broken. Handicapped, but not broken,” Izuku mumbles and it takes a beat but Aizawa’s hand is reaching over to ruffle the boy’s hair.

“No, you aren’t,” the man agrees, voice calm, and his words final.

Izuku nods, not quite looking up at him, but grateful nonetheless. It always felt good to have the man’s vote of confidence, especially with how hard it was to get it. “Besides… he’s mostly known for the forge, thing, and that’s not what I want… Which is why I’m using that name for a system that assists in building tools for me automatically.”

“Of course you are,” Aizawa drawls, stuffing his hands in his pockets. “It’s a mouthful, anyway.”

“Yeah…”

There’s a stretch of silence as they walk and Izuku has a chance to think. Most of the names were too specific or had some defining feature that made Izuku uncomfortable. He wasn’t ashamed of his handicaps, not anymore, not usually, but he didn’t want them to be his defining feature as a hero. He wanted others who were handicapped to see him, know they could be a hero too, but being handicapped wasn’t his defining feature. It wasn’t the only thing about him. He wouldn’t let it be.

Besides… He already had plans for a lot of the gods’ and goddesses’ names.

He had a system for cleaning and harvesting functions and AI he was working on for future robots to assist in picking up the environment as well as getting Izuku raw materials. Those would be named Poseidon and Persephone for ocean and land pick up respectfully, and Demeter for gathering protocols. Nike would be the name of his mobility systems, like Ares was the name of his weapons systems. Artemis was the name of a tracking system he already actually had in use with an infrared vision already installed in his Eye, but plenty more features to come.

“Kacchan said I should focus on the fact I’m ‘creating’ stuff from my mind,” Izuku comments after a while. He’d been thinking about that a lot lately, uncertain what it meant for some time. Katsuki had been adamant that it was about his creating, not his building, and it was only recently that he had figured out what it could mean. At least, what it meant to him.

Building meant there was already something there to work off of, like tools or material, but creating could mean so much more. It could mean he was using tools, or he was simply using his mind, or something was being brought about from the void. Certainly Izuku didn’t match these all specifically, but it did feel more powerful than building, and it meant something that it was coming from Katsuki.

“Well… sounds like you’re creating some gods, anyway,” Aizawa says around a yawn and Izuku nearly trips over his own feet, his mismatched eyes widening. Wait…

He WAS creating his own gods, wasn’t he?

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Izuku stands in his room, holding a couple of papers in his hands, scanning over them carefully. They were letters his mother had just brought in and he was going over them one more time to make sure he’d gotten everything sorted in his head. Once he’s certain he has he nods to himself and goes and puts them all in a binder under his bed.
“What were those?” Katsuki asks from atop Izuku’s bed. The blond has a notebook in hand that he had been furiously scribbling in for some time now, working out his own hero costume from what Izuku can see. It’s one of Izuku’s notebooks too, which he isn’t too happy about, but not upset enough to really call his friend out on it.

“My patents went through with a few more of my inventions,” Izuku explains simply and hops up onto his bed as well. It felt awesome to be able to jump around like he used to, that small activity alone making his nerves jump for joy every time he did it.

Katsuki hums, looking back at his current sketch. There’s a lot of red on the page that Izuku can’t tell if it’s blood or explosions. “When are you gonna start sellin’ that shit?” the explosive boy questions, not looking up from his work and Izuku rolls his eyes skyward.

“You know I can’t,” he grumbles, obviously irritated at the situation himself. “I am not selling my idea away, and I don’t have the time, resources, or current finances to start my own business at the moment, so all I can do is license them.”

“So license them.” Katsuki snaps back, still glaring at his drawing.

Izuku, in a spur of confidence, repeats back in a higher, more ridiculous voice, “‘So license them,’ like it’s that easy.” Katsuki’s head snaps up so he can snarl and glare at Izuku, furious at the teasing, but when Izuku hardly responds he deflates with nasty grumbling under his breath. Izuku raises up his hands now to begin ticking off issues on his fingers as he lists them out loud. “I don’t know which licensees I can trust, I’d have to do extensive research, all tools that could go to hero work probably will and that’s not at all what I want for them all, plus if they did go to hero work there’d be all kinds of paperwork and testing from the support departments in the government, PLUS who knows what villains might get their hands on them if the licensees aren’t careful, PLUS—“

“Yes, holy shit, I get it!” Katsuki cuts in with a massive groan as he throws his head back. Izuku stops and smiles over at him apologetically, knowing he had gotten away with himself again.

It wasn’t just the licensees that were an issue, either. All of his prosthetics were breakthroughs in the realm of science, sure, but they were far from being ready for mass production. Each one, his Base and Arm, his Bridge and Reinforcement, his Artificial Orbit and Eye, were all specifically calibrated and tested for him and his body make up alone. It would take a long time to create a system that could scan individual people and determine how to build the nerve connecting machinery they needed. Either that or train all possible doctors in this field how to manually build the neurological connectors from charts and scans and just pray it would go well.

“I wish I could, you know,” Izuku says after a while of silence and Katsuki does pause with his drawing to look over at him, glare in place “License my ideas, I mean… I publish enough of my scientific papers and theories, yeah under a pseudonym for privacy, but I’d have plenty of backing from the science communitie since they do know me to get a good licensee to come my way… But all the products are either not ready or just… I’d hate to not be in direct control of their distribution…” Izuku deflates a little bit and stares at his two hands in his lap, flexing the robotic one a few times. “I feel like… maybe I’m letting my mom down? She had to go back to work and everything for us, and here I am, inventing stuff, and I won’t even sell it for her…”

Katsuki scoffs and flips his head like he’s flipping his hair, even though his is hardly long enough for that. Mashi and Izuku had tried to convince him to grow his out with them, but he liked his short and spiky.

“You are not letting down Auntie Inko, that’s bullshit,” the other boy says like this should be the most obvious thing in the world. “The old man told me once that it’s a parent’s job to look after their
kids and that they are ‘honored’ to do so, and if that’s true for MY parents, it’s definitely true for
yours,” Katsuki looks over at Izuku, but suddenly pauses, scowls, and looks away. “Well, for one of
yours…” he whispers and Izuku looks away too.

Right, his mother was amazing, but the other one… “I really don’t see that man as a parent
anymore,” he admits quietly, getting red eyes to look back at him curiously. “I see him more as just a
sperm donor.”

Katsuki, shocked by the fact it’s Izuku who just said that, lets out a surprised snort before beginning
to laugh. Izuku just smiles and watches the rare scene. Katsuki had a lot of laughs, mostly ones of
malice or adrenaline, but his humor laugh was the most rare and by far the best. It was higher than
the others, a little breathier, and every so often a loud snort would be intermingled within.

“Where the HELL,” Katsuki cackles as he comes down from that high, scrubbing at his face, “did
you come up with ‘sperm donor’???”

“It came to me in a dream,” Izuku says, waving his right hand in a big arch, his voice deep like a
narrator. Katsuki huffs and elbows the boy’s flesh arm, making Izuku giggle. “I heard mom say it to
Nemuri-san when they didn’t realize I was there.”

Both boys now tumble into a giggle fit, imagining the usually kind natured woman getting nasty and
talking shit about Izuku's father.

“So, can’t market your medical shit,” Katsuki begins after the giggling ends and Izuku nods.

“Still needs work.”

“Can’t market weaponry-like shit.”

“Would want to market that myself with my own business to insure safety.”

“What about your materials?” Katsuki proposes and Izuku’s brows furrow. His materials? “Like the
shock absorbing stuff?”

“I’m actually calling that Hera,” Izuku says. He liked that he had been researching so many names,
now. It meant he could finally name some of his long waiting inventions.

“Hera…” Katsuki says slowly, eyes thinning as he tries to deduce what that goddess has to do with
shock absorption.

“Because Zeus could never shock her?”

“Oh my god…” Katsuki slaps a palm over his eyes as Izuku giggles at his little joke. “Whatever,
sure, your Hera material! Sell that shit!”

Izuku relaxes and begins pulling at his bottom lip in thought. “It does seem the most obvious
choice… but that, too, I’d hate for anyone with evil intentions to get their hands on some of the
variations of Hera. The metallic-like one, mostly…”

“Then don’t sell that one, fucking obviously! Just do the original one. License it to somebody that
has no major ties to heroes, like… like somebody that makes tools, or something!”

“Tools…” Izuku repeats and tilts his head, diving a little farther in his brain. He considers it for a few
seconds before deciding to check something. He takes a beat to focus on his brain and its extensions
until a screen pops up in Izuku’s view, just floating there, unseen by anyone else. He goes through
the actions of searching for possible companies that work with tools alone and finds a large variety almost immediately. “Hmm, construction tools would be good. Maybe some gear for sports?”

“There, you aren’t putting out anything dangerous, you’re getting your name out there—“

“Pseudonym. Still want my privacy.”

“Fucking… right, sure, whatever, pseudonym, and you probably save some people anyway!”

Izuku blinks and closes out the windows, a few names saved for later. This was perfect. He needed to do a lot of research, reach out to a lot of companies, plan presentations, build a conversation, but it was an actual start. He’d been so frantic about wanting to sell some of his devices, but being unable to. This was the perfect solution.

“Kacchan, you are a genius!” Izuku finally announces, throwing his arms upward and Katsuki sits up a little bit straighter.

“And don’t you forget it, Deku,” he smirks. Izuku rolls his eyes at the cocky response but doesn’t push it. It was just Katsuki being Katsuki. “Anyway, enough about you, tell me if you can build this shit or not,” the blond waves the other boy over, shaking the notebook where he had still been sketching.

Izuku scoots closer and promptly plops against his childhood friend’s side, earning a grunt and grumble, but he isn’t pushed off, so he takes it as a win. He looks over Katsuki’s drawing, a crude sketch of a hero costume, and arches a brow. “Your dad is a professional fashion designer,” he mumbles at the sight of the very terrible drawing.

“Whatever! You can tell what I meant, can’t you??!!” Katsuki snaps, as expected, and Izuku giggles and drops the matter. Yes, he could tell what his friend was trying to get across. It also helped he’d made notes pointing to things describing their function.

Izuku lifts his mechanical hand to point at the picture and the grenade-shaped gauntlets. “Easy. So easy. If you want, though, I could make something three times smaller with multiple canisters to hold your sweat. Save room for some other tools.” Katsuki brings the book closer to make a note of that then holds it out again so Izuku can see it. “I’m thinking your ‘mask’ may want to actually be more like goggles, too, with ear protection. Keep your eyes and ears safe from all the explosions.” Katsuki actually makes a small noise like he’d forgotten that and makes another note. It was easy to forget that even though these were his own explosions, it didn’t mean he would be unaffected by them.

“And I know you’re nerd ass has already come up with some ideas, so lay ’em out already,” Katsuki groans but Izuku, after years of becoming fluent in “Kacchanese”, can hear the eager note in the explosive boy’s voice.

“Make a note,” Izuku begins and points to the hands on the drawing, “I call them Bullet Fingers.” Katsuki does write that down as Izuku explains, “Don’t actually shoot bullets—“

“Boooo.”

“—but they do channel explosions into a more compressed, directional blast. More like a sniper than a shotgun. Now… This one’s my favorite,” Izuku smiles as he points instead to Katsuki’s drawing’s feet. “All your sweat is explosive, it’s just your palms that actually can create the explosive reaction necessary. So, why not have boots that absorb sweat, similar to your gauntlets, and then there would be a way for you – somewhere on your belt or your gloves or something I’m thinking – to control a built in explosion mechanism and basically—“
“Feet explosions.”

“Feet explosions, yes.” Izuku tilts his head, still laying on his friend’s shoulder as he drapes over him, not a care in the world, and sees Katsuki not even hiding the sparkle in his eye. “Will take a lot of practice to master, once built,” Izuku warns and Katsuki shakes his head.

“Don’t care! Feet explosions!!”

Izuku giggles to himself and finally pushes off of his friend as he turns to a new blank page and begins redesigning his costume with the new changes in mind, grinning maniacally down at the page but still grumbling under his breath. He didn’t mutter like Izuku, oh no, he grumbled, and Izuku thought it was absolutely hilarious.

While Katsuki does that Izuku leans back on his bed and pulls up the screens on his internal computer so he can go over them and begin his research.

Both boys were so excited and preoccupied they nearly missed Inko calling to them for dinner, and when they go to eat they can’t seem to wipe the grins from their faces.

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It’s the middle of the summer and Izuku has no idea how Aizawa is STILL wearing his pink sweatpants to go walking. Sure, he was wearing a T-shirt now, which always looked odd on the man, and his scarf was actually left at home for once, but still with the pink sweatpants.

“I don’t get it,” Izuku says not for the first time and Hizashi, on his right, laughs brightly.

“I think maybe he’s so dead inside he just doesn’t care anymore,” the blond chuckles. He was wearing sensible clothes, baggy, jogging shorts, sneakers, a T-shirt, his hair tied back so his neck didn’t get too hot. Izuku had also changed into cooler clothes, feeling gross in his uniform.

“I will make you new pants. I will make them look just like that, too, and make them self-cooling, please, oh my god,” Izuku groans and looks to his left, up at Aizawa. The man just shrugs.

“I’m fine,” he says simply and Izuku actually groans, running both hands down his face.

“Why… Why wear those? Is pink your favorite color or something?” the boy questions and he hears Hizashi chuckle at his expense.

“No, purple is—"

“I’ll make you purple pants.”

“I just got these at a bargain—"

“I am offering to make new ones for FREE!”

Hizashi is all out laughing by now as Izuku continues to beg to let him make Aizawa something new and better than those obviously scorching sweatpants.

“These work fine, it would be illogical to ‘fix something that isn’t broken’,” the tired man sighs right back. Izuku grumbles under his breath at the ridiculousness of this whole thing.

“What is illogical is that you are going to give yourself heat stroke!” Izuku flaps his hands around frantically, walking sideways so he can face Aizawa directly and give him a look that says, “you’re being ridiculous.” Hizashi, having been watching and giggling this whole time, finally speaks up.
“Make ‘em anyway, kiddo! But make them something, like, rainbow as payback,” he suggests and Izuku turns to walk straight again, but look up at the blond man.

“Oooh, yes, that’s a great idea! That’s what I did with his sleeping bag!”

Aizawa’s brows furrow a little behind his bangs and he looks down at the boy. “That’s why it’s yellow?”

“Yeah, you were lecturing me on taking care of myself but you weren’t doing the same for yourself so… y’know…” Izuku trails off, scratching his bare neck just under his messy bun.

“He got petty, Shouta-kun!” Hizashi laughs brightly, before leaning down as they walk so he can look at the green-haired boy a bit more evenly. “Okay, so, definitely rainbow. Maybe tie-dye?”

“Yes! And one that looks like those paper cups everyone always has. The white with the blue and purple squiggles?” Izuku smiles right back at Hizashi, who cackles at the thought.

“And one that has the word ‘gucci’ on the butt—ah… Actually, wait, still make that, but I want that one…” Hizashi looks away and whistles innocently. Izuku giggles at that but nods. Sure, why not?

“One with leopard print,” comes the blank suggestion and both Izuku and Hizashi groan and turn towards Aizawa, who is doing his toothy grin.

“Aizawa-niiiiiii!”

“It’s no fun if YOU play along!”

Aizawa definitely cackles under his breath as Izuku and Hizashi whine.

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Izuku has just turned twelve when Mashi brings him a flyer announcing a big meteor storm that night. The girl is grinning excitedly as she holds the flyer between both hands, letting Izuku read over it.

“There’s a viewing party over at the park near here! I think it’d be cool if we went!” Mashi is saying as Izuku leans back and straightens, humming thoughtfully. “I love space, you love space, it’s perfect!!”

“We do love space,” Izuku agrees, even if it was for different reasons. Mashi was more a fan due to movies and the excitement of aliens and futuristic discoveries, but Izuku was more interested in space for the science and how the space program was just a laughable mess nowadays. They’d been to the moon long before quirks appeared. They’d sent satellites and all kinds of devices all the way to Pluto. Now, though?

The International Space Station had been abandoned long ago and no new satellites were sent up unless they had to do with some company or something.

“Let’s go, then!” Mashi bounces up and down and Izuku finally takes the flyer from her hands to look at the back.

He and Mashi were still technically grounded, but they had slowly been given back a few of their freedoms as time went on. Izuku was given back the majority of his tools, except for his darn soldering iron, and he was free to watch any television channel again. He technically was also allowed back on his laptop, but that hardly mattered with his super computer.
The biggest thing that still remained was the supervision. He was allowed to walk to school on his own again, but someone still would come and pick him up. He’d go out on his walks with Aizawa and there was always an adult in the apartment with him, or he would be at his neighbor’s. Slowly, however, he was being allowed out on his own again. Inko may send him out to grab some groceries, or maybe he would want to go for an additional walk at some point, or even he and one of his friends would want to go out to the park or something. So long as Inko, or one of the adults, was informed ahead of time Izuku was usually fine.

But they had never asked to go out after dark. The walk to the park wasn’t far, and it was well lit and the neighborhood was a safe one, but still.

It couldn’t hurt to ask, though.

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Inko hums as she looks at the flyer, Izuku and Mashi standing eagerly in front of her. She reads over it one more time and asks, without looking up, “And you can’t watch the shower here?”

“Well…” Izuku trails off, adjusting some of his longer strands of hair in his face. “Yes, ma’am, we could if you’d prefer. This just has a better view and some people will have telescopes to watch.”

“Plus food!” Mashi adds on excitedly, hopping over to point out on the flyer where it says some people would be bringing barbeque. Izuku thinks he actually hears the redhead’s stomach growl at just the thought.

“Maybe… you could come with us?” Izuku suggests, twisting and fidgeting with his fingers in front of him, peaking up at his mother through his mess of hair.

Inko is already shaking her head, though. “I have work in the morning, sweetie…” she trails off, still looking at the flyer, weighing the options. “I’ve been putting a lot of trust in you lately, Izuku,” Inko begins after a bit of thinking and her son straightens up like he’s at attention. “You, and Mashi,” the redhead smiles brightly, “have been very good at behaving and being honest with us, even when you’re scared or think we won’t like the answer. So…” Inko looks again at the flier and nods, coming to a final decision. “I’m going to trust you with this.”

Both children pump a fist at their sides and whisper an excited, “Yes!”

“I’ll leave my phone on loud if you need to call me. And don’t be out any longer than necessary. It may be the weekend, but you still need your rest.”

“Yes, ma’am!” both children say in unison, Mashi actually saluting Inko as Izuku gives a bow. They both turn away a second later and rush to get ready, getting shoes on and grabbing jackets for the slight nippiness to the wind.

“Take some lawn chairs with you,” Inko suggests and Izuku goes to grab a pair, carrying both under his robotic arm with no issue.

“Should we get a camera?” Mashi questions, near bouncing off the walls in excitement.

“No need,” Izuku shakes his head then points at his own left eye. Suddenly one of the lenses within the iris begins to glow red and Izuku smiles brightly. “I can record everything we need!”

Mashi’s eyes widen and she leans into Izuku’s personal space to stare at the robotic eye as the light turns off. “So. Fucking. Cool,” she says happily, pauses, then grabs her own phone. “I’m still gonna record some stuff for myself, though!”
Izuku shrugs, having no issue with that.

They wish Inko good-bye and hurry off, an eager adrenaline making them walk fast. The sun is just about disappeared behind the buildings, painting the sky into a watercolor array of oranges, pinks, and purples.

There aren’t that many people that show up to the viewing party, but it’s still a pretty good crowd. There are kids running around, teens chatting or helping adults set up some telescopes. The barbeque pits are already set up and they can smell the meat cooking, making their mouths water.

They find a good empty spot next to a family they know from Izuku’s own apartment complex, setting up the lawn chairs then quickly rushing over to grab some food.

They plop back down in their lawn chairs with plates of food, Mashi’s definitely stacked higher than Izuku’s, and while Izuku is slower eating, savoring each bite, enjoying the treat of getting to eat barbeque, Mashi forgoes chopstick all together and either uses her hands or just grabs at pieces with her own mouth.

“You’re barbaric,” Izuku comments at one point and Mashi giggles as she stuffs a few pieces of pork into her mouth.

“Thank you!” she says around her mouthful and Izuku rolls his eyes skyward but smiles. He really wasn’t all that surprised.

Mashi gets up to get more food at some point while Izuku is still working on his first plate. The sky is dark by now, sun gone. There are a few lights set up around the little gathering, but now they’re being turned off and eyes are slowly looking up to the sky, expectantly. Izuku turns on the recording in his eye as he watches, food forgotten in his lap, while Mashi chews loudly at his side.

“Can you chew any louder…?” Izuku mumbles with a small laugh, not looking over, and Mashi groans a little and nudges his right side, making him sway.

“Not my fault my mouth has acoustics!”

“How… do you know the word acoustics…?”

“Mama.”

“Gotcha.”

The whole back and forth is recorded, but Izuku doesn’t mind. He liked playing around with Mashi, how they were both fine with teasing each other nowadays, how they had no personal bubbles when it came to the other. It felt kind of nice to have them recorded.

The first streak in the sky is small, but it gets everyone’s attention. It’s a little spooky how the sound of chatter just suddenly drops off, but it doesn’t feel bad. It feels like everyone is holding their breath, silent and expectant. They’re all here for the same reason, to witness a natural wonder that has been going on since the earth developed an atmosphere. Something older than all of them and the human race.

Another streak of whitish yellow, sudden and quick, like a cut in the sky, fading like it had never been there a second later. Two more follow afterwards and Izuku hears Mashi whisper beside him, “Whoa.” Everyone around them also begins letting out quiet, amazed noises, like they can’t be contained.
In this moment no one here is any different than the person next to them as the sky begins to light up with streak after streak, like the stars are raining down on them. It feels like this should be something out of a fantasy book, or one of Mashi’s science fiction movies, and the scientific explanations leave Izuku in that moment to make way for the stunning awe and beauty of it all.

He feels a tap on his shoulder and tilts his head just enough to show he’s listening and Mashi, stunned into a whisper, says, “I’m gonna go check out a telescope,” and she’s gone, hopping away.

Izuku thinks that’s not the worst idea and zooms in with his eye a little, hardly telescope strength, but a better view for the recording.

A second later he’s nearly being bowled over as Mashi rushes back, grabbing hold of his shoulders. He startles out of his stupor, panic lacing through him as he looks to his friend, but Mashi doesn’t look panicked. She looks excited.

“Zuzu!” she hisses, voice still quiet. She turns around and points over to the buildings on the outside of the park. “LOOK!” Izuku stares at Mashi for a long second, not sure what’s gotten into her, before turning to what she’s so excited over.

His eyes widen when he spots it, or rather, him.

On top of one of the buildings, just on the corner of the roof, is a silhouette of a person, a man, with tendrils hovering and dancing around his head. Technically it could be a man or a woman, but Izuku, even with his limited knowledge on this one, knows exactly who it is.

“Eraserhead,” he whispers in awe, the meteor shower forgotten.

“The underground hero, right? Right?” Mashi hisses back, looking back to her friend as Izuku keeps staring at the silhouette.

“Yeah,” Izuku gasps, slowly standing from his seat, setting his plate back on his chair. “I’ve never seen a picture of him, he’s really good at keeping to himself, but I’ve read a lot of reports. Those tendrils? Those are his weapon, no doubt.”

“Whoa,” Mashi whispers in awe, this time not at the spectacle above their heads, but at the appearance of such a rare hero sighting.

“His quirk is so cool, too,” Izuku keeps whispering as he begins to aimlessly walk in the direction of the buildings. It was just on the edge of the park. Maybe if he caught the hero’s attention he could talk to him? Doubtful, but he wanted to try. “He can block people’s use of their quirks if he stares at them.”

“That’s crazy!” Mashi hisses a little louder, following by Izuku’s side, not arguing with heading over. A few people on the edge of the viewing party hush her, but no one stops them, everyone’s eyes turned towards the sky.

“He’s so cool…” Izuku mumbles and Mashi cackles.

“Oh? Is All Might’s position of favorite being threatened now?” the redhead questions, looking over at Izuku through the corner of her eye.

Izuku snaps his head towards Mashi, who tries not to giggle at his serious expression. “How dare you say that to my face. Wash your mouth out with soap, blasphemer,” he hisses and Mashi grins, shoulders shaking as she holds in her laughter.
They were pretty close to the edge of the park by now and they look back up towards the silhouette, expecting him to still be there, but find nothing.

“W-what??” Mashi straightens up in shock, eyes wide as she looks over the roofs of the buildings nearby. “Where’d he go??”

Izuku groans in misery and drops his head. “Aw man! I really wanted to talk to him!” the boy whines, arms dangling by his sides. Mashi steps forward, still looking around, her hands on her hips and her ponytail flopping around as she swings her head.

“Wait… don’t you have, like… thermal vision or something?” the redhead turns back towards Izuku, who stands up straight and looks back at her.

“Well… yeah, but if he’s already gone, he’s already gone. He’s a stealthy guy, who knows.”

“Exactly! Who knows? He could still be nearby? But you gotta look, first!” Mashi argues and Izuku looks over at her, thinking. It takes a few seconds before he sighs and nods. Okay, he could at least check, there was nothing wrong with that.

They head to the edge of the park and stand right on the grass by the sidewalk. Not many cars are driving by on the street ahead of them, thankfully, and after some thinking and focusing Izuku’s robotic eye clicks to a different vision. His view is suddenly a mess of blues, purples, reds, oranges, and yellows. He shuts his right eye and looks around at his new, thermal environment.

He wasn’t as great at this vision as he was with his zoom, but he still had some practice under his belt. As he looks around, spotting a few cats in nearby alleys, people walking nearby, his excitement is coming back. He feels giddy at the thought of getting to meet a hero in person, especially one so mysterious, and he feels himself getting jittery as he searches.

Finally he spots a thermal signature of a person slinking around behind the buildings, moving carefully, like they know what they’re doing. After a few moments of walking, pausing, then walking again they fling out their arm like they’re throwing something and suddenly are lifting and swinging away. Izuku makes a sound of joy, finally finding who he was looking for.

“Did you find him? Did you find him?” Mashi asks excitedly, grabbing at Izuku’s arm and shaking him a little.

“Yeah I think I did!” Izuku replies, just as excited, but his smile is quick to fade. The thermal signature is quickly getting smaller as it moves away. There was no way they could keep up with that, nor should they. “He’s leaving…” He mumbles and he can just about feel Mashi’s disappointment by his side.

“Oh…” she mumbles. Izuku feels himself deflating as well, shoulders slumping. Darn, they’d been so close, too. At least, it felt like they had been. Eraserhead liked his privacy, maybe they hadn’t had a chance to begin with.

“Well… we should just—” Izuku sucks in a sharp breath as he turns to look at Mashi, but something catches his eye across the street. He had just been about to turn off his thermal vision, too, but…

There was something there. Something big and long and walking on all fours. It doesn’t have feet or hands, it just balances on points, as it slinks along the sidewalk across the street, a massive head on the end of a long neck lulling back and forth with each step.

Izuku feels something settle in his chest, something thick and heavy that creeps up into his throat and makes it hard to breathe.
He turns off the thermal vision, staring where the... thing had been, but only sees empty space. He flicks on the vision again, and there it still is, creeping around people walking by, and turning into an alleyway. Thermal off, he still can’t see it.

“Zuzu...?” Mashi asks, worry filling her voice as Izuku just freezes there. She reaches out and grabs his mechanical arm, shaking it a little to get his attention, but he doesn’t look over, thermal vision back on as he watches the creature scuttle now through the alleyways.

“There’s something over there,” he whispers. “I-I... I don’t know what it is, but it’s invisible.”

Mashi stiffens, Izuku can feel it with how close she’s gotten. The creature is moving a little quicker now that it’s in the alleyways and doesn’t need to worry about moving around civilians. “What... What is it doing...?” the redhead questions quietly.

“It’s just... walking around and...” Izuku’s eyes widen when he catches sight of Eraserhead’s signature again, swinging back through the alleys. This was probably where his patrol was tonight and he was making sure all the dark corners of the buildings were safe from villains. Izuku looks again as the creature slinks through the alleys, going in the hero’s direction.

“It’s after Eraserhead,” he gasps, eyes widening in terror. “Eraserhead won’t be able to see it!” He doesn’t even think. He just starts running, but not away. Forward, across the street, after the heat signatures. Some subconscious part of him is screaming at him to stop, he was being an idiot, but a louder part is yelling that the hero won’t see it. That Eraserhead’s entire quirk was based around sight and he wouldn’t be able to see it. But he could see the creature right now, so if he could somehow get Eraserhead’s attention, or stall the creature, than that was what he needed to do.

He sprints into the alleys, his leg muscles stronger now, but he can still feel them protesting at the breakneck speed he’s taken. He trips over garbage and debris, unable to see them well enough with half his vision as thermal, his gaze locked on the... thing.

“ERASERHEAD!!” he screams, hoping the hero will hear him. “ERASERHEAD!!”

Behind him he hears more screaming and realizes Mashi is right behind him, also screaming out to the hero, her heavy footsteps making her hard to ignore. Izuku feels a little safer, knowing she’s there, that she would follow him with little question, but he has to focus on the task at hand. They needed to get to Eraserhead before something bad happened.

Izuku takes a second to look over in hopes of finding the hero coming this way, but he’s lost him. He can’t find the thermal signature, and when he turns his head his vision is suddenly filled with fiery yellows and reds.

Izuku falls backwards, feet kicking out in front of him, A shriek escaping his throat as he stares in horror up at the thermal signature of the creature, it’s big, round head only inches from Izuku’s nose.

“Zuzu??” Mashi cries out, rushing towards him.

She can’t see the creature, Izuku remembers with a jolt, and he yells out without looking away from the heat signature, “Stay back!!”

Mashi nearly trips when she stops. She stands back where she is, not coming closer, and Izuku feels at least a bit of relief, but the thing is still right there, standing completely still and hovering over Izuku as he lay on the ground.

Izuku doesn’t know what it looks like, can only see the outline of it from the thermal vision, but he can feel it staring at him, can feel the force of it, as it bores into his very bones. Izuku’s lips quiver
and tears are beginning to form in his right eye. The realization of what he’d done catches up to him in this moment. He had just run after what was probably a villain because he was the only one that could see it. Had he done the right thing? He wasn’t sure, but he felt both stupid and like he simply didn’t have another choice.

“G-g-g-go a-way,” Izuku’s voice shakes miserably and he sounds pathetic, but he doesn’t know what else to do. The creature doesn’t budge, not a single inch, and Izuku hears a whimper escape him. He’d wanted to help, he’d NEEDED to help, but now…

Mashi lets out what can only be considered a battle cry and suddenly the massive thermal signature is ripped from Izuku’s vision.

The redhead stands above him, gunstaff in both hands, and Izuku wonders when she had grabbed that but decides this really isn’t the time to be asking questions. She’s posed to strike again, both hands on the staff like it was a bat. Izuku stares up at her in shock, her eyes fiery and her scowl wild enough to look like a beast’s. She’s looking around, she still can’t actually see the creature, and Izuku realizes she had simply swung where Izuku had been staring.

Izuku scrambles to get up, turning and focusing on the massive thermal signature shaking out its head. This thing really was big. Mostly it was long and spindly, but now, as it lifted up its head at double the height of a full grown man, Izuku realized how puny they were to it. It’s making noise now, too, clicking and rasping like something out of a horror movie, but not speaking.

“What the fuck?” Mashi questions, still looking for the source of the noise. She backs up to stand beside Izuku, gunstaff raised, and growls viciously. “GO AWAY!” she yells and Izuku sees the creature reel back, like it’s going to strike, and his eyes widen in panic.

Without thinking he raises his arm, machinery within clicking and whirring as an Equalizer is filled with Blaze on his mental command and, as the creature is lunging forward, a part on the top of Izuku’s forearm clicks up and the Flame Equalizer is shot out.

Mashi jumps back as the explosion of fire erupts a few inches from their faces and a wild, shrill shriek erupts from the creature as it reels back again, this time in agony. It squirms and lashes its head as the fire fills Izuku’s thermal view with whites and yellows.

“Oh my god…” the redhead suddenly breathes, stiffening at Izuku’s side, and with his own real eye he sees it. With a switch the thermal vision is turned off and they stare at a now very visible monster currently writhing in pain. Its whole body is a gross, shiny black, the points of its legs and arms looking surgically created with bizarre scaring along the ends. It’s basically skin and bones, hardly any muscle to it save for the long neck.

Izuku has a moment to appreciate the contrast of this monster to that of the meteor shower still taking place in the sky above them, just visible down the alley behind the beast.

The thing smacks its own head against the ground and the walls a few times, finally sputtering out the flames with the dirt, and raises its head to glare at the children, wide, grotesque mouth hanging open and drooling a green sludge. Except it isn’t glaring at all, it’s just… staring.

With one, single, massive eye that has three irises in it.

Just one single massive eye…

Sitting in the front of a round, bulbous, exposed brain.
Chapter End Notes

Chapter Song: Blondie Redhead - For the Damaged Coda
They get a second to stare at the creature, bodies frozen with fear, when a boot comes rocketing from above and straight into the beast’s eye.

Izuku and Mashi yelp in surprise as the creature lashes out and flings the boot, and its owner, off of it and they land with practiced ease between the kids and the beast.

“Eraserhead!” Izuku exclaims when he sees the flying, lashing tendrils around floating hair while the underground hero stands off against the monster. The hero wastes no time, lashing out with his capture weapon and wrapping the beast’s front legs. With a snap of his wrist and a change of stance he’s pulling the front legs together and putting the beast of balance.

The creature clicks and chatters furiously as its front legs are flung sideways and it crashes to the ground, back legs scrambling on the concrete as it tries to keep itself up.

For a moment Izuku wonders if it’s over, that it really was that easy, but then there’s the sound of slicing.

“What the hell…?” he hears Eraserhead say under his breathe and… wait that voice sounded familiar. No, wait, that didn’t matter right now, what mattered was that the creature was sliding its front legs back and forth and was actually slicing through the hero’s capture weapon.

The hero curses and throws over a few more of his capture weapon’s tendrils to try and wrap up the creature even more and keep it still. Izuku didn’t understand. Wasn’t Eraserhead’s capture weapon supposed to be made of some kind of super strong alloy? What were this thing’s legs made out of?

With the addition to the ties the creature finally seems to be stuck, falling fully with a crash to the side, massive eye swinging around in its head and more of that green goop falling from its mouth as it squirms. The tendrils are wrapped snugly around joints and points of movement, keeping the thing still from trying to escape. It seems to realize this, too, as it hardly even tries to escape again.

Izuku and Mashi have moved closer to one another, sides pressed together as they try to get as behind the hero as they possibly can. There’s silence beside the creature’s clicking and rasping. It just lays there, the only thing moving is its eye rolling around before finally zeroing in on the three others in the alley and just staring.

“That…” Mashi begins slowly and Izuku looks to her. There were still tears in his eye, but adrenaline was making it hard for him to focus on one specific emotion at a time. He wasn’t sure what to feel or what to do, but Mashi was apparently not having that issue. “Was totally AWESOME!!”

“EH??” Izuku swings towards her fully as she pumps her fists in the air, eyes sparkling, one hand still grasping her gunstaff. “No it wasn’t, it was terrifying!”

“But also awesome!” Mashi looks to him with a huge grin, eyes wide with energy. “I am so glad I’m friends with you! You attract the coolest trouble!”

Izuku groans miserably and presses both of his hands to his face. This wasn’t helping at all. He was still shaking, tears rolling down his cheek, and he felt like an idiot, but they were safe now, thanks to
the underground hero they’d originally spotted. He looks up towards him now.

Eraserhead still has his back to them, but he’s moved forward towards the creature to tie more secure restraints over it, making sure it isn’t going anywhere. He looked so familiar, but with his back turned and the terrible lighting of the night it was hard to tell why.

“Mr. Eraserhead!” Mashi calls, waving her gunstaff above her head, and Izuku cringes at her volume. It felt painful, how it banged against his ears while his whole body still rattled. “You were so badass! Like… that was sooooo cool, and—“

“Are you both…” Eraserhead begins, standing up straight, and his voice sounds dangerous. Mashi’s mouth shuts with a snap and both kids stare at the hero in confusion, waiting for him to finish. Eraserhead turns around with a snap, making them jump, and he storms over towards them.

“COMPLETELY INSANE???”

Izuku’s eyes widen as the man comes into better view. Even with his hair straight up and yellow goggles in place and floating tendrils around him Izuku can recognize him anywhere.

“A… Aizawa-nii…?” he whispers as the man finally gets to them. He’s scowling and he reaches up to rip his goggles down and off of his face, revealing glowing red irises. He keeps glaring down at them, making Mashi squeak, but Izuku has frozen.

Aizawa is just about yelling at them, voice raised and furious as he begins demanding answers on why they were here and what they were thinking. Izuku can hardly hear them.

The monster had terrified him, but he hadn’t frozen. If anything, it had spurred him into action, but this? His neighbor, his honorary big brother, his role model, was standing in front of them, in hero garb, right after kicking monster butt.

Part of Izuku wants to be angry. At himself for seriously not putting together the pieces that now seem so obvious in hindsight. At Aizawa for never even telling him even though he knew how much heroes meant to Izuku. He wants to feel guilty, too, because he didn’t just worry Eraserhead with all of this, he’d worried Aizawa, and that just made everything feel worse.

He figures he will feel these things in a little bit, but not right now.

Right now he’s in a small fog and he hears Aizawa demanding, “Izuku, are you listening to me??” But Izuku hasn’t been. Instead of answering he steps forward and wraps his arms around Aizawa’s middle, squeezing as hard as he can, and begins to weep into his uniform, relief flooding his system.

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They can’t leave the scene yet. With the creature of unknown abilities still detained they’ll have to wait for the police to get there and cart it off. The creature isn’t moving, though, not throwing a fuss at all, so it’s decidedly easier and safer than expected.

Izuku doesn’t know how long he cried, just that at some point Aizawa had placed a hand on his shoulder and one on his head, awkwardly trying to soothe him. His methods weren’t great, but it was fine. Izuku was calming down just having the man here.

When he relaxes he steps back, wiping at his face and sniffing. He felt awful all over and he knows he’ll be able to sleep for a very long time tonight.

It seems Aizawa has calmed down too for when he crouches down his eyes aren’t glowing anymore and his hair has flopped down around his face again and…
“Your scarf was your capture weapon,” Izuku sniffles in mild realization, like it’s just one more thing to add to the pot, and Aizawa nods, ruffling the boy’s hair.

“Yeah, it is,” he nods. Izuku sniffs and ducks his head, his whole body shaking.

“I could see it,” he says quietly and he can just see Aizawa tilt his head, waiting for the boy to continue. “My eye… It has a thermal vision… We thought we saw you and we wanted to see if you were still nearby and then I saw… THAT thi—MASHI!!” Izuku had been looking up to motion at the creature when he sees his friend inching towards it, gunstaff raised as if to poke it.

The redhead swings around, eyes wide like she’d been caught with her hand in the cookie jar, but much worse. “Uhh…” Aizawa glares at her for a long moment, not saying a word, and finally she shrinks in on herself and scuttles back over to stand by Izuku’s side. The boy, still crying and frazzled and stressed, stares at her in open bewilderment.

“Are you serious?” he questions and she very pointedly looks away. Both he and Aizawa stare at her until she peaks over, sees their eyes are still on her, and groans.

“I was just curious!” she whines and Aizawa sighs deeply. He pinches the bridge of his nose, obviously stressed and exhausted, and raises his other hand towards Mashi, palm out, waiting for something. It takes the redhead a second before her shoulders slump and she dejectedly sets her gunstaff in his open hand.

“When did you even grab that? It was in my room,” Izuku mumbles, obviously stressed with his friend as well. She pouts and shrugs.

“Like… three days ago?”

“Oh my god…”

Aizawa is watching them both as Mashi grins sheepishly and Izuku now holds his face in both hands again. What was this night? What was happening anymore? Why him?

“You said you could see it?” Aizawa urges Izuku to continue instead, wanting all of the details he could get from this, done with the playing around. Izuku looks up at him, momentarily startled, but then nods.

“Y-yeah… It was invisible normally,” he says and Aizawa arches a brow. “I-it… it wasn’t doing anything at first… it was just creepy, but…” Izuku shakes his head, tears beginning to form in his eye anew. “It was following after you,” he whispers and he feels a little sick at the thought. He’d been distraught that anyone could be hurt in this situation, but knowing now that it could have been Aizawa makes his stomach turn.

“So you decided to play hero,” Aizawa says blankly, his eyes narrowing, and Izuku looks up at him.

“NO! No no no, I swear we weren’t! I just… I didn’t even realize I’d started moving until after the fact…” Izuku shakes his head and looks down at his feet. “I-I… I wanted to get your attention, but it drew the monster's instead…”

“We didn’t actually mean to pick a fight…” Mashi says and she finally sounds like she regrets what they’ve done, but then she whispers so only Izuku can hear, “even if it was super cool…” Izuku represses the urge to sigh.

“I’m so sorry,” he whispers instead, looking to Aizawa and forcing himself to make eye contact. “I… I really didn’t mean to. I feel stupid and foolish… I just…”
“Reacted,” Aizawa finishes and Izuku nods, quiet now, waiting for judgment. His neighbor is silent for a long moment, running his hand through his hair a few times, before saying, “It was a pretty stupid move, but that doesn’t make YOU stupid. Why were you out, anyway?”

“Midoriya-san let us go to the meteor shower viewing party at the park,” Mashi answers, looking down and away. Izuku cringes at the mention of his mother. What was this going to do to her? Had he ruined her trust again?

“Well…” Aizawa sighs and looks back at the creature still currently tied up and clicking on the ground. “You won’t be in trouble for vigilantism,” he begins and both kids look up at that. They hadn’t even been thinking about that. “You weren’t actually acting out as heroes and there was no inappropriate quirk usage since… well, you don’t have quirks.”

The hero, and Izuku is still having trouble wrapping his head around the fact Aizawa is actually a hero, turns back to look at the kids, face serious. “Do you regret what you did?” he suddenly asks and Izuku and Mashi straighten. They hadn’t been expecting that question.

“O-of course!” Izuku answers as soon as he processes the question. Regret didn’t even feel like a strong enough word for all of this.

“Yeah, me too…” Mashi mumbles, ducking her head and pulling anxiously at her ponytail. Izuku knew that, despite her energy, she had been scared too. It would be hard not to be considering what they had just faced off against.

Aizawa examines their faces for a long, long moment, his eyes thin and boring into them, before he nods. “Okay.”

Izuku and Mashi hesitate, looking to each other in confusion. “Okay…?” Izuku asks after a second, watching as Aizawa stands back up.

“Okay. I believe you,” the tired man says with a shrug. When both kids just keep staring at him, confused, he sighs and slumps his shoulders a little. “You want to know the difference between this and the last dumb move you two made?” he questions, giving them both a stern look at the mention of a “last time,” referring to Izuku’s spine and eye installations. “Difference is you planned, far ahead, to go through with that. I know you both didn’t plan to do this – we will still be talking about this, don’t think otherwise – but I think you both have been punished enough for this already,” the man pauses then looks back at the creature laying those few yards away from them, still completely still and staring at them.

“Oh…” Mashi whispers, nodding slowly, before saying with the same conviction, “I don’t get it.”

Aizawa sighs again, a bit more tired, and Izuku sends a small smile towards his friend before focusing on his neighbor.

“You’re allowed to make mistakes, you know,” Aizawa says finally as he looks down at them. “If this…” he motions to them and over at the creature, “ever happens again, yes, you will be punished, but for now I have a feeling you won’t be running off like that again without thinking ahead of time.”

“You would be amazed by my levels of stupidity—OW!” Mashi yelps when Izuku elbows her with his robotic arm, shooting her a disbelieving glare.

Aizawa huffs and shakes his head. “I know you two have been working hard to earn your trust back, and I know you didn’t consciously mean to do this, so I’m giving you a pass,” he lifts Mashi’s
gunstaff that’s still in his hand to point at the two kids, eyes narrowing, “despite how monumentally ridiculous this whole thing is.”

Izuku lets out a deep, soul weary sigh that he really shouldn’t be able to create at twelve-years-old, but he doesn’t have the energy anymore to be concerned. He was still shaken and bothered, but to know that they’re escapades, for once, would be forgiven felt like a great weight was taken from his shoulders.

“Uh… guys?” the green-haired boy looks over to his friend, curious at her dubious tone. Her brows are furrowed and she’s raised a hand to point over where the creature was tied up. “It just got a bit more ridiculous…” she mumbles and both Izuku and Aizawa look to the creature.

At first nothing seems out of the ordinary, just the beast laying on its side, clicking and rattling deep in its throat, but then Izuku sees it. The shadows seem to be moving, somehow. Jumping and twisting until they converge on the ground right beneath the creature and it begins to sink into them.

“Shit!” Aizawa hisses and rushes forward to grab as many loose strands of his capture weapon as he can, shooting out a few more to assist in trying to pull the creature back up. Izuku can only watch on in terror as the hero fights a losing battle, sliding slowly across the ground, trying with all his strength to heft the beast back. His hair is floating again and Izuku can see the red glow in his eyes but, despite this, there’s no one he can pinpoint to cancel out a quirk and, like its sucking in a sudden breath, the shadow portal shrinks with a snap into nothingness, severing the capture weapon tendrils where it closes.

Aizawa stumbles but keeps his footing, scowling as he pulls in the broken tendrils. He curses under his breath, then curses again, then sirens can be heard and the alleyway is filled with blue, flashing lights from the far end of the alley.

Izuku keeps staring, stunned, at where the beast had disappeared, mouth hanging open, as Mashi mumbles at his side, “Well… fuck,” and he doesn’t think he’s ever thought a curse word was more appropriate in his life.

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They all go to the police station.

Aizawa contacts their mothers, letting them know that there was a villain incident, but that they are entirely safe and within his care. Izuku can hear Mottai’s voice over Aizawa’s phone when he pulls it away from his ear, her yelling much too loud, as she curses out any villain that would dare touch her daughter and asks if Mashi got a good hit in.

Inko is worried, of course, but surprisingly much more receptive than Izuku thought she would be. He stares at his neighbor’s own phone as he hangs up, confused how easily his mother had accepted everything. “Why isn’t she freaking out?” he asks, looking up at Eraserhead as they sit at the police station, waiting for an officer to come in and talk to them.

Aizawa is suddenly very interested in the far wall.

“She trusts me with you, it would seem,” he says simply, and Izuku knows it isn’t a lie, but he also has begun piecing a lot more pieces together, more skeptical. The boy’s eyes thin, thinking, considering, before they snap open wide.

“Oh my god! She knows you’re a hero!” he nearly shrieks. He felt betrayed enough as is, knowing Aizawa had kept this massive secret from him for so long, knowing how much Izuku adored heroes,
but now to realize his mother had done the same?

“It was a safety precaution,” the man finally sighs, shutting his eyes and looking a million times older. “We keep our identities secret from a lot of people for our own safeties and those we care about, but when we get close to others we can inform them if we desire. I preferred to keep my reveals to a minimum.” The man finally looks down at Izuku, who is pouting in anger and sadness, tears building in his eye. “You are still young, and I didn’t think you were ready.”

“Do the thing,” Mashi suddenly says, peaking around Izuku at Aizawa, her cheeks puffed out in her own betrayal. She didn’t look like she was going to start crying, but she still looked upset.

Aizawa’s brows furrow as he looks to her, mildly confused, then back to Izuku when he speaks up, “Do the thing or we won’t forgive you.”

For a long moment the hero is silent, perplexed, before it dawns on him what they want and he rolls his eyes skyward. There’s just the smallest of smiles on his face, however, and it’s gone a moment later as he clears his voice. He then turns to the kids, grinning his toothy grin, eyes a little wild, and says, “It was a logical ruse!”

Both kids, still upset and Izuku’s voice watery, begin to giggle uncontrollably and Aizawa schools his features back to normal, watching as the kids finally laugh after everything they had been through. Izuku feels like maybe his laughter is a little on the manic side, like he can’t control it anymore as he releases the pent up energy in his veins. He was going to pepper Aizawa with questions later, but right now wasn’t the time.

Well, except maybe for one.

“Hizashi and Nemuri are pro heroes too, aren’t they?” he asks finally, looking up at his neighbor’s calm expression.

“They are,” Aizawa nods after a beat, seeing no reason in hiding it anymore. “Present Mic and Midnight.”

“No way!” Mashi exclaims, standing from her seat, slack jawed and eyes wide and sparkling with sudden amazement. “That… actually makes a lot of sense, because—yeah, WOW, okay, how did we miss that?” the redhead deflates, face thoughtful and mildly amazed as she looks back on all the clues.

Izuku does too and kicks himself a little for how dumb he’s been with all this. He groans and leans his elbows on the table in front of them, then buries his face in both his hands. “Oh my god, we’ve been so stupid,” he mutters into his hands and he definitely feels Aizawa’s absolutely not helpful pat on his back.

Izuku takes a breath and tries to give himself a break. In hindsight of course it seemed obvious, but in the moment, well… he trusted them to not lie to him, and apparently they’d had his mother’s help too, so… wait…

“Wait a minute…” Izuku sits up straight, eyes wide as he remembers a specific event from not that long ago. “WAIT A MINUTE!” he shakes his head and then lets out a furious groan, tears and laughter from before far forgotten now. “Hizashi-san and Nemuri-san have been messing with us!”

“Do you mean the notebooks?” Aizawa questions and Izuku snaps his head towards him. The man shrugs. “They mentioned they’d seen your designs for their hero gear, but not much else.”

“They kept asking us questions about their hero personas when we didn’t know it was them and they
KNEW THAT!” Izuku shakes his head, the betrayal fresh and hot now.

“Oh yeah! They did!” Mashi yells in equal realization, standing back up after she’d sat down only a second ago. She huffs and crosses her arms, glaring down at the table. “I’m glad I called Present Mic a cockatoo now…”

Aizawa actually chokes, burying his face in the torn up remains of his scarf-weapon. “You called him a what?”

They don’t answer him, instead moving on to the next issue.

“I showed them my ideas and everything and got NO feedback! None! That’s so… that’s so…”

“Bullshit!”

“I was going to say rude but that works too…” Izuku looks to Mashi, nodding at her as they both continue to fume. “Aizawa-nii!” the boy now looks to the man at his side, his eyes narrowed dangerously, and the tired man just stares back, curious but not intimidated. “Can you do me a favor and not tell Hizashi-san and Nemuri-san we know about them?”

Aizawa stares at them for a long moment, thinking about the request, before arching a brow. “Are you getting back at them for all this?”

“YEP!” Izuku and Mashi say in tandem.

“Sure, I’ll even help if you want,” Aizawa agrees with a shrug. He takes a second, then, to look away and pull out some eye drops, applying them liberally.

“We’ll show them!” Mashi is saying, hands clenched into fists in front of her, “Messing with us like that, not telling us that—ah.”

The tiny noise comes out of nowhere and Izuku looks over, concerned by the sudden drop of his friend’s voice. He finds her sitting back down, frozen in place, ridged and eyes wide in very obvious horror. The anger Izuku had been feeling a moment ago vanishes as he immediately begins to worry. “Mashi…?”

The redhead mumbles something so quiet Izuku can’t hear her and he scoots closer. Aizawa also has his attention on her, looking like he’s about to stand and come around to her side. “What is it?” he questions and with him asking the girl finds the strength to speak louder.

“I told Midnight I had a crush on Midnight…” Mashi whispers, then slowly raises her hands to drag them over her face, voice raising a few octaves as she squeaks, “to her face!”

Izuku stares at his friend for a long, long moment as she seems to have a bit of a crisis and, he’ll feel bad about it later, but he just can’t help it, he begins to laugh.

He rolls his head back, loud peels of laughter erupting from him, Aizawa relaxing in his seat and sighing, while Mashi just slides out of her chair and curls up on the ground, groaning miserably.

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When the officer finally arrives – and he gives Mashi’s form, back in her chair, head on the table, a curious look that is quickly waved off – things become serious. Izuku lets his friend hold his robotic hand so she can relax from her misery and they can answer questions.
Aizawa seems to know the officer, speaking to him in familiar, but still professional, terms.

They each recount their own experiences of the events. Apparently Aizawa had heard Izuku and Mashi screaming for him and had hurried over as quickly as he could. Mashi keeps her cursing to a minimum, thankfully, and when asked about her quirk she grins and says she doesn’t have one. The officer seems perplexed that such a confident, eager to fight girl could be quirkless, but doesn’t ask any more questions.

Then it comes time for Izuku.

He tries to keep to the facts and not the emotion, explaining what happened. The officer asks to see his Equalizer darts and he loads up an ice one and shoots it at a bare wall, an explosion of mist erupting and the wall gets covered by a mound of thick ice.

“So, thermal vision, you said?” the officer asks towards the end, trying to get more specific details now.

Izuku nods. “Yes sir. When designing my eye I built in multiple variations to its sight. It also has a zoom function, night vision, and a variety of scanning capabilities that are… still being tested.”

“Is the thermal vision still on?”

Izuku’s brows furrow at that question. “No sir…” he says slowly. Why would he think something like that?

“Why’s that red light on, then?” the officer points towards Izuku’s left eye with his pen, his face expectant.

Izuku straightens up. Red light? He looks to Aizawa, looking for answers, but the man shrugs. “There’s been a red light on since I got to you. You do so many things with your builds I decided to wait for you to explain it.”

Izuku feels his breath picking up and he looks now to Mashi, whose eyes are wide in her own realization. “I just… I just forgot about it!” she admits, shaking her head. “I don’t think you turned it off since the meteor shower!”

Izuku swings back to look to the officer, his eyes wide, and finally the light turns off as he turns off its function. “I’ve been recording this whole time!!” he gasps. The recording dot, the red one usually in the corner of his vision, had been so small and out of his way he’d forgotten about it, and he hadn’t actively shut it off which meant it wouldn’t on its own unless he fell asleep. “A jump drive. I need a jump drive!”

The officer, surprised by the boy’s energy, gives Eraserhead a look, but the man just shrugs. “Get the kid a jump drive.”

The officer does finally go to fetch one, bringing it back with a few more of his coworkers behind him. One has a laptop in hand, which Izuku is grateful for. He’d forgotten about that, but now isn’t the time to berate himself. He takes the drive with his left hand and twists his bod some. The shoulder piece on his right arm with the speaker built in, which covers his real shoulder and isn’t actually a necessary device, has a port right under it, hidden away unless you know where to look. Izuku plugs in the drive at an angle then leans back in his chair and shuts his eyes.

He couldn’t put a port in his eye, it was too small, but he had built in a wireless connection between his eye, spine, and arm for instances like this, or perhaps some other function he would later implement.
With his eyes closed he focuses on the computer in his head, adjusting files, changing them to different file types that can actually be viewed on a normal computer, then uploads the video to the drive.

“It’s long,” he admits, opening his eyes to look back at everyone staring at him, “So it might take a seco—oh, no, it’s done.” He takes out the jump drive and hands it over, letting them plug it into the computer and open it.

The screen begins with Izuku and Mashi bickering playfully, which feels odd. Only a few hours ago they’d been laughing and eating and having fun, but now they were in a police station, discovering they had been hanging out with pro heroes for years and having fought a mysterious monster.

They skip forward a bit in the movie to Izuku’s thermal vision, watching as he spots the creature for the first time. A few of the officers actually gasp while past-Izuku flips between normal view and thermal, realizing the beast is, indeed, invisible.

When it gets to the part where Izuku is running and he turns and the creature’s bright, thermal signature is right there, Mashi takes hold of his robotic hand again and squeezes while Aizawa leans a little bit closer towards him. Then past-Mashi is charging the beast and present-Mashi cackles to herself. “That was awesome,” she mumbles under her breath and Izuku rolls his eyes.

The film goes on as usual, just as Izuku remembers it. He’s momentarily impressed with himself and his response time shooting his Equalizer, but it doesn’t last long.

They skip through Aizawa’s talk with them and watch as the beast is absorbed into the ground by shadows. When the police arrive on screen they stop the video and release a collective breath they’d been holding.

It still felt surreal, like any second Izuku would wake up and this would all be a dream. The creature would just have been a construction of his mind, his neighbor and adult friends wouldn’t be pro heroes, and he and Mashi would have only watched the meteor shower then gone home, but no. Everything was real.

“Well, Midoriya-san,” says the original officer, turning back towards them in his seat, pen tapping a few times against his report. “You certainly are something else…”

Izuku doesn’t know if that’s a good thing or a bad thing, but he smiles nonetheless.

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They get a lecture, and Inko is more protective for a long while, but they don’t get any additional punishment, just as Aizawa promised. Izuku feels so grateful. The encounter with the beast, he can’t even call it a fight, really did feel like punishment enough.

He’s a little bummed his mother is a bit more strict again with when he can go out on his own, but he feels it’s a small price to pay, and he can hardly fault her. He’ll just have to wait a little longer before he can return to the clubhouse, which had become his main goal lately.

It had been a long time since he’d been back. The machines were slow, every time he went to check on them in the past they had made progress, but not much. By now, if Izuku’s calculations were correct, the building should be able to be worked in. Some sections would still be off limits as construction continued, but hopefully Izuku would be able to get in there soon and build new upgrades or new bots altogether. Preferably that second one. He had a lot of ideas stockpiled up.

For now, however, he had other plans.
He sits after a good walk with Aizawa in said man’s apartment. The man is curled up on the ground in his sleeping bag and Izuku has sat down on the floor beside him, his feet propped up against the sleeping bag, just on top of the man’s leg.

(“Do you mind?” Aizawa had grumbled once Izuku had settled.

“No,” Izuku had replied innocently then got to work.)

Notes were scattered around him as usual and his microscope and laptop were to his side, looking at a new and particularly interesting quirk genetic code.

“Aizawa-nii’s quirk is so cool,” Izuku whispers as he moves the view on his screen and then writes down a few notes, “and also hopefully helpful.”

“Because that’s not creepy at all,” Aizawa mumbles sarcastically from the floor, voice muffled by his sleeping bag. Izuku shrugs.

“You did agree to it. At least I didn’t ask for any blood…” he replies absently, still focused on his work. Now knowing that Aizawa was Eraserhead opened up a lot of possibilities for Izuku. One was just getting to talk to a pro hero and gush a little. Not much, because despite everything Aizawa was still basically like his older brother.

The second was getting to examine up close a hero’s gear. Aizawa already had a replacement capture weapon ready to go while they made him a new one and Izuku was allowed to look it over, along with his goggles. They were… subpar, in his honest opinion, and could be so much better, but he could get to that later.

Because the third opportunity Izuku had, and his favorite, was that he was able to examine a unique and rare quirk of a pro hero, and hopefully lead to a new technological invention for himself, and Aizawa’s quirk really was perfect for Izuku.

Aizawa could block out the usage of the quirk factor. He couldn’t destroy, but rather put on pause another person’s powers. He then was able to subdue them with superior fighting capabilities. If Izuku could find a way to replicate that in some manner, that would mean he could put people on an equal playing field with him, giving him the advantage of knowing how to fight without a quirk while they, most likely, didn’t.

“I think I’d like to call the device a Leech, or Leeches,” he says as he looks over some possible blueprints of a few differing devices.

“No Greek mythology?” Aizawa questions back around a yawn, not sounding very interested, as usual.

“Well…” Izuku hums and tilts his head in thought. “I thought maybe something to do with the Lernaean Hydra, which had a poison that did so much damage to a god they gave up their immortality so they could die… but that sounds a little intense… plus too wordy. Leech just works better…”

Aizawa hums, probably not listening, probably on the verge of sleep, so Izuku stops talking, for the most part. He still mutters up a storm as he works, thinking of the future.

Eventually he does move onto designing new gear for Eraserhead, focusing first on better goggles. The current ones… made no sense. They had holes in them for Pete’s sake, how did that protect him from wind or debris? It didn’t, was the correct answer.
He works on the design and build, planning on making both a yellow one for consistency’s sake and a purple one since it apparently was Aizawa’s favorite color. Variety. Even someone like Aizawa wouldn’t mind a little variety.

The capture weapon is easier to think of new functions, but harder to come up with how to build it. It definitely needed to be made of the Hera material, but Izuku would need to craft that into a new form. He had a more rubbery form, a metallic form, a plastic-like form, but not a cloth form. He could hop on that anytime he wanted, though, so he wasn’t too worried.

As for functions, perhaps something in the tips for more strike ability, and an electrification function, which Aizawa would need specialized gloves for. Izuku jiggles his pencil in his left hand, eying the research and ideas. It was a lot he had planned, he would need to set up a schedule or checklist of some sort, but for now he figures he should probably take a break.

He lays backwards, feet still propped up on his neighbor, and yawns. A quick nap wouldn’t hurt.

So he shuts his eyes and takes Aizawa’s lead and begins to slumber.

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Izuku is awoken by the sound of giggling and snapping. He doesn’t open his eyes at first, realizing he recognizes the voices, and Aizawa hasn’t moved either.

He recognizes that the snapping sound is also the sound of a camera on a phone, too.

Still feeling petty and irritated Izuku turns on his thermal vision, eyes still shut, and looks over at Hizashi and Nemuri’s heat signatures, because those are definitely their voices. Hizashi’s hands are up, definitely holding a phone, while Nemuri stands behind him, giggling as she watches him take pictures. It doesn’t feel like Izuku has moved that much in his sleep, both feet still propped up on his neighbor, but he supposes that must still be cute to them.

The machinery in Izuku’s mechanical forearm comes to life on his command and, while looking at Hizashi’s figure using his thermal vision, he quickly raises his arm and fires an Ice Equalizer at the man’s hands, making the man and Nemuri shriek in surprise. And Aizawa is definitely cackling, which meant he was awake, so that was nice.

Izuku opens his eyes and straightens up, pulling his legs towards himself to cross them under him. Both of Hizashi’s hands, and his phone, are now incased in ice and Nemuri has actually fallen onto the ground, clutching her stomach as she laughs. The blond man looks shocked, sunglasses crooked and mouth hanging wide open.

Still feeling vengeful Izuku uses his eye to snap a quick picture.

Aizawa shuffles for a second before also sitting up, yawning and stretching his back, while still staying in his sleeping bag. He looks up at Hizashi, who has begun blabbering, not sure how to respond, and grunts, “Serves you right.” He then looks to Izuku and says, “Nice shot.”

“Don’t encourage him!!” Hizashi shrieks, finally able to find his words, shaking his stuck hands around. “This is not okay! Baaaaaad boy!!” he continues, now focused on Izuku, who just shrugs.

“I could shoot a Fire Equalizer at it next, if you like?” Hizashi scuttles back quickly, nearly tripping over Nemuri, scowling deeply.

“Nooooooo thank you!!” he yells in English, still waving around his frozen hands. Izuku giggles at the whole scene and finally stands, feeling a little pity for the man, but only a little.
“I’ll get some warm water,” he says, nodding. “You’re phone is waterproof, right?”

“Yeah, it is,” Nemuri offers, still on the floor and giggling uncontrollably. Izuku nods and grabs a bowl from his neighbor’s meager possessions and fills it with hot tap water. He also grabs a roll of paper towels and heads back into the living area, setting the bowl on the coffee table so Hizashi, who is pouting like a child, can sit on the couch and soak his frozen hands in it.

“Why do you have a waterproof phone, anyway?” Izuku asks conversationally, sitting to Hizashi’s left on the couch.

“He’s such a klutz he just needed one,” Nemuri answers for Hizashi again, who sends her a particularly deep pout.

“Not true! It just seemed like a good investment!” the man huffs, holding his nose up high. Izuku hums thoughtfully.

“For being a teacher? Or your other job?” he asks as innocently as he can. He knew why Hizashi had a waterproof phone. There was no telling what kind of enemy one would face in the line of hero work, but Hizashi still didn’t know that Izuku knew, and neither did Nemuri.

“The… teaching one. Kids, y’know?” Hizashi says and this time Izuku can hear the pause.

“I figured you’d be teaching high school or something,” the boy says like he can’t believe it, looking up at Hizashi with surprised eyes.

Izuku still didn’t know what school they all taught at, Aizawa wasn’t actually allowed to share that unless given permission, but Izuku knew now it had to be a hero school, and those only started in high school.

“Oh, no, we do! It just gets so rowdy!” Nemuri chirps and Izuku nods. Okay, that was enough questioning their work. If he went any further he’d probably make them suspicious, so next up was his biggest plan.

“Hey, Hizashi-san!” Izuku turns again to the still pouting man, “I saw your favorite hero on television the other day!” he says and just like that the man brightens up, not a care that his hands are still currently frozen together.

“OH! You mean Present Mic??” Izuku nods with a smile and Hizashi turns near giddy. “What was he doing??”

“Well, actually, it was more of a gossip segment. Someone caught him pulling a wedgie out of his pants and they were talking about his leather outfit,” the boy says like it’s nothing and he actually sees the color drain from Hizashi’s face while Nemuri holds back a loud snort.

“Uh… but… YOU like the leather, right? Makes him look COOL and like a ROCKSTAR!!” Hizashi slowly builds up more energy, focusing instead on Izuku, certain the boy will say something nice, but instead Izuku gives a half shrug.


“Feathers…” Hizashi says and his voice actually sounds a little dead inside and Izuku has no sympathy.

“Yeah! Keep up the whole cockatoo look! Oh! They were talking about Midnight too! She’s your favorite, right Nemuri-san?” Izuku looks now to the woman and really, how had he missed that she
was a hero? She hardly changed anything about her look from Midnight to Nemuri save for a
clothes.

“Really, now?” Nemuri purrs, side-eyeing the miserable man by Izuku’s side. “Were they using her as
an example for what to strive for? I’m sure they were, she—“

“Actually they said her outfit was tacky.”

“WHAT???” Nemuri shrieks, eyes wide and furious. Izuku leans away, not needing to fake the
surprise on his face at her eruption. “THAT…” Nemuri raises a pointer finger, steaming, before
taking a deep, deep breath and calming down. “That’s just not true. I refuse to believe such
nonsense.”

“They did like ONE hero’s outfit, though,” Izuku decides to go in for the kill, not really wanting to
hear Nemuri shriek again even if it was pretty funny.

“Who? All Might?” Hizashi huffs with some scorn, because of course, everyone loved All Might
and his outfits. Including Hizashi, but the man was too downtrodden now to show it.

“No, no, they were focusing on newer heroes, and apparently someone got a really rare photo of this
one hero, Eraserhead!”

There’s a long, drawn out silence as both Nemuri and Hizashi freeze, turning to stare at Izuku with
obvious bafflement. “Huh?” they say in unison and Izuku nods, holding onto his laughter by a
thread.

“Yep! Apparently they liked his sensible but still stylish choices. Plus, the weapon doubling as a
fashion statement? They really loved that. Mmhm!” Izuku nods, like it’s all true, and slowly he sees
Nemuri and Hizashi peak over at Aizawa, trying to be discreet.

Then they see how the man has buried his face deep into his sleeping bag, face red, and shoulders
shaking from even his attempts to keep down the laughter.

“HE KNOWS???” Hizashi erupts first, standing and spilling water over the coffee table.

“OH MY GOSH, YOU JERK!!” Nemuri cries out as both Izuku and Aizawa finally begin to laugh.
Aizawa’s is quiet and breathy, more of a wheezing fit than anything, while Izuku’s is loud and high.

Aizawa had helped Izuku, as it turned out, by telling him exactly what to talk about to get the best
reactions out of both Hizashi and Nemuri, and fashion was the solution. He then said he would just
remain quiet and let Izuku do his thing. The comment about Eraserhead’s fashion being considered
better had been a last minute improvisation on Izuku’s part, and he was pretty proud of himself for
that.

“You both are terrible,” Hizashi hisses, swinging back and forth to look at the two of them. Aizawa’s
laughter doesn’t last long, and he’s soon waving his friend off and getting up to get something to eat,
still cackling under his breath, while Izuku can’t breathe he’s laughing so hard.

“You both are terrible,” Hizashi hisses, swinging back and forth to look at the two of them. Aizawa’s
laughter doesn’t last long, and he’s soon waving his friend off and getting up to get something to eat,
still cackling under his breath, while Izuku can’t breathe he’s laughing so hard.

“THAT’s what you get!” the boy eventually yells, sitting up straight and wiping at his eye, then
grinning at the two adults. “AND…” he begins, before pointing at his robotic eye. “Recorded the
whole thing!” he grins. He had turned off the feature that had the eye glowing red when he recorded,
thinking it could be an issue in the future with hero work, but apparently it also was helpful with
getting petty vengeance.

Both Hizashi and Nemuri immediately erupt with, “DELETE IT!!” and Izuku is back to laughing his
Izuku’s leg jitters as he sits on his couch, waiting. Mashi sits beside him and both of their mothers are mumbling to each other over by the kitchen.

Apparently someone wanted to meet the two kids, someone important that Aizawa, Hizashi, and Nemuri all respected greatly. Izuku wasn’t sure who this person was, or why they wanted to meet them, but he had to figure it stemmed from the monster attack a few days back.

Nothing had been found out. No perps had been caught and no evidence had been found. They had attempted to collect some of the saliva the creature had left behind but not long after it just seemed to dissipate into nothing.

Evidently this person, whoever they were, was not actually tied to the investigation. Not directly anyway. They simply wanted to meet Izuku and Mashi.

The knock on the door makes Izuku jump. He hadn’t even noticed how wound up he’d gotten, sitting and waiting for who knows what, eagerness and anxiety chattering through his bones. His mother goes to answer the door and Izuku sits up, Mashi at his right leaning forward to look around him towards the entrance hall. Hizashi and Nemuri enter first, all smiles and happy to see them. They’re in their civilian clothes, not their hero uniforms, which Izuku is still waiting to see personally. Behind them comes Aizawa, speaking in hushed tones with Inko. He’s actually wearing his hero uniform, but he’s been doing that for years without the kids knowing.

It feels oddly normal, but Izuku doesn’t see the person that wanted to meet them. He doesn’t see anyone at all. Just the three pro heroes that are always coming over to visit.

Mashi notices this as well and decides to speak up on the matter. “Heeeeey… What gives?” she begins, sounding a little cross. Izuku couldn’t blame her. They’d both been sitting around anxiously for some time now, not even speaking as they waited for the mystery guest. “Where’s—“

She can’t get another word out when Aizawa’s scarf begins to move on its own. They watch in shock, leaning in closer as the movement continues. Had the underground hero learned a new trick? What was this about?

“Hello, children!!” and out pops a talking animal.

Mashi shrieks, nearly falling off the couch, but Izuku grabs the back of her shirt with his robotic arm and pulls her back on instinct. He certainly… hadn’t been expecting that. Why was a talking… animal of some sort inside Aizawa’s scarf?

“Uh oh, I do apologize for that scare,” says the little white… rat? Dog? What was it? He? It had a male-sounding voice. “I just couldn’t resist. A good joke is always a good way of breaking the ice, after all.”

Wait a minute. Waaaaaaait a minute.

Izuku’s eyes widen and he’s quick to stand up, body shaking at the exhilaration that takes over his body. “You’re Principal Nedzu!” he says as his brain finally makes the necessary connections. A little white animal, with a scar over their right eye, in a well-kept suit, and capable of speech. Of course it was THE Principal Nedzu, who else would this be? “The principal of UA!”

“That is me,” Nedzu chuckles as he climbs down Aizawa calmly and hops onto the ground. “Now
don’t go telling any of my students about my little trick. I do enjoy giving them an occasional spook when they are too uptight,” the animal wags a furry finger at them, all kind smiles and patient eyes.

“It worked,” Mashi huffs, eyes still a little wide, before she shakes her head out and gives the adults gathered there a once over. Izuku is just about vibrating, no he definitely is vibrating, as he faces the actual Principal Nedzu of his dream school. “So does that mean you guys work at UA?” Mashi asks and Izuku looks over to her. She’s pointing at the three pro heroes, one of her brows arched, and Izuku has to put his fanboy self off to the side for a second so he can piece that together. He looks to Aizawa, then to Hizashi, then to Nezumi, then back to Aizawa, then to his mother, his eyes sparkling and mouth hanging open as he bounces up and down.

“Mom! Mom! They work at UA! They work at UA! Oh my gosh!!” he says, the fanboy not staying gone long. Inko smiles over at him and nods.

“So it would seem,” she says softly, looking over all of the guests in her home.

“I am sorry for the sudden visit,” Nedzu is saying, looking to Izuku’s mother with a slightly apologetic expression.

“Oh!” Inko straightens, surprised, before shaking her head and holding up her hands to wave off any concerns. “Please, with how highly everyone spoke of you, I feel honored to have you here.”

“Yeah, right, honored and stuff, but uh, don’t mean to be rude or nothin’, but why DID you wanna meet our kids?” Mottai speaks up, leaning a heavy arm against the back of one of the kitchen chairs, one of her eyebrows raised.

“Well, I’ve heard quite a lot about these children,” Nedzu begins, which has Izuku’s face heating up and looking quickly towards the pro heroes for answers.

Hizashi is the first to shrug, grin, and reply, “What can we say? You two bring out a lot of conversations! Especially from Shouta-kun!” Izuku and Mashi look over at Aizawa, who is now glaring at his own best friend, before he looks away and coughs and doesn’t say a word. Mashi snorts at that while Izuku just blushes deeper.

“Hmm, quite true,” Nedzu agrees, glancing back at Aizawa, before focusing again on the two children in front of him. “I have been wanting to meet you both for some time now, but with this recent attack I must say I wanted to check up on you personally.”

“That is very kind of you, Principal Nedzu,” Inko says and Izuku is nodding vigorously.

“Y-yeah! That’s really nice! You’re nice! I am a big fan and I really want to go to UA one day and become a hero and oh gosh I’m rambling Mashi stop me before I say something stupid!” Izuku can feel the panic mounting as he begins to speak, unable to stop himself, and Mashi reaches up to grab him and make him sit back down, patting his shoulders a few times before backing off and giving him a look, wanting to know that he’s okay. “I’m good… thank you,” he mumbles then scowls at himself and looks again at their new visitor. “Sorry about that…”

Nedzu is still smiling, perhaps a bit more humorously this time, and shaking his head. “Please don’t be. It is great to see such energy in the youth of today! Especially in such a bright young man such as yourself. I hear you are an inventor?”

“Yes, sir, I am!” Izuku nods, “I’ve created a lot of handy gadgets for around the house, new replacement parts for myself for the things I lost in an accident a few years back, a new shock-absorbing material called Hera that can take a multitude of forms and properties if done correctly,
elemental darts called Equalizers in my arm, a super computer in my brain, I’m currently researching quirk genetics in order to mimic quirks through technology—“ Izuku gasps suddenly, running out of air as he goes on and on.

“Breathe, Izuku!” Mottai calls with a hearty laugh and Izuku nods absently as he tries to catch his breath.

“That’s quite the list,” Nedzu hums, impressed, and Izuku, despite still gasping, beams. “I would quite like to sit down with you one day and speak more in depth on these inventions of yours.” Izuku is already nodding furiously. Nedzu was a genius, that was his quirk after all, and Izuku had always dreamed of getting to speak one on one with him one day.

“And what about you, Mashi-san?” Nedzu turns now to the redhead at Izuku’s side, who has been remarkably silent through this all. “Mashi is fine, yes? Yamada-san told me you much preferred being called by this name?”

“Oh!” Mashi sits up straighter, surprised at being addressed, “Y-yeah! It’s just better.” The girl isn’t speaking as loudly as she had been a moment ago and Izuku wonders with a jolt if she feels out of place. She liked heroes, and she was interested in UA, but she didn’t have the same information Izuku had on the matter, nor the same intrigue. Plus, all the talk on technology must be making her feel out of place. Izuku wanted to reach out to her, make her feel welcome and safe, but Nedzu was still here and still talking.

“I hear you have a fire in you not even many adults possess. An urge to fight, but never malicious.”

Mashi blinks a few times, uncertain how to respond, before nodding slowly. “I guess…?” she looks down at her lap, her feet dangling and kicking off the edge of the couch. “I just don’t like being quiet when people are mean or think they’re better than somebody. If somebody is being a jerk somebody should do something, right?”

“I can’t disagree,” Nedzu nods, walking around the coffee table to stand closer to Mashi’s side. “I hear you want to be a hero as well?”

“Hell yeah!!” she immediately replies, energy returning to her voice, and Izuku wants to berate her on her language but she’s already off and yammering. “Me and Zuzu are gonna prove that even if you’re quirkless you can be a hero! We’re gonna have a bunch of tech and weapons and a drive no one else can faithless!!”

“Fathom.”

“That too!!”

Nedzu hums thoughtfully, running a paw over his chin. He seems unperturbed by the girl’s gumption, seeming to actually be pleased by it. “Weapons you say? Wouldn’t you say that’s unfair? No one else gets weapons at UA,” he questions slowly and Izuku can tell it’s a test. He wants to see how they’ll respond. So Izuku is honest.

“With all due respect, sir, that’s because they were born with their weapons ahead of time. They’ve had a silver spoon in their mouths since birth while we are treated like trash due to the uncontrollable consequences of our births,” Izuku pauses, catching Nedzu’s thoughtful eye before continuing. “With the technology we are capable of quirkless individuals could easily become heroes with training, but the society we have built is what has made being quirkless a ‘bad thing,’ nothing else. Society has made a system that won’t let us be heroes, then belittles us and treats us like it’s our faults to even dream of something more.”
“Besides!” Mashi pipes in, leaning forward in her seat, looking over at Izuku to make sure she didn’t interrupt his talk. “Everybody needs help, that’s why there’s schools and shit, some people just need a little different help.”

Nedzu looks at the two of them for a long, long moment before finally nodding, seeming to be pleased. “Well said, well said indeed,” he says with a smile and a nod. “I must say I look forward to seeing how you both do getting into my school. We would be lucky to have such spirited and mindful individuals such as yourselves with us.”

Izuku and Mashi beam immediately at the praise.

“However, Mashi-san,” Nedzu begins, turning to the redhead with a suddenly serious expression, and the girl stiffens. “There is a rule in the entrance exam that all items brought in must be necessary to stabilize a quirk, or must be designed by the user themselves. I understand you have a weapon of preference called a gunstaff that Midoriya-san made for you?”

“I-I just built it!” Izuku cuts in quickly, “I didn’t actually design-design it, that was Mashi…”

Nedzu looks to Izuku carefully, eyes searching and thoughtful and it feels a little odd to be getting such a look from an animal. “Very well,” he says after some consideration, “I will make you a deal. If you can teach her how to make her own gunstaff for the Entrance Exam, then I will accept that tool into the test.”

Mashi suddenly doesn’t look so sure of herself, her shoulders sinking and her brows twisting sadly. The boy beside her looks to her and immediately decides he’s having none of that. He reaches over and grabs her hand, squeezing it hard and looking straight at her until she meets his eyes.

“No problem,” he says firmly, more to Mashi than Nedzu, but still the principal accepts it, smiling at the two and nodding.

“Very good, than,” he says and looks over at the mothers standing quietly at the kitchen table. “You two have a fine pair of children, here.”

“Thank you, sir,” Inko nods graciously as Mottai crosses her arms and beams.

“Damn straight!” the redheaded woman booms, making Inko jump and Hizashi and Nemuri chuckle.

“I understand you two have been designing quite a few ideas for your hero personas. I must admit I am curious. I have never met quirkless heroes-to-be, after all,” Nedzu continues and the atmosphere seems to shift into something more relaxed. Nemuri heads over to sit with Inko and Mottai, eager to chat, as Hizashi scuttles over to the kitchen to steal some food and Aizawa follows him to stop him from stealing some food.

“OH! OH!” Mashi suddenly leaps up and bolts for Izuku’s bedroom, a blur of red that has both Izuku and Nedzu blinking in mild surprise until she’s bolting right back with two of Izuku’s notebooks in hand. She hands one to Izuku before plopping down and opening the one she still holds to a page she herself has drawn in. She shows it to Nedzu, who takes the notebook gently and looks over it.

“I will be the Wild Hero, Apex!” she announces loudly, thumping a fist to her chest, pausing, then rubbing where she hit her chest and mumbling, “Ow…”

The drawing is crude, even worse than Katsuki’s had been, and looks more like a tank than a suit for a hero. Weapons stick out everywhere and her notes are hard to follow. Izuku will need to sketch down his own idea for her costume and work with her from there, but for now that’s all they’ve got.
“Interesting, interesting,” Nedzu nods, going over the drawing like it could be understood. For a while he lets Mashi tell him all she wants about her ideas and how she wants to fight and how she wants to help. Nedzu does a great job of following along, asking questions and smiling pleasantly up at the girl.

Eventually, however, his attention turns to Izuku, patient and listening. For a moment the boy is frozen, hands tightening on the notebook Mashi had shoved at him, before he takes a deep breath and nods.

He opens up the notebook to the main page of his hero gear. Notes are listed everywhere, explaining functions, and he’s integrated his own robotic parts into the suit itself. There is armor for his left arm that will have similar functions to his robotic right arm in order to keep a better balance of power and every inch of the suit is made of his Hera material.

Nedzu takes the notebook and looks it over, reading the notes and nodding approvingly. Izuku was sure he would have other drafts much later on, and he also had plans for exosuits in the future, too, but for now this was going to be his hero image.

He glances at Mashi, who grins and nods at him, urging him forward. He nods back then takes a deep breath.

“I will be the Genius Hero…” he pauses.

“ Titan.”

Chapter End Notes

AAAHHH! Titan has been revealed!! **AND HERE HE IS!**

Also I tag anything to do with this fanfic as IIOHAH if anyone is interested. I haven’t made too many posts, yet, so sorry for that, but it’ll be fine!

Chapter Song: *Tim Be Told - Into the Stars*

Edit: I love being told people’s ideas. I like criticism and bettering my style. But let me tell you, it does NOT feel nice when people tell me how I should be writing my story. That is not criticism, it’s rude. I’m happy with what I’m doing, and I want to keep sharing it, but when I keep hearing “you should have done this” “you should have named him this” “you shouldn’t have gone with that” it’s discouraging and it hurts. I think hard about what I choose to do, and I’m proud with what I come up with. It’s not cute or helpful when people tell me how to do these things.

I’m not mad at you if you’ve done it before, all I ask is that you be courteous to me and many other writers in the future. If you don’t like the way something is written or designed then, I’m sorry if this sounds cruel, you can go do it yourself.

Edit 2: LISTEN I LOVE IDEAS!!! If you have an idea PLEASE share!! This is a story about being true and scientific advancements and ideas galore! What I have issues with are people saying "You should have..." but I love “What if...?" Share share share!! Be brilliant and lovely!!
Okay a lot of stuff for me to say! There will be a bit more at the end of the chapter as well.

First: There's fan art!!! And I love it!

By cryptidflavored-archived there is (1) and (2) and I love them both!!

Second: I said on my tumblr that I would be taking requests for small little drabbles to do with IIOHAAH, and that is still a constant thing, come request something!!

But I unfortunately did not realize some requests were requests in my asks, it seemed more like hopeful comments for the future, and I... answered them like an idiot like "HAHA yeah..." and I am very sorry! PLEASE! If you do send a request tell me it's a request. Don't just send a sudden idea, I am a forgetful and thick-headed bean, have mercy. And feel free to resend some things!

These small shorts will be answered on my tumblr, but I will also be making a separate work right here on ao3 for all these shorts.

And requests will only be answered if they work with the IIOHAAH story and if they don't spoil anything for later in the story. I may hold some for later as I release more of the story, though!

Now then, back to the story!

Katsuki couldn’t believe this. It was their first day back at the clubhouse, his two, reckless, quirkless friends finally back to being allowed to walk around more freely, if still needing to let someone know when they were heading out. They had all, of course, headed straight to the clubhouse. Katsuki had been a few times before, just to see the progress, but he didn’t have enough information on the machines and the desired outcome to determine whether a lot or a little progress had been made.

Now they’re back and he finds out that the main entry hall upon entering was now sturdy, and a couple of the halls and rooms to the left were safe to work in. The right side of the building still had some work to be done and the second floor was hardly even touched. Only having two of those big machines, or Bendies, meant the pace was sluggish.

They’d walked around for a little bit, determining the purpose of certain rooms, the biggest going to Izuku’s future, large builds. Katsuki and Mashi also claimed a room for themselves, determining that was their spaces. Izuku didn’t, since any space for his inventing was basically his and he didn’t want to take his own room when there would be a whole other second floor in the future.

Next visit they made would be bringing tools and decorations in to fill the mostly empty space. Mashi had even suggested they paint a few rooms and bring in a few things to make it all homier.

But right now?
Now they were planting flowers.

“Kacchan, stop scowling at the nasturtium bush, please,” Izuku calls where he’s crouched examining some of the pots they’d brought with them.

“Screw you, Deku, I’ll glare where I want!” Katsuki snaps but finally moves away from the plants with a loud huff. They were planting flowers for the exterior of the building. With some extra care to the lawn the grass had begun to turn green again, but the place was devoid and pathetic looking. Bushes were dead everywhere and there were even a few window planters that were empty save for spider webs and trash.

“Oh chill, Street Flare!” Mashi calls where she’s digging a hole with a shovel, already covered in dirt, a tree sapling of some sort by her feet. “This is fun!”

“Fun is actually doing something useful!!” Katsuki growls furiously, arms crossed as he refuses to help anymore. He’d helped plant a few of those nasturtium bushes; he didn’t think he needed to do anything else.

Izuku looks over at him, one of the windowsill planters under his robotic arm, a brow raised. “You think only useful stuff is fun? Kacchan that’s really sad…”

The explosive boy snarls, hands moving to his sides to crackle, shoulders raised, and he takes a few threatening steps towards Izuku, whose shoulders curl in defensively. “What the fuck did you say to me, nerd??”

Suddenly the shovel Mashi had been using a second ago lodges itself into the ground between the two boys, vibrating from the strike before standing still, stuck in the ground. Katsuki swings to growl at the redhead as she walks over, yanks the shovel back out of the ground, and then waves it in his direction.

“Please, PLEASE, keep being stupid. I want an excuse to throw this between your legs next,” she snarls right back. Izuku sighs from behind the girl and pokes his head out around her.

“Thank you Mashi, but it’s fine. If Kacchan doesn’t want to do this, than it’s no big deal, we could get this done without him,” the boy shrugs and Katsuki bristles.

“Like fuck you could! Screw you, Deku, I’ll plant way more than either of you!” the blond roars before stomping back over to their cart of bushes. He doesn’t know where they’d gotten all of this, they’d mentioned someone named Leanne whose family apparently owned a greenhouse, and the cart was from Mashi’s house, but he still doesn’t know how they’d paid for anything or gotten it all the way here. All he’d gotten was Izuku shrugging and saying, “Because science, Kacchan,” before getting to work.

Apparently they didn’t just want to make the interior of the house better, they wanted everything nice. It was supposed to be good for them and the environment, but Katsuki thought it was just a waste of time. The whole point of the clubhouse was to have a place they could work on bigger stuff. Who cared if it was “pretty?”

“I can’t wait to show mom this place,” Izuku says over to Mashi at some point while he gently removes a spider from a planter and brings it over to one of their new bushes, and then begins cleaning the planter itself.

Mashi hums an affirmative and Katsuki snaps his head up, eyes widening. “Are you a fucking idiot, Deku?? You can’t do that!!”
Izuku stops what he’s doing to look up, his expression openly surprised and confused. “Yes I can. I’ve already told her about the place, in a way,” he explains with a shrug and Katsuki feels himself bristle with mild panic and fury.

“What?? You idiot!! This is supposed to be a secret!! AND we’re trespassing!!” the boy erupts, anger and frustration boiling to the surface. What was Izuku doing? Why was Mashi okay with it?? This was completely stupid!!

“Actually, turns out, we’re not,” Mashi cuts in, leaning now against her shovel as she turns to Katsuki as well, her expression a little cocky at knowing something Katsuki didn’t know.

“Listen, Kacchan, after everything that’s happened I don’t want to keep lying to my mom. It isn’t okay…” Izuku looks down at his hands, a distant look in his eyes. “I’ve worried her so much lately. I can’t keep doing that. So I told her we had a clubhouse, and she was excited for us because she thought that was great for kids to have… I told her the address in case of an emergency, too, but she doesn’t know it’s an abandoned building… yet.”

“I don’t fucking care about that!! Once she DOES come here she won’t be able to find us because of your fucking EAARDs,” Katsuki waves a hand above his head to motion at all the floating hexagons in the air, “and she’ll see the abandoned building and we’ll be a deep shit!!”

“Again, not actually trespassing,” Mashi groans, now resting her head on her hands on the shovel, looking irritated that she’s being ignored.

“What does that even fucking mean?? Of course we are!!” Katsuki roars.

“Nope. No owner, this place is legally abandoned. Right Zuzu?” Both the redhead and the blond look to Izuku, who nods.

“After I told my mom… I wanted to make sure we were doing things right. So I did some research —”

“Some,” Mashi says with air quotes and even Katsuki has to snort in agreement to that. Izuku pouts, but continues.

“Turns out the original owners of the place passed away with no one to pass it onto. This place has no one to determine that we’re trespassing. In addition it was not marked off in any way, we were able to simply walk in, meaning legally we’re still safe. I mentioned when we first saw this place that what we were doing was illegal, but turns out it really isn’t and I was wrong.”

Katsuki is silent for a long time, just staring at the boy, then glances over at Mashi, then back to Izuku. He takes a deep breath before screaming, “AND YOU DIDN’T TELL ME THIS???”

“It didn’t come up!” Izuku yelps, raising both hands to hopefully placate his friend. Mashi straightens, gripping her shovel dangerously as she watches Katsuki to see what he does.

“Why are we keeping all this a secret then???” Katsuki pushes on, hands flexed in font of him, little explosions popping around his fingers, eyes aflame with anger.

“Because then we’d be staking a coup,” Mashi grumbles and Izuku smacks a hand to his face.

“Staking a claim, Mashi, I’ve told you this eight times now,” the boy mumbles, peaking out between his fingers to glare a little at the redhead, who just shrugs.

“Staking a coup sounds cooler though!”
“It isn’t grammatically correct!”

“What the fuck are you two talking about???” Katsuki snaps before the two can get too far away from the issue at hand.

Izuku sighs and runs a hand over the top of his hair where it has been pulled back into a small bun. It was getting pretty long. “We aren’t trespassing, but if we show interest – like we are doing by cleaning up the place – openly then we are ‘staking a claim,’ or basically saying we want it and want to own it. Last I checked none of us are old enough, or have enough money, to pay any kinds of taxes for ownership, now do we?”

Katsuki keeps glaring at Izuku. This kept happening. Why did this keep happening? Izuku and Mashi being in on some kind of information and him being left out. Sure, they went to school together now and Katsuki was the one visiting, but Izuku had a computer in his head, now, was it so hard to send him a message? Was it so hard to keep him in the loop?

“Whatever,” the explosive boy scoffs and turns away, glaring over at the other bushes he had been working on, some hydrangeas to be put between the nasturtiums, just far enough away the roots wouldn’t strangle each other, but close enough for the leaves and branches to mingle.

There’s no sound behind him, probably Izuku and Mashi glancing at each other and having some silent conversation about him, until finally the girl gets back to planting the saplings and Izuku gets back to the planters. Katsuki scowls deeply, seething, but still working. It’s a miracle he doesn’t explode any of the plants with how angry he is, but he doesn’t, and he soon finds the actions oddly soothing, at least to get him down from furious to irritated.

If they wanted to leave him out of things, fine, that wasn’t his problem. He would do what he needed to on his own. He didn’t need them to succeed. If anything they needed him.

For a while they all continue to work, nobody speaking. Katsuki manages to get the next few bushes placed, easily done with how scrawny they currently are. They’ll grow over time, but for now they’re a little measly.

“Hey, Kacchan?” The explosive boy lets out an angry breath through his nose, nostrils flaring and shoulders rising at just the mere voice.

“WHAT, Deku?” he snaps, looking over his shoulder at the boy, glaring viciously. Izuku doesn’t react beyond a small hesitation.

“Mashi and I discovered something really cool recently,” the green-haired boy says and Mashi looks up and over at having her name said. She looks confused for a second before her eyes widen and she quickly marches over.

“Whoa whoa whoa! I thought we weren’t supposed to tell anybody!!” she says, waving the shovel frantically above her head.

“Mashi and I discovered something really cool recently,” the green-haired boy says and Mashi looks up and over at having her name said. She looks confused for a second before her eyes widen and she quickly marches over.

“Whoa whoa whoa! I thought we weren’t supposed to tell anybody!!” she says, waving the shovel frantically above her head.

Katsuki turns around fully, eyes thinning. What was going on now? What else was being hidden from him?

“Oh come on! We can’t NOT tell Kacchan! He’s part of all this too. Without him we wouldn’t be the… what did you call us?” Izuku looks to the redhead, who immediately drops her worry to grin and pump her fist, with the shovel, into the air.

“The Triumphant Trio!!” she yells loudly, followed by booming laughter. Izuku snorts at her then turns to Katsuki again, smiling.
The explosive boy stares back at him. His shoulders have lowered and he doesn’t feel the urge to blow either of them up anymore, and just at the fact Izuku had noticed something was wrong and now they were including him again. How pathetic was that? He shouldn’t be concerned with being part of their little group. They were both useless, quirkless dorks without a chance out in the world. He was the one with all the promise. He was lowering himself to be around them.

So why did he keep coming back to them? Maybe it had to do with how boring his group – he couldn’t consider them friends – was back at school. That’s what he kept telling himself, but that shouldn’t make him feel a desire to be part of the group. Not like this.

Yet, despite his internal battle, he growls and turns to Izuku again, glaring expectantly. “What stupid bullshit did you idiots find out??” he demands and the other boy smiles.

“You know Aizawa-nii, Nemuri-san, and Hizashi-san?” he begins.

“The weirdos next door to you? Yeah, what about them?” Katsuki grumbles, arms crossing tightly over his chest. He sees Mashi grin from the corner of his eye, obviously she was no longer concerned with sharing this secret, and he snarls at her. She grins bigger.

“You won’t believe what their ‘day jobs’ are,” she cackles.

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“Okay, Deku, you can’t screw this up,” Katsuki is saying now, sitting in the grass as Izuku moves around, continuing getting the planters ready. Mashi has also joined him on the ground, finishing planting a sapling and deciding Katsuki had a good idea with resting in the grass.

“How would he even screw it up? They already know him like family,” Mashi huffs with an eye roll before going back to looking at her lap where she’s playing with some plants. “Fuck, I mean, Zuzu calls one of ‘em big bro already and ‘Zashi is like that fun uncle and Nemuri is the really, really, really, really pretty aunt or… something…” Mashi gets a dreamy look in her eyes at the mere mention of Nemuri, smiling dumbly.

Katsuki shakes his head. “No, he can’t go all otaku on them! He’ll scare ‘em off! This is a fucking awesome opportunity to get some shit out of some real heroes, even if they aren’t that high ranking,” the blond snaps, obviously irritated with Mashi, but she never was scared of him so he gets no response.

“He already has when we didn’t know about them. They thought his otaku mode was funny,” the girl snaps right back and then grins when Katsuki growls. “They’re fine, chill, for fuck’s sake.”

Izuku was enjoying this, even though he was the only one working anymore, watching as his two volatile friends sat in the grass near each other and bickered relatively good-naturedly for them.

“They’re actually interested in talking about my outfit designs I’ve had for them,” Izuku says, finishing patching up a third planter.

Mashi finally seems done with what she’s been doing in her lap and she’s grinning wide down at it and Katsuki eyes her with an apprehensive glare. “Good for you,” he says, watching as the redhead begins to scramble towards him.

“Well, Midnight and Present Mic have talked about it… niichan I’m doing it for him on my own because he’s difficult and won’t admit his gear needs an upgrade,” Izuku grumbles the last part half to himself. He sighs. He was looking forward to helping out the pro heroes, Principal Nedzu had even offered his own school grounds as a testing field for them, but he did really wish Aizawa was
more interested in getting better gear. It would make it easier to design them.

Finally Mashi reaches Katsuki, the boy leaning away as much as he can from her, and she reaches out to plop down a flower crown on top of his head. He blinks and his eyes narrow. “What…?”

“It’s a flower crown!” she leans away, leaning back on her hands. Izuku looks over as he stands, the three planters now stacked together and in his arms. “Wanted to make one for you!”

“Uh… thanks…” Katsuki begins, his expression suspicious, and Mashi nods before pointing at his head.

“It’s made of weeds! Annoying and destructive, just like you!”

Katsuki immediately reaches up to set the crown on fire, face unimpressed and angry while Izuku giggles under his breath and Mashi laughs loudly. Before they can dive into a full-blown fight Izuku quickly comes over and sets a planter down in front of both of his friends. He sets the third to the side for himself.

“No fighting, come on, make your own planters, I’m not going to do it. Leanne-san got us a bunch of flowers to pick from,” he says then moves over to their cart to look over their smaller plants. Little plastic containers of all kinds of flowers lay everywhere. There would be plenty more planters and plenty more flowers in the future, but for now they could get their own personal ones done that would sit under their rooms’ windows. Izuku’s would go under a window of his main workroom.

Mashi pops up beside him, nearly making him jump, looking over all of the flowers. “I like Leanne! She gave us discounts AND free stuff!” she says brightly before immediately nabbing a couple snapdragons when she spots them. She nearly knocks Katsuki off his feet as she passes him going back to her planter. The explosive boy snarls after her, yelling at her to watch it.

“I’m serious, Deku,” Katsuki is saying as he comes over. Izuku feels so happy that he’s going along with everything now. He had been worried earlier when the boy had gotten all quiet and angry, steaming in his thoughts. He remembered their talk from a few years back, how he had realized Katsuki was lonely despite all the praising crowds. He didn’t want Katsuki to feel that way ever again.

“I won’t scare them off,” Izuku smiles as he crouches down to consider a few of the flowers. “You’ll have a chance to talk to them, I promise.”

“Isn’t this supposed to be a secret, me knowing? How are you so terrible with secrets, Deku??” Katsuki growls, picking up the first fiery colored flower he sees. They’re marked as geraniums, Izuku notes, and are a pretty combination of reds, pinks, and purples.

“I’m not going to lie to them anymore, Kacchan,” Izuku says, looking over his shoulder to give Katsuki a firm look. He had hurt his family too much keeping secrets. He wasn’t going to do it again, not if he could help it. “They’ll understand. They know how close we are.”

Katsuki stares back at him for a long moment, eyes thin and shoulders up, before he turns away with a huff and a mumbled, “Whatever…” Izuku smiles after him as he sits down by his own planter to the right of Mashi, giving himself and the girl plenty of room as they work. Mashi has already made a mess of the soil they have to fill the planters, and Katsuki immediately yells at her for it, also snapping at her when he spots her not wearing her gloves, grabbing her discarded pair and throwing them at her face.

Izuku smiles at them, feeling more at ease than he has in a while. He snaps a picture with his Eye
then turns back to the flowers and decides to test out a new function.

As he looks over the plants thin, pale circles appear over individual flowers, rotating slowly, until a line grows out of them and leads to a word identifying the plant that particular circle is hovering over. Izuku grins. This would be helpful in the future for all kinds of observational needs.

He shuts off the function, pleased, and gets back to the task at hand. This was a time for nature and friends. He needed to allow himself to have more of these moments or else he may just drive himself crazy.

He picks up some rhododendron, large flowers that would fill the majority of his planter, and a couple bluebells. He was amazed by how much Leanne had given them, but the woman had been so excited to help them with their planting. She adored plants, and she adored them.

Izuku also picks up two other flowers when he sees them and heads back over to his friends, sitting down at his own planter, forming a small circle with Katsuki and Mashi. Katsuki is glaring down as he works, carefully preparing everything, while Mashi makes a mess, grinning like a fool, not a care in the world.

“Hey, Kacchan, try these, too,” Izuku says, pushing over a small container of daffodils. The blond boy looks over at them, then to Izuku with thinned eyes. For a while he considers, but finally he takes the new flowers for himself and gets back to his silent work.

“Clubhouse for building crazy science shit is gonna be fucking covered by flowers,” the explosive boy grumbles and Izuku smiles. Yes, it did seem odd, but they needed to be taking care of this place in every aspect, as well as themselves. Walking up to a rainbow of petals every time they arrived seemed like a great idea to lift their moods.

“Izuku!” Izuku now turns to the redhead, whose head pops up right away. She looks at her friend curiously as Izuku now pushes his other flower grab towards her. “I think these cornflowers would look good with yours,” he says and Mashi picks up the new flowers, examining them.

“Prettyyyyy!” she says, then looks up at Izuku with an arched brow and a smirk. “Aren’t we supposed to be making our own, though?” she teases and Izuku blushes deeply.

“O-oh! Yes, well, I just wanted to suggest! Uh… See, I just thought they’d look pretty with what you’ve got, and they have a lot of symbolism in Egypt and aren’t you half Egyptian on your mom’s side? It seemed like a good idea and the colors seemed to go well with the snapdragons, right?”

Mashi snorts loudly and reaches out to pat Izuku’s head, stopping his rambling midway. “Zuzu, relax, I was only joking! I like them!” she cackles, finding Izuku’s flustered response hilarious despite trying to calm him down.

“Sorry…” Izuku mumbles, ducking his head and pouting. He’d seen the flowers, the daffodils and the cornflowers, and after a quick look up of their meanings in his Eye had thought they would make a nice addition to his friends’ planters. “New beginnings” for Katsuki and “loyalty and constancy” for Mashi.

“It’s fiiiiiiine,” the redhead waves off, calm and happy, but then she gets a glint in her eye that has Izuku leaning away. “But if you still wanna make me feel better…” She pauses and wiggles her eyebrows at Izuku, an unspoken but now rather familiar request in the air.

“Let you play music through my Shoulder Speaker?” Izuku questions when he realizes what Mashi must want.
“Let me play music through your Shoulder Speaker,” the redhead nods and pulls out her phone, waving it excitedly towards him. Izuku stares at her for a long moment before sighing and nodding in agreement. Mashi lets out a happy whoop before also digging an AUX cord out of her pockets and shuffling a little closer. It was a good thing she was on Izuku’s right as she looks for the ports under his shoulder. Right beside the USB port is an AUX one, which was used for testing a tool that let Izuku speak into a small microphone and have his voice projected through his speaker. Good for rescue missions, he figured, and he’d probably change it to some kind of wireless, Bluetooth-like feature later.

But Katsuki had found out about it, and then Mashi had found out about it, so now he was their walking sound system.

“Don’t play anything stupid!” Katsuki snaps and Mashi flips him off as she scrolls through her phone, grinning. She was going to play something older, she always did, and once the familiar lyrics began playing Katsuki groans, Izuku laughs, and Mashi immediately begins to sing along, her work temporarily forgotten.

It only takes a few lines before Izuku joins in, grinning as he and the redhead sing terribly. He couldn’t sing worth a damn, even if he was technically “on key,” and Mashi was apparently great at beat boxing and rap they’d discovered, but not singing AT ALL.

They sing, being dramatic with arm movements and poses. As they go, they begin eying Katsuki, smiling and motioning at him to sing along. The boy keeps growling and glaring at them, seeming to be too engrossed in his work on the planter. It did look rather lovely.

Eventually, however, during the first small pause in lyrics, he sits up straight and crosses his arms, eyes squeezed shut, grumbling something about annoying friends and that this always happened.

Then, the lyrics return, and they all three belt them out too loud for the song but uncaring.

"Mama! Just killed a man! Put a gun against his head! Pulled my trigger now he’s dead!" Mashi and Izuku take a moment to cheer gleefully now that they’ve got Katsuki joining in, his own movements just as intense, soulful, and silly as theirs, but he seems to be taken it a bit more seriously. Their planters are forgotten for the time being and they won’t go back to them until the song is over.

"Mama! Life had JUST BEGUN! But now I’ve gone and thrown it aaaaaall away!" Izuku had a moment to be thankful no one can hear them outside of his EAARDs because really, they were so loud and terrible, their mix of voices not at all working for the song. But they didn’t care. They were having too much fun.

"MAMAAAA!! OoooOOOoooOOOO!!"

And so they sang on.

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The tests were going… amazing, to say the least. His Leeches, as he’d decided to call them – he didn’t want to get too obsessed with naming things after Greek mythology and so decided the large, main systems would be named after the gods, but not the individual inventions, save for Hera – were making remarkable progress in such a short span of time. It helped he had access to the man who had the actual quirk he needed to examine, and that he had actually eventually gotten a small blood sample from a pricked finger. With so much to research, even from a single individual, he had been able to get out the first Leech prototypes in less than two months.
They’d gone well enough for prototypes. Izuku couldn’t create a beam of some kind to shut off a person’s quirk like Aizawa’s eyes, and honestly he didn’t want to with how limiting such an invention would be, so instead he had created a device that, upon contact with bare skin, could pause a person’s access to their quirk factor.

Currently he just needed to test the capabilities of his invention, so he had made a simple, silver band that latched onto a person’s wrist with contact. He’d gotten the idea when Mashi and Hizashi had scared the crap out of Aizawa with these old timey toys called snap bracelets. Izuku’s test device didn’t snap, it just bent to encircle the wrist or arm.

He sat out at the park with his mother, Mashi climbing a nearby tree. The sky was clear and beautiful and there was a light breeze in the air. It was a lovely day for experiments and Inko had sent out an online request as she had done before asking for people to show up for a small science experiment. All quirks were welcome and food would be provided.

The food had actually been from their first volunteer, Leanne, who had dropped by with two large plates of cookies. She had wanted to check on how the planting was going, happy to hear it was going well, and also to help out with the experiment.

Leanne’s quirk was an ability to bury a strand of her hair in the dirt and grow any flowering plant of her choosing. She loved her flowers, but she also could create fruit trees with longer strands of hair. After a few minutes anything still in the ground would wither, die, and dissipate, leaving the soil a bit more fertile.

Izuku had only really heard about her quirk in passing and had never had a chance to ask questions, so he used this opportunity to get as much out of her as he could, eyes sparkling as he wrote in one of his notebooks on quirks. He also asked for a small sample of hair and saliva, even if that wasn’t what this experiment was for, and Leanne had happily obliged.

He would be asking a lot of their volunteers for samples during this experiment much like he had in the past. Who knew what kind of quirks would show up and, even though he was here to test the Leech ability, he wasn’t going to turn down an opportunity that presented itself to him.

Eventually he actually put the Leech bracelet onto Leanne and asked her to try to use her quirk. She crouched down and planted a smaller strand of hair and then waited. And waited.

Izuku had grinned giddily as he wrote down his notes and recorded everything with his Eye. Leanne clapped her hands in amazement then removed the bracelet. Almost immediately her buried hair grew into a bush of light pink roses.

Mashi and Inko applauded the entire display as Leanne picked a flower, the bush dying behind her as she turns to hand it to Izuku, smiling brightly.

When she eventually leaves Mashi jumps to start gushing over Izuku and his Leech technology. He had tested it on his mother and the pro heroes that frequented his house, all of which it had worked on, but this was the first time Mashi was seeing it.

Now, though, they had time to themselves. Leanne had shown up early to bring them the cookies so now they had to wait for the first batch of volunteers. Inko was sitting on a bench, a book in her hands that had been recommended to her by Mitsuki, while Izuku sat on the ground by his gear, reviewing some blueprints for all his enhancements for Eraserhead, Present Mic, and Midnight, while Mashi hangs upside down from a branch.

The ideas were basically all the same as his designs they had seen in his notes, save now he actually
had to plan out how to make them.

Mashi was giggling from the branch as blood rushed to her head, no doubt.

“Mashi-chan, please come down, you’re beginning to make me worried,” Inko says eventually, lowering her book to look up at the girl. Izuku looks up as well and sees just how dazed Mashi looks.

The redhead makes a noise of sadness but ultimately clambers down, mumbling, “Yes, Mamadoriya…” Izuku rolls his eyes and smiles at his friend, who flops onto the ground beside him, trying to stop the world from spinning.

“You’re ridiculous,” he says to her.

“You’re a butt,” she says back and they laugh.

“Ah, would this be where the experiments are being held?” comes a voice and they look up.

Standing a few feet away is a young man, probably a teenager a few years older than Izuku and Mashi, wearing a black hoodie with the hood up and over his head. “I saw the request online,” the boy continues, his voice a little scratchy, “I had errands to run so… thought I’d check it out.”

“You’re a little early,” Inko says politely, “But you did finish setting everything up, right sweetie?”

Izuku looks back at her and nods. He had been able to get everything ready earlier than expected, so if they wanted they could go ahead and get started. He smiles up at the newcomer. “My name is Midoriya Izuku, I’ll be the one doing the experiment and recording everything. That’s my mom, and this is my friend, Mashi.”

“I’m here for shits and giggles,” Mashi says with a grin, finally sitting up beside Izuku.

The boy nods slowly before sliding to sit on the ground as well, not seeming to have any complaints. He reaches up to push back his hood, revealing pale skin that could really use some moisturizer, a mess of fluffy, silver hair, and red, sunken in eyes. He looked tired, but he smiled at them anyway. It wasn’t the prettiest of smiles, but Izuku was never one to judge on appearance.

“Call me Tomura,” the boy says, head tilting to the side, a hand coming up to scratch absently at his neck. Izuku’s eyes are drawn to the welts he spots on said neck, and the boy, Tomura, seems to notice and pulls his hand away. “Habit,” he admits with a bit of a shrug and drops his hand back into his lap.

“So you wanted to help out with my experiment, Tomura?” Izuku finally asks, smiling back up at the silver-haired boy. He sets down the notebook he had been working on and Mashi passes him a new one for his notes.

Izuku can feel his mother’s eyes on them as Tomura shifts how he’s sitting and nods. “That’s the idea. I’m not sure what we’re testing though,” he says. His stare was intense, sticking to Izuku like glue. He wasn’t glaring, if anything he just seemed curious, but still it felt a little off putting.

“Well,” Izuku begins, opening up his notes and starting a new page for this volunteer, “I’m testing the functionality of a new device of mine called a Leech. Basically while it is on your skin it creates a chemical reaction, not dangerous at all, that enters through your pores and will actually pause your quirk usage. I’ve asked for a lot of people and quirks to volunteer in order to see its possible range.” Izuku leans over to grab the bracelet he’ll be using, holding it up to show it to Tomura with a grin.

The boy’s brows raise and he now looks to the bracelet. “That’s interesting…” he says finally, head
tilting back and forth. He looked kind of like an owl the way he was moving his head. He had also
gone back to scratching at his neck.

“I know right??” Mashi says loudly, leaning forward with a big grin on her face. “Isn’t Zuzu
awesome??”

“It is pretty cool…” Tomura nods, hands dropping to his lap, before his eyes thin and he smirks a
little, kind of like a challenge. “If it works,” he says and Izuku straightens, hackles rising. He has to
take a breath to remind himself that the boy was probably just teasing him and didn’t mean anything
by it. At least, he hoped he didn’t.

“Let’s see, then,” Izuku smirks right back at Tomura once he’s calmed down. “First can you show us
your quirk?”

The silver-haired boy looks around for a second before grunting and reaching to pick up a nearby
stick. He holds it out in front of him with his pinky out, showing it to them, then lays his pinky onto
the stick and it begins to disintegrate.

“Holy shit!!” Mashi yelps, jumping onto her hands and knees so she can lean closer and look at the
remains of the stick, just seeing a pile of ash. Izuku’s eyes have widened and he nearly drops his pen.
Whoa… That was one seriously powerful quirk.

“Decay. Anything I touch with five fingers disintegrates,” Tomura explains, flicking the dust still
between his fingers into the air like he’s throwing confetti, and Mashi cackles, sitting back.

“That is wicked cool!” she comments and Izuku shakes his head out of his stupor to quickly go to
scratch down the information on the quirk.

“How unique! How amazing! I’ve never seen a quirk quite like that! It…” Izuku trails off, looking
now up at Tomura with a worried expression and the other boy arches a perplexed brow at him. “It
must be dangerous. Is it difficult to keep everything under control?”

Tomura shrugs and looks over at a bird atop a nearby tree’s branch, seeming to momentarily zone
out. “You get used to it. If I must I can just wrap one finger on each hand.”

“Have you ever disintegrated your pants??” Mashi cuts in, suddenly leaning into the man’s space,
not at all seeming to be intimidated by such a powerful quirk.

“When I was little,” the boy says with a small sneer, either at Mashi or the memory Izuku couldn’t
tell. Tomura reaches up and uses a single finger to push the redhead away from him, and she sits
back down beside Izuku with a cackle. “What are your quirks, then?” Tomura questions.

“We don’t have one,” Izuku admits, defenses rising. He was getting better at people questioning his
quirklessness, at telling people he was quirkless, but after so many years of teasing he always
instinctively readied himself for cruelty.

“Quirkless???” the boy exclaims, straightening his back and eying the two kids dubiously. Inko
straightens her own back from her spot on the bench, giving the boy a dangerous look, Mashi’s
expression turns deadly quickly, hands flexed into fists, and Izuku’s shoulders raise and curl inwards.

“Y-yes, quirkless,” he tries to say strongly, but his voice is low. “Today’s society is… broken for a
lot of people. Quirkless people like us are seen as a waste despite us being as human and capable as
everyone else.”

“Or more!” Mashi snarls, motioning at the Leech bracelet with a wave of her hand.
“So… don’t look down on us! I’m going to prove that no one should be judged based on the nature of their birth, that everyone is human and thus deserves a chance to prove themselves and become what they want to be,” Izuku was on a roll now, eyes determined as he spoke to the silver-haired boy, “I’m going to help change this society into something more open and nurturing to everyone, and I’m going to do that with my technology!”

Tomura is eying them with a long, blank stare, his eyes thinned a little bit as he thinks, before rolling his neck and nodding once. “Change society, huh…? Well, let’s not waste anymore time. Let’s give your gadget a try,” he says like everything is fine and back to normal.

Izuku’s lips twist a little. This boy was odd. He had certainly been surprised by Izuku and Mashi being quirkless, but he didn’t seem to care now. Usually people either were disdainful or amazed, but Tomura was neither, he was just rolling with it.

“Y-yeah! Let’s do that,” Izuku agrees, motioning for Tomura to raise his wrist as he scoots closer. He didn’t know what the odd boy’s actions meant, but for now he would take them as a positive. It definitely didn’t seem like Tomura had much experience around other people, so maybe this was just part of that. He was awkward and had difficulty interacting with others.

The Leech bracelet goes onto Tomura’s pale, thin wrist. When Izuku pushes back the black sleeve a tiny bit he sees a few more of the boy’s itching welts along the flesh.

“Okay,” Izuku nods, leaning away and picking up another branch near himself, handing it to Tomura, who is just silently watching them now. “Try and disintegrate that now,” the green-haired boy smiles brightly up at his volunteer. Tomura stares at him for a long moment before looking to the stick and setting all five fingers onto it. When nothing happens surprise registers on his face, his red eyes widening.

Mashi giggles loudly at the expression as Izuku quickly begins writing his notes. Tomura brings the stick closer to his face to examine it where it touches all five of his fingers, silent in awe or shock, it was difficult to tell.

“Fucking badass, am I right??” Mashi exclaims, leaning forward, both her hands on her knees, grinning wickedly.

“Pretty impressive,” Tomura says at length, lowering his hand with the stick still clasped between his fingers. Izuku looks up from his notes when he realizes the other boy is staring at him. Izuku can feel Mashi and Inko watching as well, both still uncertain about how they felt about the odd boy. Slowly Tomura’s face begins to pull and he offers over a large, creepy, yet somehow still endearing smile. “You are pretty interesting, aren’t you, Midoriya Izuku?”

Izuku snorts and ducks his head, smiling to himself as he blushes at the praise. “Normal is boring,” he chuckles sheepishly.

Finally Izuku reaches forward and pulls off the Leech bracelet and they watch as the stick still in Tomura’s hands dissolves almost immediately. “That quirk really is cool,” Mashi breathes in amazement and Tomura looks up at her with an odd expression. Wasn’t he told his quirk was cool often? Izuku couldn’t imagine why not, it was a remarkable and powerful quirk. So why did Tomura look like he’d hardly, if ever, heard it?

“You could be a hero with a quirk like that,” Izuku offers, hoping to maybe boost the boy’s mood with some additional praise. If he didn’t hear this often, he should, at least occasionally. Not enough to go to his head like Katsuki, but still enough.
But Tomura’s head is snapping towards Izuku, a look to his eyes that doesn’t look entirely hinged in reality, and his frown is deep. Izuku and Mashi jump in surprise, but the look is short lived and soon Tomura is sitting there, just sulking and glaring at the ground like he was trying to control himself. “I’ll pass,” he says lowly, voice scratchy enough to be on the verge of a growl.

“You not a fan of heroes?” Mashi asks, almost like an accusation, but she stops when Izuku reaches out and lays a hand on her shoulder.

“That’s fine, he doesn’t have to be,” Izuku says firmly, staring not at Mashi but at Tomura, who is glaring up at him through his hair. This volunteer was turning out to be an interesting experience, but hopefully a good one, for at least someone. “Hero society is the biggest issue we face, in this broken society, I can imagine some people see that and are… resentful?” he tilts his head as he looks to Tomura, looking for confirmation.

“Not a fan, no,” the other boy eventually replies, straightening up and looking like a mixture of suspicious and curious.

Izuku remembered when he first accepted and stomached the realization that it had been a hero’s battle that had made him lose his eye, arm, and mobility. He’d been furious, he’d been hurt, and with all the issues he’d kept seeing within the system that had been built around pro heroes he had been resentful himself, for a time, but not for long.

“I have always adored heroes, and I think that in order to change the hero system someone should be a part of it that speaks up and says ‘this is wrong,’ otherwise nothing will truly be done. Right now no one speaks up from within because they’re either blind to the problems they create, or they know but benefit so much off of them that they don’t want to lose that,” Izuku moves his hands around as he speaks, pausing a moment before continuing, “There also needs to be people outside of the system saying the same thing, that this is wrong. Everyone should be speaking up, not just a few,” Izuku presses onward, hands coming up to clench into fists as he speaks, a firmness and confidence in his voice.

Tomura is staring at him blankly again, his glare thankfully gone. He’s silent and after a while Izuku’s confident pose falls and he slouches in on himself, not liking how long the silence was lasting. Not even Mashi was saying anything, uncertain what even she could say.

“You know…” Tomura begins, head tilting and a hand coming up to scratch at his neck. He doesn’t stop when Izuku glances down at it, seeming to only be focused on what he’s saying. “Those people that say ‘this is wrong’ outside of the system are usually called villains.”

“That’s another issue,” Izuku nods, sitting up a little straighter and crossing his arms. “No one should be judged as a villain on their words, but rather on their actions.”

“Can we also, like…” Mashi raises her hand when she speaks to get their attention, pausing to make a face of irritation at what she’s about to say, “NOT call everyone who breaks the law a villain? Petty theft? Villain. Confused, not sure what to do with their life teenager doing graffiti? Villain. Poor person not sure what to do anymore having to steal for their life? Fuckin’ villain! Like DAMN, guys! That’s bullshit! It makes everybody else just not give a shit about any of their lives or plights because they’re depressurized.”

“Desensitized.”

“Right, yeah, meant to say that.”

Tomura is eying both of them curiously. Izuku didn’t know what it was about these volunteer
requests but he always seemed to talk a lot about his views during them. And he didn’t know what it was about Tomura but Izuku felt like he just… NEEDED to talk about all these things with him. Like the boy was in a dark place and maybe Izuku could offer him a bit of hope. That the world was broken, but it could be fixed with awareness and perseverance.

“Definitely interesting,” Tomura says after a while and Izuku feels his ears heat up pink, smiling sheepishly and ducking his head. “Well, anyway, neat gadget,” the boy says and grunts as he gets up, dusting off his pants, careful to keep one finger up on each hand so he doesn’t disintegrate anything.

“You’re heading out?” Inko asks and Izuku looks back at her. She didn’t look tense, per say, but she did look apprehensive as she looks at Tomura. Had she been staring at the boy that way the whole time? Izuku realizes the boy was odd and a little on the creepy side, but he seemed more like just an awkward, antisocial teenager to Izuku, not a threat.

“You’re heading out?” Inko asks and Izuku looks back at her. She didn’t look tense, per say, but she did look apprehensive as she looks at Tomura. Had she been staring at the boy that way the whole time? Izuku realizes the boy was odd and a little on the creepy side, but he seemed more like just an awkward, antisocial teenager to Izuku, not a threat.

“Yeah. Cool experiment, though. What did you call that bracelet?”

“Leech bracelet,” Izuku answers with a quick nod. Tomura nods back then reaches up and pulls his hoodie back over his head. He balls his hands into fists and shoves them both into his hoodie pocket, slouching slightly.

“Well, Midoriya Izuku, this has been educational. Thanks for letting me be join in,” Tomura says absently, staring down at Izuku again. Izuku looks back up at him and, starting to get accustomed to the stretches of awkward silence now, offers up a big smile.

“Thanks for coming! Glad you could help!” he says cheerfully. Tomura keeps staring, looking at the grinning boy, before snorting and smiling right back before turning and leaving in silence.

“He was weird!” Mashi says cheerfully and Izuku turns to her quickly to smack her arm with his robotic hand. She immediately whines and pouts at him as he tells her not to be mean. Inko remains silent, watching as the boy disappears, her expression concerned and suspicious all in one.

It isn’t until later, after they’ve gone through all their volunteers, all the cookies have been eaten, and Izuku has spectacular new notes that he realizes that he never did ask Tomura for a DNA sample.

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“Rulers.”

“Check!” Mashi yells, holding up two rulers, one blue and one red, that she then sets in the two piles on either side of her.

“Calculators.”

“Check!” Mashi holds up two identical calculators. She’s sitting on the ground of the Midoriya apartment while Izuku sits on the couch, reading off of a list of school supplies.

“Pens and pencils.”

“Check and Check-a-roonie!” Mashi shows the pack of mechanical pencils and a few black pens. She also puts in both piles a sparkle, pink gel pen simply because she can.

“Don’t forget binders,” Aizawa calls absently from where he’s laying in the corner, in his sleeping bag, resting, “So many kids could keep up with so much more if they just had a binder…” He wouldn’t have work tonight since the new year of school was starting tomorrow and he needed a
tiny bit of extra preparation.

“Got those,” Mashi says, grunting as she reaches for a couple of binders of varying, obnoxious designs, which she then splits evenly to put into each pile.

“Do you have all of your textbooks?” Inko calls from the kitchen, poking her head out to look at them. Dinner smelled delicious, whatever it was.

“Yes ma’am!” Izuku calls back. They’d already made sure they had all their books, that had been their first order of business. Their first day of Junior High was tomorrow and they were so excited and so nervous. He and Mashi were going to the same school and had found out they would be, once again, in the same class. It made things feel a little bit better, to have such a familiar, reassuring face, but that didn’t change the fact there would be plenty of new people as well. New people who could react terribly when they found out Izuku and Mashi were quirkless.

“Highlighters,” Izuku continues, looking back to the supply list.

“In multiple colors!” Mashi sing-songs, holding up two packs of multi-colored highlighters then tosses one to each of the piles. “Aaaaaand, gunstaff? Yes, definitely check,” the redhead continues with a smirk, reaching over the her constantly present weapon currently laying half under the coffee table.

“No,” Aizawa immediately says firmly, not even opening his eyes, and Mashi retreats her hand, pouting grumpily.

Mashi would be sleeping over tonight. The two had been so high strung about the coming new year that it only seemed natural they should be together rather than apart. It also helped that this school was just a tiny bit closer to Izuku’s home, rather than their elementary school that had been closer to Mashi’s.

“Did you bring your uniform?” Izuku questions, looking up and realizing he hadn’t seen it. The redhead points over to the kitchen table where a black uniform is laid out.

“Yeah! Over there,” she says with a grin and Izuku stares at the uniform for a long, long moment.

“That’s the boy’s uniform,” he eventually says slowly, turning to look at his friend with a furrowed brow.

“Uh, no, that’s Mashi’s uniform,” the redhead says in the third person, looking right back at Izuku with a challenging arch to her brow and fire in her emerald eyes. Izuku knew Mashi hated wearing skirts, or anything that seemed to be specifically marketed towards women since they rarely were that durable or had pockets. She also said the only time she’d need a purse was if she were filling it with rocks to use as a mace.

Now, that being said, Izuku doesn’t know what the dress code rules were exactly for their new school. He wasn’t sure how Mashi had gotten a uniform like this, and he wasn’t sure if she would get away with it for long, but she had gotten it, and she sure as hell wasn’t going to let anyone stop her.

So Izuku just sighs and nods, going back to the list. They finish up inventory then both go to stuff everything into their new backpacks, Mashi’s with an Alien vs Predator theme, Izuku’s with a galaxy theme.

They go to eat when Inko calls them over, Aizawa eventually slinking over as well and joining them for some katsudon. As they eat Mashi begins yammering to anyone who will listen about some new,
old-timey discover she’s made of some online gaming show. Something about grouchy gamers? Izuku wasn’t entirely listening, honestly, too caught up in his thoughts.

The biggest fear he had was the new students they would be facing. People who didn’t know he was quirkless, but would probably know quickly enough with how proud and loud Mashi was about it, and who didn’t know Izuku was handicapped, which may take longer.

Izuku’s Spine was easiest to hide, it was just under his shirt, after all, and his Eye he had been working on to not constantly be glowing or look too unnatural. It was still blue, though. He didn’t want to wear his eye patch again, that would certainly set any bullies off. Sure, the scar was still there, but perhaps it would mostly just get sympathy points.

His Arm had been the trickiest one. He had been working on a lot of new tech and upgrades for his Arms, and yes that had now officially become plural, he had all kinds of variations of Arms now, but the most difficult, surprisingly, had been one that had the least number of functions. It simply looked like a real arm, smooth, maybe a bit too smooth, with no abnormal protrusions, colored his skin tone and covered in a freckle design. It had a few creases and indents he just couldn’t help, mostly at joints, but from a distance it did look like a real arm.

Izuku was proud of what he’d accomplished, he really was, but when he thought of new people, new, possibly judgmental people, seeing him for the first time and seeing only his prosthetics he was filled with a nauseous dread that wouldn’t lift. He didn’t want to be judged. He didn’t want to be teased. He didn’t want to be narrowed down to the parts of him that made him an “other” rather than part of a whole. He didn’t want people to see him as deformed, because he wasn’t, or useless, because he wasn’t, or weak, because he wasn’t.

He knew he was strong, that there was so much more to him than his injuries or some dumb extra toe joint. He knew everything, logically, but still his heart would ache. Some days were worse than others, but he just had to remind himself that even if someone was awful, even if he couldn’t build replacements for his body and had just been left broken, he still had people there that didn’t judge.

His family would keep him strong, keep him grounded, even as he spiraled and worried himself into an anxious mess.

He takes a deep breath now, looking up at the people gathered at the table around him. He finds Mashi talking animatedly with Inko, who is smiling fondly and nodding along to her, but Aizawa is looking across the table at him, his exhausted eyes thoughtful as he looks over Izuku.

The boy straightens automatically in his seat, looking back at Aizawa as the man looks him over. He had noticed Izuku’s silent, internal fretting, that part was obvious, but Izuku didn’t know how to reassure him that it was a momentary thing. That he was going to be okay.

The boy glances at the two women at the table, hoping they hadn’t noticed either, and is about to turn back to Aizawa when he feels the man promptly kick his leg. Izuku doesn’t yelp, but he does jump in surprise, eyes widening as he looks quickly back at his neighbor. Aizawa is smirking a little now after startling Izuku, but soon it vanishes and he keeps staring at Izuku. It takes a second but now the boy can see the bit of concern on the man’s face, the unspoken question of, “Are you alright?”

Izuku stares back for a while then lowers his head and nods, smiling to himself. He really did have a great family to look after him, people that couldn’t care less that he was handicapped, who saw him as a person they loved dearly. He still felt dread bubbling in his gut, but it would be manageable now. He had people who would look after him.
He still kicks Aizawa’s shin back in retribution.

Chapter End Notes

Hope y'all enjoyed everything! Next chapter we're finally at Junior High!

Further news~ If anyone is curious about some information on characters (like sexuality, heritage, backgrounds, etc) I can make a list on my tumblr for y'all to reference. Just let me know if you want that and what kind of stuff you'd like to see.

ALSO! Handy dandy flower meaning chart right here!

Chapter Song: Queen - Bohemian Rhapsody (I mean, come on, it'd be wrong if I didn't use this, right?)
The Junior High

Hey guys! I have a master list page for all things IIOHAH now! Check it out over here!

I'll also be making fact posts for characters that will regularly update. Izuku's and Katsuki's are already up! Let me know it there's anything you'd like me to add that isn't spoiler-y!

Enjoy my longest chapter yet!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku is sweating up a storm as he and Mashi walk towards their new school life. He had hardly slept and had managed to work himself into a tizzy thinking of dealing with new teachers, new students, new everything. He had been so panicked he’d made sure to go over their directions to the school a good twenty times, fearful he would get them lost.

He flexes his hand, the robotic one, and glances down not for the first time to check that it still looks somewhat like a flesh hand. Mashi is eying him out of the corner of her eye, one brow arched as he frets.

She looks nice, for once, partially because Inko had gone over all of them before they left, including Aizawa. Mashi’s hair, instead of in a ponytail, was now pulled into a long braid, which already had a couple of strands sticking out, and her black uniform jacket and grey slacks aren’t yet wrinkled, stained, or dirty as they would most certainly be soon. She had even known how to tie her tie, which was more than could be said for Izuku, who’s looked more like a crumpled mess.

(“How do you even know how to tie a tie?” Izuku had asked.

“Dude… Online videos…” Mashi deadpanned, giving her friend an unimpressed look.)

Izuku, despite his sad attempt at a tie, which he stubbornly would not let Mashi fix for him, still felt like he looked pretty nice. He had never had to wear a uniform like this before. He felt kind of fancy with his white button up, black jacket, black with white stripes tie, and grey slacks. His long hair was pulled back into a short ponytail, which he usually didn’t do unless he was working, but his mother had insisted on making a good first impression.

It was all almost enough to drown out the anxiety pulsing through his veins.

Mashi, thankfully, doesn’t ask why Izuku was trying to hide his prosthetics. He didn’t want to admit to being afraid, to fearing all these new people and their judgments. He felt weak and pathetic and sad, but no matter what he said, no matter the logical reasoning in his head, he couldn’t make it go away.

Shouldn’t he be proud of what he had accomplished? Shouldn’t he be happy to show off? No, he didn’t want to show off or gloat, and he didn’t want people to only see his handicaps.

Wasn’t he always saying people needed to see more than quirks? Well, he needed to be more than his injuries, or his quirklessness, and maybe this was the best way to do it, to make sure people saw
him and only him.

Or maybe it wasn’t. Now he was agreeing with the anxiety, saying this was okay, but then another voice began screaming that he was hiding and pathetic. That he should be ashamed of himself. When he became a hero people all over would see his injuries. His missing parts. He needed to get used to people and their judgments.

So why couldn’t he just wear his regular prosthetics? Why couldn’t he just man up and get over this panic in his gut and walk in, showing everyone what he really was? Why couldn’t he—

A dark hand comes into his line of sight as it engulfs his prosthetic one, squeezing it and pulling it to let it dangle at his side. He looks up at Mashi, who is looking back at him, gently swinging their hands between them, her eyes hard and her brows pinched determinedly.

“I like your arm,” is all she says and Izuku lets out a wet chuckle. Had he been crying? Apparently so.

“I feel stupid,” Izuku whispers, ducking his head.

“Welcome to my world,” the redhead smirks and Izuku shakes his head.

“You aren’t stupid.”

There’s a long stretch of silence and he peaks up at his friend, who is looking at him with a considering and confused expression. He doesn’t have time to ask her what that look means because she’s shaking her head to rid herself of it. “Who cares what other people think of what you do?” she says at length and Izuku sighs.

“I know… It shouldn’t matter what they think, but… I just don’t want them to judge me before they get to know me. That’s what everyone has ALWAYS don—“

“No, I mean,” Mashi sighs in frustration, having a tough time with her words. “If you need to take your time, than that’s fine! Like… just… take care of yourself because fuck anybody who thinks they know you better than yourself, right? Don’t let anyone judge you on how you need to deal with your shit, including yourself!”

Izuku stares at Mashi for a long while, his eyes wide in surprise. She always did amaze him with how well she could understand people, how she could read an atmosphere and just know what was up. Sure, she had a difficult time actually acting out what she needed to, and words were harder for her than actions, but somehow she always figured it out.

Mashi is beginning to squirm under Izuku’s stare, and he feels bad for not saying anything yet, so he smiles and nudges her with his shoulder. “You know… you’re my hero, Apex.”

The redhead sucks in a sharp breath, now her turn to look surprised, before she smiles and ducks her head, flustered. “Yeah, well… you’re my hero too, Titan…”

They smile, squeezing each other’s hands, and keep walking to their new school life, much more at ease than ever before.

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Izuku and Mashi didn’t get to sit next to each other in homeroom. There were assigned seats and Izuku was in the front row, while Mashi was three rows back and one seat to the left. It was equal parts a blessing and a curse.
Of course they wanted to sit next to each other, but there was also a very high chance that if they did one, or both, of them would not pay attention to class.

Their teachers seem fine enough, none seem exceptionally cruel or foolish, but also not especially kind either. Time would tell, especially once people began to realize Izuku and Mashi were quirkless, and that Izuku was partially made of machinery instead of flesh.

Izuku diligently takes notes through everything, even when he understands everything the teacher is saying perfectly. It never hurts to go over things again, and he knew Mashi was an awful note taker and he would be able to help her out with his own.

As usual, history is his least favorite subject. He grimaces to himself as they go over names and dates and events he just doesn’t care about, but he tries to remember what Aizawa had told him all those years ago, that history was important for a lot of unexpected reasons.

As most things in school tended to be, Mashi and he contrasted each other and she was quite good at history. She still took terrible notes, but they made sense to her so she could recite what they’d learned later on. She was good with names and dates, and often would re-word lessons as a story instead of just a reciting of facts, which helped a lot.

English Izuku, of course, breezed through. He was already fluent, after all, it was no challenge at all to him. Again, he knew Mashi would have issues, but she was getting better when they had realized she could learn from constant, regular practice. They’d realized this when they found out she was pretty great at speaking Arabic just due to necessity when visiting her mother’s parents in Egypt, so Izuku and Hizashi both had made a point of speaking only in English some days to help her learn.

When lunchtime comes Izuku felt exhausted. He was used to school, was great at school, but the nerves from a first day at a new school made his energy levels deplete much quicker than usual. Mashi came bounding over to his desk, her own box lunch in hand courtesy of Midoriya Inko, her energy unending, it seemed.

“This place is so much more intense!” she says, yanking over a chair to sit on the other side of Izuku’s desk while he pulls out his own lunch.

“That is what happens when you go up a grade, yes,” Izuku teases with a smile and Mashi huffs at him, pouting and flicking some of her rice at his face.

“You know what I mean,” she grumbles before beginning to stuff food into her mouth. Izuku snorts a small laugh at her but follows her lead, beginning to eat as well.

Most of the kids were sticking in small groups, probably those that knew each other from elementary school, similar to Izuku and Mashi. From what he could tell his friend and him were the only ones from their own old school. They would miss Hayashi, but what a blessing it was to never have to deal with Kaito again.

That is, until they figured out who the bully was here. Izuku wanted to be hopeful that there wouldn’t be one, that everyone would be kind and understanding in this class, but he highly doubted that would ever happen.

“You thinkin’ of joinin’ a club?” Mashi asks out of the blue and Izuku looks up. She’s nearly entirely done with her food while Izuku isn’t even halfway finished yet.

“Club? I hadn’t… really thought of doing so, no. Were you?” Clubs had something of a nice ring to them, but Izuku had a lot he wanted to do outside of school. He wasn’t sure he would have time to
 join a club.

Mashi looks at him for a long second, then ducks her head to poke at the last remains of her lunch. Was she flustered? “Well, uh… kinda, yeah? I’ve always wanted to. Maybe a club that’s a bit more laid back? Or one about old movies??”

“I’m not sure that’s a thing,” Izuku says with an apologetic smile. Mashi pouts.

“We could make it a thing…” she mumbles, stuffing a tiny sausage into her mouth.

“What? Start our own club?” the boy questions, brows raising in surprise. Mashi shrugs but doesn’t say anything. Where was this coming from? Why was she so interested in joining a club? Izuku wouldn’t stop her, but he didn’t really know where to begin supporting her either. “That would take a few more than two people…” he says at length, “Why do you want to be in a club, Mashi?”

For a while the redhead says nothing, before finally she releases a frustrated breath and sets down her chopsticks. “It’s just… I dunno, I know we have each other and Street Flare and the clubhouse, but it’d be cool to be part of an organized group too. Included… y’know?”

Included? Mashi had never shown any signs of caring if she was included or not, but Izuku supposes that after so many years of only having such a small pool of friends, and being such a high energy person like herself, the draw of a club would become enticing. Izuku didn’t fully understand the feeling, he had his group of friends and family and he loved them, and while he did feel a desire to be included by society, he hadn’t really considered a club.

Maybe Mashi was onto something, though. They couldn’t be avoiding everyday, normal school life activities. They should be active and interacting as much as possible.

Inko would love it too.

Izuku’s mother and Aizawa had both been trying to get Izuku to just enjoy his childhood for a long, long time now, and Izuku was trying, but sometimes it was hard with all the ideas in his head and the things he wanted to do. Joining a club might be a good opportunity to do just that.

“Yeah, okay,” he nods and Mashi looks up, eyes owlish in surprise. “Let’s check out some clubs after school.”

Mashi grins at him eagerly before stuffing the rest of her food in her mouth.

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Majority of classes were meant to be taken with the exact same class through all the class periods. That was how it had been in the past and how Izuku expected it to be here in Junior High. It was supposed to be that way, but apparently this school was doing something a little different.

For classes that required students to go to another classroom themselves some of the students would swap around with the other class of the same year. It was meant to be an attempt to spread social interactions, and had been working relatively well for the school for the last two years, but it still meant that the class on his Monday schedule right after lunch was without Mashi.

He would be going to a Home Economics class while Mashi went to Music.

He was sad, Mashi was dramatically “weeping” and crying for their lost time as she spun down the hallway, embarrassing the life out of Izuku, but it went well enough.
The class was in what appeared to be a lab, but with more tools for a kitchen rather than chemicals, which somehow made it even more intimidating to Izuku. He knew chemicals, he didn’t know cooking. There was no Home Economics in elementary school, this would be his first exposure to it.

The teacher seemed to be fully aware no one in this class had ever taken a class like this before and was gentle with them. He was a tall, skinny man with much larger eyes than usual a little farther on the sides of his face, and all eight, because apparently he didn’t have any pinkies, of his fingers were long and tentacle like. He could apparently also change the color and texture of his skin.

His name was Octavius Damon, he was from America, where he was Damon Octavius, and everyone called him Octopus-sensei. He had a terrible accent that they tried hard not to laugh at, and he was very aware they were trying not to laugh, so he was making an extra show of speaking like an American and being silly. His teaching style was a bit more laid back, but Izuku did feel a bit more at ease with him. He was a little odd, didn’t assign seats, and just seemed to want the kids to enjoy themselves as they learned in his class.

Izuku was feeling a lot better, until Octopus-sensei decided to go around the room, asking people their name and a fact about themselves. It became achingly clear everyone, alongside their personal fact, was going to also be sharing their quirk information after the first few students. They would say their name, a fact, and then add on their quirk at the end.

He could feel static in his ears as the panic began to set in. He didn’t actually have to share he was quirkless, no one had said he had to, but he felt kind of bad keeping that a secret too. He was already hiding his arm, his eye, and his spine; he felt awful hiding this as well. Mashi was proud of her quirklessness, why couldn’t he be?

“Excuse me, young man?” Izuku looks up in surprise to find the whole class staring at him, Octopus-sensei smiling kindly at him. He must have missed the last few students because now it was his turn.

“What’s your name?”

“I’m Midoriya Izuku…” he begins slowly. It felt like his spirit may have left him as he shakily introduced himself to the class. “I really like science and heroes and…” was he really going to do this? Was he really going to disclose that he was quirkless on his own? He had been so sure Mashi would accidentally do it for them both, but… that was cowardly, and not fair to her. He needed to be confident in himself and who he was, and maybe he was still scared about everything, but admitting one thing could be the first step to admitting the rest.

“My quirk is that… I don’t have a quirk,” he keeps his head up, but he looks up at where the wall meets the ceiling. He didn’t want to see anyone’s faces, he could already hear a couple of the students whispering to each other, a snicker over to the side, until Octopus-sensei claps his hands and laughs.

“Oh great! My little sister is quirkless! Good to have you in my class, Midoriya-kun!”

That was it? No stunned or pitying response? No badly hidden scorn? Octopus-sensei was just… accepting this? Izuku supposes that if he does have a quirkless sibling it must be easier for him to work with this, but it still baffles the genius boy for a few seconds.

When he’s relaxed Izuku lets out a held breath and they move on to the next student. He leans heavily against the clean table in front of him. He can still feel the eyes on him, staring and judging and he feels sick, but he’d said it. He’d told the class what he was, all on his own, and he was still standing.

He’d see how long that lasted…
He meets up with Mashi again after class in the halls. She’s grinning extra wide and before he can even ask why she’s raising a small instrument case and thrusting it into his face to show it off. “I got a trumpet!”

“Oh heaven help us,” Izuku says immediately, staring in mild panic at the school instrument. Seriously? What kind of person would give someone like Mashi a trumpet? Even on the first day, heck, in the first minute of knowing her that should have been an obviously bad idea.

Mashi sticks her tongue out at him and he joins her in putting the instrument up. He can still feel eyes on him as they walk through the halls, more now than before, the news of him being quirkless sure to have spread.

When they drop off Mashi new instrument he stops her, laying a hand on her shoulder to get her attention. She looks over to him, brows furrowed in confusion at his serious expression.

“I told them…” he whispers and her eyebrows shoot up.

“About your prosthetics?” she whispers right back, though a little louder in her concern.

Izuku shakes his head. “No, I… Last class we were all introducing ourselves and everyone was saying their quirk and I admitted to being quirkless. I was trying to be brave, but now I feel kind of sick.”

Mashi tilts her head, considering her friend with puckered lips. “Bravery makes me nauseous sometimes, too,” she admits with a nod, trying to look sagely.

That surprises Izuku. Mashi was always brave, and always ready to go, to think that she got sick over things sometimes too felt oddly surreal. “Really?”

“Oh yeah! One time I actually DID throw up, but I just real quick swallowed it before anyone would notice!” the redhead says cheerfully, perking up, and Izuku shudders and cringes.

“Mashi! That’s gross!” he whines.

“You asked!”

“I really didn’t!” Izuku lays his face in both hands while Mashi cackles.

“Yeah, well, anyway! Bravery is… uh… what was it? Not the lack of fear but… Like, you have fear still, you’re just saying ‘fuck you’ to the fear and getting past it, so, uh…” Mashi was squirming now, trying to get her words right, so Izuku waits patiently for her to work it out. “You’re still scared and stuff, so even though you worked past it you can still get all sick and bleh from still being scared… y’know?”

“Yeah, I think I get it,” Izuku nods, smiling at her, and she smiles back. “Thanks, Mashi.”

“Yeah, yeah! No problem! Now let’s hurry up to PE already! I wanna go run around and shit!” she says eagerly, grabbing Izuku’s left hand and dragging them away, heading for the locker rooms to change. The green-haired boy laughs at her eagerness. He can still feel eyes on them, but now, in this single moment, it feels unimportant. Everything was going to be okay.
They wait before heading into the locker rooms, wanting to make sure that when they separate to go into the boy’s and the girl’s they wouldn’t be alone with any would-be bullies.

It ends up making them late, however, and they hurry out as quickly as they can to the field where the entirety of their grade is standing out with the instructor. Izuku keeps his head ducked, both out of nerves to the students and respect for the teacher.

“Where were you two?” demands the teacher upon their arrival.

“Sorry, sensei, we were—“ Izuku begins but Mashi cuts him off, her arms crossed and voice loud.

“We’re both quirkless and have a problem with people bullying us so we waited outside the locker rooms so we couldn’t be ganged up on and treated like we’re less than human, but, y’know, sorry we’re late!”

Izuku very slowly turns wide, unbelieving eyes on her. What was she doing? Not only was she advertising herself as being quirkless alongside him, but she was being incredibly rude to their teacher.

Apparently the response is shocking enough, though, that it dazes the teacher enough to just let them off with an awkward warning, sending them to join their classmates. Mashi is grinning wide, Izuku is still giving her a stare like he’s trying to understand this insanity, and they all quickly get to work.

The class, after everyone is gathered, is then split up into different activities of one’s choosing. With how strict the teacher had seemed it felt a little odd to suddenly just be let loose, but Izuku wasn’t going to complain. This would give him a chance to get some good exercising in.

Aizawa had begun teaching him self defense again, finally able to really get into it now that Izuku could move freely with his Reinforcement, and they still tried to go jogging everyday and get in some light exercising. Despite all this Izuku didn’t want to just sit around during PE, he wanted to use this opportunity to continue building up strength, so he and Mashi head for the track to start jogging. Mashi needed this, too. She was strong, but her cardio wasn’t the best. Natural energy could only take one so far.

“There was a kid in my music class,” the redhead suddenly says as they jog. Izuku looks over to her, curious. “I heard some kids that knew him from elementary… I think maybe he’s quirkless, too.”

Izuku isn’t expecting the sudden information so he doesn’t know what to do with the sudden jolt of energy that fires through his veins.

It feels similar to when he ran after that monster in the alleyway, or when he went out in a thunderstorm to help Dapple. This desire to help, to protect and save, to go out and keep someone safe and unharmed. The issue is there’s nowhere for that sudden energy to go. All he had just heard was that there was another, possible, quirkless kid in their grade, and that was it. That didn’t mean anything. They could be perfectly fine and happy. Just because they were quirkless didn’t mean Izuku and Mashi had to go and make friends with them and protect them. Heck, they may not even be quirkless.

“We should go and make friends with him!” Mashi exclaims, and Izuku blows out a breath.

“Are we even sure he needs new friends?” Izuku questions nervously. The protective energy was still bubbling in his system, making him begin to run faster. Mashi yelps in surprise and also picks up her speed.

“That’s not why you make friends, Zuzu!” she berates, eyes forward and focused on the track, not
wanting to trip. “Besides, us quirkless folk gotta stick together, remember?”

Izuku sighs. Yes, he certainly remembered. That’s how he and Mashi had become friends, because they were both quirkless and could look out for each other.

He still wasn’t sure if this was a good idea… but it couldn’t hurt to reach out either. Maybe this person didn’t need them at all, but they could still gain a new friend.

“Alright… Let’s talk to him some other time, though. We’re all still getting used to a new school,” he replies and Mashi grumbles. She had probably meant to go speak to this kid immediately, but she would do things Izuku’s way.

For the time being.

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After school Izuku and Mashi begin looking for club options. They make sure to let their mothers, and Aizawa, know what they’re doing and that they’re still at school, then they get searching.

None of the sports clubs seem to speak to them. Despite Mashi’s energy she wasn’t a fan of serious sports. She only wanted to do things like that for fun, and Izuku just didn’t care about them enough to give them a shot. There was a literature club, which was easily marked off their list, same with the music and art clubs. They needed something that could interest them both but also wouldn’t be too time consuming.

Their top choice, by the end of their search, was a movie club. It would probably be more recent movies, much to Mashi’s disappointment, but it would at least be something. Perhaps she would have a chance to bring in some of her own movies on occasion? Educate these people on some real art.

So they head to the classroom that the movie club meets in. There were already kids inside, some from their grade, some not, chatting and getting to know each other.

It isn’t the busiest club, but still the crowd is a little intimidating. Mashi can handle it, however, tons of people rarely actually deterred her, but she feels Izuku stiffen at her side. He was always so anxious around strangers, especially those their own age. Adults he seemed to bond with more easily, able to speak to them on a more common level, but other kids he struggled with at first.

They shuffle in, keeping to the sides. Despite the nerves, Mashi feels excitement bubbling up inside her. Ever since she was little she had wanted to join a club when she got into secondary school. Her mother always told her stories about playing in her tennis club, and the camaraderie between her and her fellow teammates. It had made Mashi excited to have something like that. She had Izuku, yes, and even Katsuki, and all the adults that looked after them, but the idea of a club, of forming a team amongst their peers, of being part of something like that had always made Mashi excited.

She and her friend stand near the chalkboard, looking over the crowd. She was near bouncing, looking around in hopes of finding someone that looked like the president of the club.

A few people are glancing over at them and murmuring but Mashi thinks nothing of it. She was too happy.

When someone, an upperclassman girl with a Mohawk of rubies, breaks away from the group and heads their way, the redhead perks up, while Izuku shrinks. This must be who they needed to talk to.

“Hi! I’m Haganehato Mashi!” she immediately greets once the girl is near enough to them, “Call me
Mashi though, it’s bett—“

“I’m very sorry, but I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

Both kids freeze, Mashi’s mouth still open in a smile from when she had been speaking, Izuku’s tense energy beginning to wash over her. That wasn’t what was supposed to be said. They were supposed to say hello and talk about what everyone did in this club and what Mashi and Izuku could do. What was going on?

“W-why?” Mashi finally croaks, trying to keep the mounting distress and disappointment out of her voice. Had she done something wrong? Had she already screwed everything up somehow?

The upperclassman sighs and shakes her head, like maybe she pities them, and Mashi hates it. She hates it with every fiber of her body. “You must know why. We’re a small club, only started last year, we can’t have our image messed up like this,” she says as if she actually cared and Mashi grits her teeth, hackles rising.

“The fuck you mean, ‘like this’?” she demands, teeth bared like a wild animal, and Izuku must be mad deep down as well, or perhaps shocked, because he doesn’t even lay a hand on her shoulder to stop her.

“Please, there’s no need for hostility,” the upperclassman raises her hands, offering a gentle smile, “It’s just the way things are, you know? You both would just create an image we wouldn’t be able to handle.”

“Why us?” Izuku suddenly whispers at Mashi’s side and she looks to him. His head was down but he was looking up at the upperclassman through his bangs. His expression was frighteningly devoid of emotion.

“Pardon?” the upperclassman questions, brows rising like they’re innocent. They have everyone’s attention by now, but they don’t care, they’re just focused on this bitch in front of them.

“Why would we give you a bad image?” Izuku clarifies calmly, slowly, “Go ahead, say it.”

The upperclassman smiles and looks back at the club, at some of her peers her own age, like this is a big joke to her, then back to Mashi and Izuku. “Well… Because you’re both quirkless, of course.”

Mashi kicks her in the shin.

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They don’t get in trouble. The movie club, with how small it actually is, and for reasoning given, were really not supposed to be turning them down, so they don’t tell on Mashi in order to keep their own hides safe.

Mashi is still furious, but she tries to hold out hope…

Until it happens again. And again. They even go to the basketball court, just wanting to see if they could get into a sports club, but it happens there too. They keep getting turned down for seemingly different reasons, but they know the truth.

Everyone knows they’re quirkless now. The word has spread, on the very first day, and there’s no getting around it. Everyone knows they’re quirkless, and no one wants anything to do with them.

Mashi is furious. She hadn’t hurt anyone else since the movie club, but she had flipped a desk on
their second attempt, flung around some backpacks on the third, and popped a basketball with her pocketknife on the sports club attempt.

(“Why do you even have a pocketknife?” Izuku had asked once, months ago.

“What kind of woman doesn’t have a pocketknife?” she questioned back, honestly baffled.)

They end up sitting on a bench outside of the school. Mashi was steaming and cursing under her breath, but Izuku had been especially quiet ever since the movie club. He kept staring down at his feet, or his hands, or out at nothing. Mashi hated to think what might be going through his head.

“If you blame yourself for any of this, I’mma hit you,” she says to him and he looks over to her, eyes startled, before he sighs and lowers his head again.

“I’m not…” he croaks. He was probably trying to keep in the tears. “I don’t really know what I’m thinking…”

“How about… ‘The system is broken and this is the proof,’ that kinda thing. Did I get that right?” the redhead offers, leaning back against the bench and glaring up at the sky. There were cherry blossoms fluttering everywhere and she hated them all of a sudden.

Izuku snorts and replies, “More like, ‘I hate shallow brats.’” Mashi smirks at that. That sounded about right. “We need to do something about this…” the green-haired boy finally says after a long stretch of silence, the two of them uncertain where to go from here.

“I don’t wanna demand we get put into one of their clubs. Who’d wanna be in a club with all those assholes?” Mashi snarls. She should have known this wouldn’t be that easy. It never was for them. Like Izuku said, society had made it that way, dug a hole and dropped them in, then spat in their faces and blamed them when they struggled trying to get back out.

“We need to be active, not silent,” Izuku mutters and Mashi is just close enough to hear as he begins to think aloud. “Not doing anything won’t help us and it won’t help anyone in the future. No lessons will be learned and the destructive behavior will continue. What active roll can we take, however, without being seen as cruel or foolish?” Izuku straightens up, an idea having hit him, and Mashi leans closer, curious. The boy turns to her, eyes wide and excited, not caring that the redhead is inside his space, life returning to his features.

“We should make our own club!”

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As it turns out it isn’t that simple, but it isn’t impossible either. They need more people to join, and they need a faculty member to sponsor them. Luckily, when they had gone to the teachers’ lounge a lot of the faculty were still there. They’d explained what they wanted to do and almost immediately peppy, American Octopus-sensei had popped up, having overhead their plea.

“I would love to sponsor these young ones!” he had said immediately, grinning broadly, and Mashi had grinned right back. Izuku had to admit, he was really beginning to like Octopus-sensei and his eager attitude. He was just happy to help, it seemed, even when he hardly knew the students.

The difficult part was going to be getting more people to join their club. For a new club to be viable they needed four people. Right now they only had two, but Mashi had an idea for where they could get a third.

They would be killing two birds with one stone with their plan the following day. At lunch they
would take their bentos over to the other class in search of the third quirkless student in their grade. If they could convince him to join their club not only would they be one step closer to it working out, but they would also have successfully befriended someone else like them.

So, the following day Izuku has his hair tied back again, once again wanting to make a good first impression, and Mashi reties her braid beforehand so it isn’t an entire mess.

They’re the first ones out the door when class ends, rushing for the other classroom, a giddy excitement in their bones. Izuku, for the longest time, had only known Mashi as another quirkless individual. He’d never even met someone other than her that didn’t have a quirk. So, despite knowing nothing about this kid, he felt optimistic and eager about this meeting.

The enthusiasm dwindles a little when they actually get to the classroom and Mashi lets out a growl. Izuku doesn’t know who the kid is they’re looking for, but she does, and she’s staring over with a fire in her eyes at a small group gathered around a single desk in the back corner of the room.

Sitting in that desk is a skinny, frail looking boy, who has to be even tinier than Izuku, with platinum blond hair so light it may as well be white. It’s hardly as long as Izuku’s or Mashi’s, but it’s not short either, and has been slicked back tight to his head until it feathers out at the back of his neck.

Izuku can’t see his eyes with the way he’s ducked his head, but he’s pale as a ghost and his lips are pinched tight as the small gathering of kids talks to him. As they get closer they can hear some of what’s being said and it sounds familiar in the worst kind of ways.

“Is it true? Are you quirkless?” “So you can’t do anything?” “Whoa, talk about useless!” “I heard about the other ones yesterday, but you too?” “Why are you even allowed into school?”

Well, that certainly answered the question if it was true the kid of quirkless or not, but that hardly mattered right now. What mattered right now was that Mashi wasn’t beside Izuku anymore and was instead marching towards the small gathering.

“Hey! How ‘bout you fuckers screw off! That sound good?!” she roars once she’s close and the kids all jump and look at her, eyes wide in shock at how they’re being addressed. They’re so shocked they don’t even move, so Mashi lurches at them, roaring gutturally, and they scream like they’ve seen a bug and scatter.

The pale boy sits ramrod straight, dumbstruck and startled, his head up as he stares at Mashi, who is still trying to chase people off, and Izuku, who is making his way over. Izuku watches as his friend roars and rants at the other students, a nervous smile on his face, before he turns fully to the other quirkless kid. He stops beside his desk, hands clasped behind his back as he bows his head in greeting.

“Sorry for the scene,” he offers politely, “Mashi tends to go overboard pretty regularly, especially when people are being mean.”

The kid is staring up at Izuku, his eyes thin, sharp, and his irises one of the deepest blues Izuku has ever seen. He isn’t saying anything, though, so the genius boy quickly continues.

“My name is Midoirya Izuku, that over there is Haganehato Mashi—“

“Call me Mashi! It’s better!” the redhead grins, finally joining them at the desk, her hands on her hips. The boy looks to her, his eyes narrowing, then back at Izuku.

“I didn’t ask for any help,” he snaps so suddenly and venomously Izuku leans away like he’s been slapped. He can almost hear Mashi’s mouth snapping closed and they glance at each other,
dumbfounded. Why was he angry with them?

“Don’t look like that. I get it, you guys wanted to save the day, right? I didn’t need any help, though, I was doing fine on my own,” the boy continues and Mashi’s energy is very quickly turning sour and angry at Izuku’s side.

He’d forgotten what he’d told himself the day before. He had forgotten that it was possible this kid didn’t want them or need them, that he was fine without them. He had been so excited to meet another quirkless person and start up a club, however, that he had ignored his own brain. He had jumped to a conclusion and now it was coming back to bite him. Still… there was something off-putting about the other kid’s words.

“Doing fine?! You weren’t doing anything! You were just… SITTING there!” Mashi snaps, hands coming off her hips to curl into fists at her sides. She looked angry, but Izuku could hear the disbelief in her voice, could see it in the turn of her brows.

“Exactly,” the boy says, looking away from them in a fashion that could only be called “snooty.” He lifts up a book he had been reading, a manga Izuku didn’t recognize, and begins flipping through the pages, speaking to them like it’s an afterthought. “The best way to deal with bullies and people like that is to simply ignore them. Eventually they’ll go away on their own.”

Izuku is stunned. Completely stunned. What was this he was hearing? He had never met someone who simply ignored the bullies in hopes they would leave. It made… a tiny bit of sense, maybe, but it still made Izuku’s stomach begin to twist. “S-sure, ignoring some bullies might work, but not if it proceeds, right?” he questions, leaning towards the boy. This was not at all how he had expected this meeting to go.

“Look, I just want to get back to what I’m doing. Confrontation isn’t going to help me do that,” the boy huffs, still looking down at the manga in his hand.

“Don’t you… want to do something about it, though?” Izuku asks, shaking his head, still not getting where this was coming from. He remembered when he was little, and even now on occasion, when he would be bullied and he would freeze up. He would be scared, but he would still see the injustice in it all. He knew it was wrong and he wanted to do something about it. He had never wanted to just stay quiet until the storm passed.

“Not really,” the boy shrugs and Izuku’s floored. He had no idea how to deal with this person. He had never met someone who just didn’t seem to have any kind of drive like this.

“What about when they get physical!!” Mashi snaps, leaning against the desk and trying to force the boy to look at her. She looked furious, her eyes fiery and teeth bared.

The white-haired boy shrugs again, still not looking up, “They weren’t.”

Mashi groans in frustration. “Not just those fucks from a second ago! Anybody!!”

“They don’t,” he says a bit more firmly and looks up at Mashi, finally, his own eyes angry now as they glare at each other. “I’m not a threat to them. I make sure I’m not, so they leave me alone. When you get all upset like YOU are doing right now? You’ve let them win.”

“Oh, fuck you!” Mashi snarls, leaning in closer, but Izuku grabs the collar of her jacket to reel her back some. “‘Let the bullies win’? Go fuck yourself! What we decide to do isn’t up to anybody, and it doesn’t mean the ‘bullies have won,’ what the hell? When you’re taking care of yourself, it doesn’t matter what the bullies think, YOU’VE won!!”
“Well, this is how I’m winning,” the boy says coolly, “I’m not rising to their challenge. That’s how I’m doing this. Now if you don’t mind, I’d like to keep reading.”

“Taking care of yourself is one thing,” Izuku says before the boy can look back to his manga. He pulls Mashi fully away, ignoring her growl of protest, and sets a single hand on the boy’s desk. He tried to school his expression but right now he just felt so… sad, there was no telling what his face actually looked like. “But wouldn’t you say that if you had an opportunity to stop further negative actions from continuing that you should? What if your silence led to a reinforcement of their beliefs, that what they’re doing is totally fine, and they go and do it to someone else not as strong as you?”

“Their actions are not my responsibility,” the boy argues, but he isn’t as heated with Izuku as he had been with Mashi, probably because Izuku wasn’t getting in his face.

“You’re right… they aren’t… but society isn’t going to teach them they’re wrong, so if you have the opportunity, don’t you think you should?”

The boy stares at Izuku for a long, silent moment, his blue eyes still narrowed, his hands still grasping his manga, his thin lips twisted. Izuku had no idea what he was thinking, he just hoped it was something good.

“You trying to be a hero, or something?” the pale boy finally questions with a small sneer and Izuku lets out a nervous little laugh, a hand coming up to run over the top of his hair.

“One day,” he says quietly and the boy actually snaps his mouth shut, staring at him.

“You’re quirkless, though,” he says after a second and Mashi pops up on Izuku’s other shoulder, leaning against him with her arms crossed.

“So?! We can be heroes, too!” she says confidently, grinning. It seemed that as the other boy calmed down, so too did Mashi.

“That’s dumb,” he says flatly and the redhead yells in anger. Well, so much for that… “You two are dumb.”

“It’s what we want to do,” Izuku says firmly, “You can’t fault us for that.”

“You faulted me for how I dealt with my problems,” the other boy sets down his manga, finally, and leans back in his seat with his arms crossed. He was glaring at them again.

Izuku didn’t understand the boy’s thinking. He didn’t know how someone could just silently take people bullying them and act like it was nothing. It wasn’t that the boy was scared or unable to do something, he simply chose not to, from what Izuku could see, but he was also right. It wasn’t fair for them to judge so harshly. It wasn’t their place.

“We’re sorry for that,” he bows his head, then elbows the redhead beside him to make her do the same. She grumbles viciously but does a quick bow of her head as well.

“Yeah, yeah, sorry or whatever,” she growls and for a second she and the boy glare at each other again, energy crackling between them like a storm.

“We never wanted to start a fight,” Izuku continues, getting the boy’s attention back on him, “We actually were hoping to ask you to join a club we’re working on making.”

“A club?” the boy’s thin eyebrows furrow. Whatever he had been expecting for their visit, it hadn’t been that.
“No club will let us in because we’re quirkless,” Mashi says, looking away and scowling at just having to say that. “So we’re making our own! Show them we don’t need them!”

“What kind of club?”

“Something like a cultural club,” Izuku says but hesitates. The actual definition of their club wasn’t yet determined, they just knew they wanted to start one. “It won’t be very demanding at all, and it won’t take up much time. It’s more like a hang out spot, really, but we want to work on bettering how people see us as well…”

“Sounds like it’s all very up in the air…” the boy arches a brow at them and Izuku’s shoulders slump. He wasn’t wrong. “Looks like we’ll have to work on that.”

For a second the words don’t fully process, but when they do Izuku and Mashi’s heads snap up towards the other boy, who is smiling smugly at their surprise. “Wait… so you’ll join us?” Izuku questions, not certain he’d heard that right.

“My brother has been pestering me to get into a club. He doesn’t like how much time I stay at home, or something, but if this is such a relaxed club, and you don’t expect me to do much, it sounds like it would be pretty good at getting him off my back,” the boy explains, but then points a thin finger at them, “I still think you’re both dumb, though.”

Izuku laughs anxiously at that and Mashi growls beside him, grumbling in his ear, “Are we sure we need him?” Izuku elbows her in the side and she quiets down.

“We really appreciate your help, even if you don’t fully believe in what we’re doing,” he says with another bow to the boy. He still wasn’t entirely sure how he felt about this kid. He saw the world so differently than Izuku or Mashi, in a way that made Izuku’s stomach twist, but he didn’t seem all that bad, especially if he was going to help them out.

“What’s your name, anyway? You never said it,” the girl beside Izuku says, still leaning against him, her eyes narrowed and a frown on her face. She was obviously unhappy with their new club member, but not unhappy enough to throw a fit or deny him.

The boy looks to her, obviously unimpressed by her attitude, then sits up straight and nods to them both. “Inazumi Ken. Pleasure to meet you.”

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The three of them could hardly be considered friends. Mashi and Izuku were close, but Inazumi – he didn’t like people using his given name unless they were family – seemed to just be along for the ride.

They would meet and have lunch together in one of their classrooms, usually his, and would talk about their plans for the club. Izuku realized very, very quickly that Inazumi had no interest in becoming a hero, so it couldn’t really be a hero club. Inazumi seemed to only be interested in manga and anime, although he did apparently have a talent for coding, so at least he and Izuku had something to occasionally talk about.

They thought maybe to make their club similar to the ones for young leaders, but more for encouraging and bettering those treated badly by the system to become something greater than anyone ever expected. That was the running plan, even if Inazumi still didn’t really match the bill.

He had no drive, no desire to stand out or become better. All the pale boy wanted to do was drift and be left alone. Izuku didn’t want to judge him, he didn’t want to judge anyone, but it baffled him to no
It didn’t help that Mashi and Inazumi despised each other, that much was made clear very early on, and Izuku always felt like he may smack them both at any second. Or himself, because this was ridiculous. Mashi and Katsuki bickered because they had a few too many things in common, but Mashi and Inazumi had verbal brawls because of how incredibly different they both were. Heaven help them when – and that was definitely a “when” not an “if” – Katsuki met the new boy.

It wasn’t an ideal situation for Izuku, the stress making his head hurt and his back ache. The Reinforcement helped keep the back pains at bay, but Izuku could still feel them when they were exceptionally bad. He would usually just remove the Reinforcement and lie down for a while at home, let his body naturally work out some of the pain, and put some icy hot on the muscles for extra help.

Add on the isse that they still didn’t have a fourth member and Izuku was just riddled with stress pains. Octopus-sensei was being so kind and patient, helping them find a room where they could meet and not once pressuring them to hurry up. That didn’t change the fact they needed at least one more person to actually make their club a reality.

It’s not until the following week on a Monday that some hope finally reveals itself. Mashi and Izuku are sitting in their classroom, eating lunch, and wondering if Inazumi will show or if they’ll have to go join him for lunch in his room. They’d decided their best option with dealing with the snooty, absentminded boy was to do what they wanted, get it done, then go find him. If he showed, he showed. If he didn’t, he didn’t. So they keep eating and when they’re finished, if he still isn’t there, they’ll head to his classroom.

It is looking like that’s exactly what they’ll need to do as they near the end of their meals, Mashi grumbling about rude, twig boys she could easily snap in half if she wanted to, but then hurried footsteps are entering the room and making their way over.

They both look up as Inazumi makes his appearance, smacking his hands on the desk they’re sharing for lunch, a smirk on his face. “I have the answer to your prayers,” he says, sounding out of breath and with more energy in him Izuku has ever seen him express.

Mashi gasps dramatically and leans forward. “You’re moving and never coming back?” she asks with wide eyes and Inazumi turns a glare on her.

“No!” he snaps then focuses entirely on Izuku instead, back to smirking. “I think I found our forth member;” he says lowly and Izuku straightens up, eyes widening.

“Really? Who?” the green-haired boy asks, pushing back some of his loose hair. It wasn’t tied back anymore.

“Are they better than you?” Mashi adds on towards Inazumi and Izuku pinches her arm, making her yelp but quiet down.

Inazumi shoots Mashi another glare, this time scowling a little, before focusing once again on Izuku. “He has a quirk,” he begins like it’s a warning, and Izuku’s brow furrows, “but he still seems like a good fit for the club, from what I’ve seen.”

“But our club is for people who have been beaten down and shit. If he’s got a quirk, how bad can it be?” Mashi questions, one brow arched and a small curl to her lips, but Izuku is shaking his head at her before she even finishes.
“Remember that boy from our Leech experiments? The one that could disintegrate stuff?” he begins and Mashi looks to him, nodding slowly that yes, she did remember. “He obviously wasn’t used to people complimenting his quirk or being kind to him. He wasn’t hurt the way we’ve been, but he was still hurt.”

Society had a way of screwing a lot of different people over in a lot of different ways. Quirkless people were treated like they were useless, handicapped people were treated with pity like they needed constant help, neurodivergent people were treated like they were lying, and certain quirks were treated like a death sentence. This desire to put people in boxes just because of a single trait no one had any control over needed to stop.

“Well, this guy’s quirk is like that,” Inazumi cuts in, crossing his arms and standing up straight. “Not as intense… but he’s treated pretty crappy for it.”

“How do you know him?” Izuku asks, looking up at the white-haired boy, who shrugs.

“He’s in my class, obviously. He keeps to himself so I didn’t notice at first.”

“He got a name?” Mashi questions, leaning her chin against her palm.

“Obviously,” Inazumi rolls his eyes, glaring at Mashi, who stares right back at him, waiting for him to disclose said name. After a pause the boy clears his throat and looks away, the embarrassed pink on his cheeks vibrant against his pale skin. “I just don’t know it…”

Before the redhead can make any snide remarks Izuku cuts in, standing up and looking between the two. “Let’s go meet him, then. We’ll introduce ourselves and get a name that way. Okay?”

Mashi nods up at him and stands as well. Despite her distaste for their third club member she still had an eager glint in her eyes. It didn’t matter that this boy had a quirk, if he was being beaten down and treated poorly, and was a decent person himself, than they would happily have him, and their club would finally be ready to go.

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He is not at all what Izuku had been expecting, but then again, nothing ever seemed to be anymore.

The three quirkless kids gather at their target’s desk and look down at him. Izuku has his hands clasped in front of him, Mashi has her arms crossed and her head tilted, and Inazumi’s arms hang by his side, expression bored.

The boy that stares up at them looks exhausted, bags under his droopy, purple eyes, his dark bluish-purple hair has been styled into messy, slicked back spikes, and he is very obviously, even if he’s sitting, much taller than all of them. Izuku can’t help but be reminded of Aizawa, but more like a younger, skinnier, more purple version of the man.

“Uh… hi there,” Izuku begins as the boy just keeps quietly staring up at them, waiting for them to speak. “My name is—“

“Midoriya,” the boy cuts them off and Izuku blinks in surprise.

“Eh?”

“Your name is Midoriya. You’re Haganehato—“

“Mashi’s better…“
“And you’re Inazumi. Everybody knows you three, the quirkless kids.”

Izuku cringes at that. Not only did people know about them, they knew their names too. They’d become something of a phenomenon it would appear.

Inazumi actually curses under his breath, looking away. Izuku knew just from the short time knowing him that the boy wouldn’t want people knowing about him. He wasn’t making a fuss, though, so Izuku took that as a good sign.

“Yeah, that’s us,” Izuku finally sighs, ducking his head. The kid stares back at him for a while, tired eyes boring into the green-haired boy’s skull, waiting for him to continue. “We, uh… we actually wanted to ask if you’d like to join our club?”

The boy blinks slowly but his expression doesn’t change. “Your club?” he questions dubiously, eyes flicking between them.

“It’s for kids like us that have been beat down by people and wanna prove we ain’t gonna deal with that shit anymore!” Mashi says proudly, grinning and puffing out her chest. “The Club of Unrecognized Talent! Aka CUT! Get it? Cut? Because we’ve been cut out of the picture?!”

“I didn’t agree to that reference,” Inazumi looks behind Izuku over at Mashi, his brows lowered in obvious frustration.

“I didn’t ask,” she grins back at him and he huffs daintily, flicking his head and looking away while she cackles.

“CUT?” the boy repeats, still sounding uncertain despite his expression not changing. “Seriously?”

“It was almost the Club of Unrecognized, Natural Talent…” Inazumi adds dryly, looking somehow defeated at just the thought of that. The purple-haired boy thinks about that before a blush forms on his face and he clears his throat.

“I thought it was a good idea!” Mashi exclaims.

“Yeah, Mashi… you’ve said so,” Izuku sighs and rubs a hand over the bridge of his nose. He needed to get this conversation back on track. “We’ve heard people have been cruel to you based on your quirk,” he continues to their hopeful, new club member, getting right to the point, “so we thought we would extend an invitation.”

For a while the boy is silent again, but his eyes have narrowed. He leans against his desk with both arms, watching them. “Do you even know what my quirk is?” he questions and he sounds defensive and frustrated.

“Dude, we don’t even know what your NAME is,” Mashi says honestly, scratching at her head.

The boy gives her an unimpressed look before sighing and saying, “Shinsou Hitoshi.”

“Shinsou-kun…” Izuku tests the name on his tongue and he finds he likes it. “No, we don’t know what your quirk is. Honestly, all we heard was that you may be having issues and we… wanted to extend the invitation,” Izuku smiles down at the boy, trying to show his sincerity on the issue.

“Yeah… I’ll pass,” the boy says with little hesitation, blinking slowly, and Izuku’s stomach drops. He feels a small sense of déjà vu having dealt with Inazumi and the disappointment he’d felt then, but the other quirkless boy hadn’t just denied them like this.
“O-oh…” Izuku says slowly, the smile on his face dropping. This had been quick, hadn’t it?

The other boy, Shinsou, sighs and lets his head fall, looking even more tired, before looking back up at them with his blank look. “You have to get it, right?” he begins slowly and all three of them, even Inazumi, stiffen. Whenever they heard something like it usually led to someone being cruel to them. Naturally they all went on the defensive.

“I’m already treated bad because I have a villain’s quirk. You guys seem fine, but I don’t need anymore negative attention on me. It’s exhausting,” Shinsou explains simply and Izuku’s shoulders deflate. This had to be the first time the excuse of “because you’re quirkless,” despite being unsaid, actually made reasonable sense. Izuku didn’t want to cause this boy anymore trouble than he already had, he really didn’t, but he also wanted to argue that Shinsou should stand up with them, fight back against the bullies.

Unlike with Inazumi, however, Izuku didn’t know the full depth of what Shinsou could be going through. He was aware certain quirks were treated badly, but it was not the same as being quirkless and Izuku had no experience with this.

He wanted to argue, but he had no references. No experience or research to back him up.

“ARE you a villain?” Mashi asks suddenly, her arms crossed and one brow arched, looking irritable.

Shinsou looks over at her, his brows raised in surprise. “What?” he asks. This was the first real emotion Izuku thinks he’s seen on his face.

“Are. You. A. Villain?” Mashi asks more slowly this time, punctuating each word by leaning in a little closer. Shinsou’s eyes narrow defensively as she gets nearer, though he’s still slouched in on himself.

“No,” is all he grounds out and the redhead stares at him for a long time, examining him, then straightens up and hums, looking like she suddenly doesn’t care.

“Guess you don’t have a villain’s quirk, then!” she says with a big shrug, shaking her head. Again Shinsou looks surprised.

Izuku tries hard not to smile as he watches his friend work. He didn’t know what to do in this situation, but Mashi was good with people. She was good at reading them and reacting, even with strangers, so long as they didn’t make her mad. Maybe they weren’t out of luck after all?

“A villain has a villain’s quirk,” Mashi continues, pulling her long braid over her shoulder and running her hands over it, lips puckered as she speaks like this is a normal conversation. “You have more of a…”

“Student’s quirk,” Inazumi finishes and everyone looks to him. He looks disinterested, but he had definitely just said that, helping out the conversation.

“Yeah…” Mashi says slowly, giving the skinny boy an odd look, but not arguing. If he wanted to help no one was going to stop him. “A student’s quirk,” she turns back to the purple-haired boy, “’Cause you’re a student, and that’s your quirk. It ain’t about the quirk, it’s about the quirk…er? Quirker? Quirkee?”

“Just say person,” Inazumi grumbles and Mashi throws him the bird. Well, there went the teamwork.

Before either of them can continue, however, Shinsou shakes his head and gives them a very sudden glare. Izuku isn’t sure, however, but it looks like there may be a desperateness in his eyes hidden
within as he looks at the three at his desk.

“Just… Leave me alone, okay?” he growls, his hands curled into fists on his desk, knuckles white and shaking. For a second the three quirkless kids freeze, surprised by the strength and emotion in his voice, the blank, expressionless boy gone. When the kids don’t move Shinsou scowls and says, voice rough, "Please."

Izuku feels his heart break. He wanted Shinsou to fight. He hardly knew the boy but he wanted him to fight for himself, to stand up and say that he decides what he is, not someone else, but… Izuku can’t push him when he’s so obviously upset. Izuku won’t.

So he bows his head deeply, long hair falling around his face.

“I’m sorry Shinsou-kun. We’ll leave you alone, now,” he says quietly, stands up straight with his head still lowered, and turns and leaves.

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It’s a Monday so Izuku’s next class is Home Economics.

The entire meeting at lunch sent all three of the quirkless kids into a low mood. Mashi and Inazumi had hardly even bickered as they both went to Music and all they had mustered was a quiet good-bye when they parted ways with Izuku.

They weren’t going to give up, they still wanted to get their club going, but Shinsou was proof that trying to help wasn’t always going to work. None of them had wanted to upset him, but they’d been so wound up in their own plans that they hadn’t thought ahead at all.

Izuku and Mashi had done that with Inazumi as well, just jumping into his life, and that had luckily worked out fine. Perhaps that was what had made them overconfident to believe that they could do it again.

It was foolish and arrogant of them, and it definitely didn’t help that Shinsou was in Izuku’s next class. He hadn’t noticed before, had no reason to, but when he enters class he spots the spiky, purple hair almost immediately. For a second Izuku freezes and Shinsou looks up. They catch eyes and the green-haired boy quickly ducks his head. He doesn’t know what the other boy’s reaction is; he doesn’t see it as he rushes to a seat on the other side of the room.

This was going to be difficult to deal with. After what he’d done and the guilt in his system he didn’t want to be near the other boy for a while, in fear of upsetting him again. That previous feeling, the one where Izuku had wanted so deeply for this boy to succeed and be great, returns, and with it the desire to see him happy. Anyone who was being bullied and judged deserved that, and Izuku was certain he was not going to be of help with that anymore after what he’d done.

With the anxiety and the terrible feeling in the genius’s gut it seemed like class should somehow be less normal than usual. Like something should happen, but nothing does. Octopus-sensei begins class like he always does, with a cheerful greeting and asking how everyone is doing, before they hop into class.

Throughout the whole class Izuku avoids even looking in Shinsou’s general direction, but as class lets out the curiosity gets the better of him and he glances over, wanting to know what expression was painted on the tall boy’s face.

But Shinsou is already gone while everyone else packs up their things to head for PE.
Izuku cringes. He wasn’t sure if Shinsou just tended to leave quickly, but he felt like he and his
friend’s actions had done this. He’d made the environment thick and difficult for a boy he hardly
knew. What was wrong with him? Why couldn’t he learn to just let things be?

When he makes it out to the field Mashi and Inazumi are already waiting for him, dressed and ready
to go. Izuku still feels downtrodden, but at least they look livelier as they argue.

“It’s not my fault you don’t got any appreciation for art!” the redhead is saying, sticking her nose
high in the air while Inazumi fumes beside her, his arms tight to his sides, fists clenched.

"Art?!" he exclaims, voice cracking in a way that has both Mashi and Izuku smiling and holding
back giggles. “You call that art? You were just blowing into your stupid trumpet all willy nilly!
There was no order, or purpose, or delicacy about it at all!"

“Not to shock you, but Mashi isn’t exactly delicate,” Izuku smirks, laughing to himself when his
friend puffs out her chest and grins proudly. Of course she would take that as a compliment.

“She ruined the entire piece!!" Inazumi shrieks, voice high and scratchy and this time Mashi and
Izuku do begin to giggle, making him grind his teeth and fume.

“I’m surprised you care,” Mashi pokes at the skinny boy’s side, smirking at him as he swats her hand
away.

“Usually I wouldn’t,” he huffs, straightening his exercise shirt, trying to compose himself, “It was
just so atrocious I felt someone ought to tell you.”

“Uh-huh, sure,” Mashi is still smirking and Inazumi growls, cheeks turning red, before he turns to
storm off, done with them. Their whole grade was out for PE, which meant they all three could be
together, but that rarely happened. Usually they would hang together at first, but it would soon end
with Inazumi finding a nice, cool spot in the bleachers to play on his phone while Izuku and Mashi
exercised.

It doesn’t look like that is going to happen today, however, as Inazumi almost immediately comes
face to face with a fellow student. The tiny boy yelps in surprise and steps backwards, bumping into
Mashi as they all three look to the newcomer, curious at who has approached them so suddenly.

He’s a large boy, looks a lot larger than someone their age should be, with shiny, gold skin and
spiky, blue hair. His eyes look like they’re made of actual diamonds, giving him both an inhuman
and snooty expression almost immediately.

He wasn’t from Izuku’s homeroom, so he had to assume he was from Inazumi’s. He looked familiar
enough from when they had visited the classroom, but Izuku can’t place ever having interacted with
him.

“Kinas,” Inazumi says in recognition, his voice carefully calm. He was shutting down, Izuku could
see it, ready to just silently let the boy say what he wanted then go. It was a warning sign that this
was not about to be a pleasant meeting.

“Hey, freak,” the golden boy says with venom on his tongue and Izuku’s shoulders square up. Yep,
definitely not pleasant.

He focuses entirely on the newcomer but sees Mashi, still behind Inazumi, also flex up dangerously.
Kinas looks at them and sneers.

“Oh, I can tell you aren’t happy about something,” Izuku begins slowly, raising his hands in hopes
to stop the mounting altercation. “Why don’t we—“

“Shut it, freak two!” Kinasa snaps, glaring down at Izuku in a way that made him feel small and it floors him. It had been a while since someone had looked at him like that, with pure disgust and superiority. Katsuki used to, but he didn’t anymore, and the biggest bully in elementary school had been Kaito, who was more psychological than anything. This guy was definitely more about action than talking and he meant business.

“Midoriya, shut up,” Inazumi hisses under his breath and Kinasa snaps his head towards him.

“I saw you guys,” he says in a low tone, stalking towards the smallest member of their group. Mashi takes a step around Inazumi to stand at his side, puffing up like a wild cat, baring her teeth and glaring fire at the bully. “You trying to bring people with quirks down to your level now?” Kinasa spits out a wad of saliva right at Inazumi’s feet, making the boy step back. “Disgusting! It’s bad enough you’re all grouping together like a bunch of roaches!”

“I’m surprised you know that cockroaches prefer to gather together,” Izuku says coolly, stepping closer to Inazumi to try and show this bully they weren’t going to let him pick on their friend, or on any of them. He knows Inazumi preferred to lay low and avoid problems, but right now Izuku and Mashi were there and he would just have to deal with them and their “innate need to save the day,” as he’d put it.

“You insulting me, freak two?” Kinasa turns to Izuku now. Izuku didn’t know what it was about people like him that got a kick out of breaking people down like this. They hadn’t done anything to him, hadn’t approached him or said a word, but he didn’t care, he just was looking for a fight and saw them as the best target.

Or perhaps he honestly thought he was doing the world a service by telling the quirkless kids to leave people with quirks alone, and that was even sadder, that picking on a bunch of kids was seen as a heroic act in this boy’s mind.

Whatever the reason may be, however, the issue was they had a bully in their faces, eager to throw down, and Izuku had no idea where the teacher was. He couldn’t go looking for him, there was no telling the specifics of this boy’s quirk, nor the limits of his sanity. He could seriously do any of them a lot of damage. They stood their best chances sticking together.

“No, if anything that was a compliment,” Izuku offers. His expression stays blessedly blank, but he can feel his every muscle shaking. He hadn’t stood up to a bully in a long time and his entire body was screaming at him to run away and get help. He wanted help, he wanted a teacher to show up and stop this already, but he didn’t think that was going to be happening anytime soon so he needed to be strong and brave. He would stand up to this bully no matter what he felt.

“That better have been,” Kinasa says slowly. He was a lot taller than Izuku and he looks down his gleaming nose at him. “Unless you want me to start ‘complimenting’ that ugly ass scar of yours.” Izuku’s previous drive, the one to keep his friends safe and to fight the bully, screeches to a halt as his stomach drops and a coldness settles into his bones.

No one had ever… commented on his scars before. He got stares and he got whispers and he got judgements, sure, but no one, not even Kaito, had ever actually used them to inflict cruelty. It was like they were off limits in the realm of bullying, that saying anything about them would be stooping too low. Izuku had foolish assumed anyone would realize that. Had thought he was safe but… he wasn’t.

“It’s a good thing you have that girly hair, too, otherwise everyone would see your stupid raisin
Izuku feels like he might actually be sick. His mouth has fallen open and his lip is quivering, tears beginning to form in his human eye. The brutality of the comment has him reeling, unable to respond, unable to think, unable to do anything. This was wrong. This was so, so wrong and he couldn’t think of a way to respond. He shouldn’t have to, this shouldn’t be happening at all!

The gut wrenching desire for his mother makes his breath stutter on his tears. Luckily, he tries to remind himself, digging to yank up the dwindling fire in his chest, he at least always has someone at his back—

“Forget you, Kinasa!” Except that wasn’t Mashi. Mashi was the one that always jumped to his defense, but that hadn’t been her.

Izuku looks back in surprise and sees Inazumi standing a little taller, his body shaking like a leaf. Mashi is staring at him, obviously dumbfounded, and Inazumi has a look in his wide, blue eyes that says he’s shocked at his own actions as well.

Kinasa slowly turns to him and begins to walk closer.

“J-just… Just go away… p-p-please,” Inazumi quivers in fear, shrinking in on himself, terrified and wanting to disappear. Mashi has a hand on his arm, squeezing tightly and keeping him close to her side as she now glares up at Kinasa.

“Yeah, ya fuckin’ nugget! Get the fuck outta here!” the redhead roars, fire in her eyes as she glares down the bully much larger than her.

“Y’know,” Kinasa begins, suddenly sounding conversational as he glares down at Inazumi. Thankfully nothing has gotten physical yet. Now if the teacher would just notice them already and put a stop to this…

“I knew this bitch,” the snapped word makes Inazumi flinch with his whole body, eyes beginning to widen even further, like he was realizing something, “back in elementary. Back when it was all pigtails and skirts, but now you wanna act like you’re some kinda boy,” this flinch is even more violent and Izuku can see Inazumi’s eyes fill with the most raw horror he’s ever seen, the boy’s whole body freezing and he retches on nothing. At the reaction Mashi bodily drags him behind her, standing between their new friend and the gold boy.

“And now you’re acting like you’re all tough and powerful, trying to build up some stupid gang, when you AREN’T!” Kinasa goes on and Izuku sees it at the last second. He sees the hand coming back as the boy glares down Mashi and Inazumi, a fist clenching, and the green-haired boy is moving. “You’re just a bunch of quirkless FREAKS!”

The resounding bang that follows fills the field, a shockwave of dust reverberating around them, and Izuku thinks time might freeze for a second. The air turns heavy, but inside him there’s a furious fire burning, encouraging him beyond his fears, making his body stand tall and steady as his robotic hand easily holds back the bully’s fist.

Kinasa blinks and looks to his right hand, shaking from the impact of colliding with Izuku’s palm. Izuku hardly feels anything, holding the fist there with ease, glaring over his arm and up at the golden boy.

He had been scared before, far before this, of what people would think and say about his handicaps. That he would be treated only by his arm and his eye and his spine, not on his merits or his morals or
his flaws or his dreams. He had been scared, was still scared, but now – standing down a bully ready
to hurt his friends – he felt strong.

He makes his robotic eye, just visible under his hair, glow red and Kinas lurches back, trying to pull
away his fist, but Izuku holds on. He doesn’t have any weapons built into this arm, not like he would
use them at school anyway, but he does wish he could show them off.

“You came to the wrong hood, bitch!” Mashi roars behind him, holding her hands out wide in a
“bring it on” gesture, and a loud, boisterous laugh erupts from her mouth. Izuku can’t help but smirk,
still staring down the wide-eyed Kinas, before he pushes his robotic arm forward and flings the boy
onto his butt in the dirt.

“Never insult my friends again,” is all he says, voice so sharp and angry for a second not even he
recognizes it as his own.

Mashi must think it’s cool, though, because she suddenly does a tiny, gleeful giggle, poking at his
back, and whispering, “Holy shiiiiit! Badass Zuzuuuuu!”

Kinas scrambles to get up, tripping once before he rights himself and faces them again, a fury in his
diamond eyes. He evidently couldn’t take a hint and Izuku shifts his feet into a stance Aizawa had
taught him, ready to defend himself again.

“You quirkless— “ Kinas begins, Izuku’s eyes narrowing at him.

“Hey!”

“What?” The call comes from out of nowhere and the second Kina responds he freezes, eyes
glazing over, looking like a zombie. Izuku’s shoulders slump in surprise, eyes widening, and before
he can question what happened a figure appears at his side, bumping shoulders with him.

Izuku looks up at the tall form of Shinsou Hitoshi, who is looking at Kinas, and begins to piece
things together.

“Go find the teacher,” Shinsou says to Kinas, voice steady, his arms crossed. He looked angry.
“Tell them what you did and deal with the consequences.” The zombie Kinas stands there for a
moment before turning with a snap and heading off, seeming to be following Shinsou’s orders.

“Whoa…” Mashi whispers and Izuku has to agree. Whoa, indeed.

“Did… Did you just brainwash that guy?” the green-haired boy asks, dumbfounded, and Shinsou
raises a hand to clasp the back of his neck, twiddling with some of the baby hairs there.

“Uh… yeah. I can control anyone who responds to me—Whoa!” the boy had slowly, sheepishly,
been turning towards Izuku but jumped in surprise when he catches sight of the boy’s still glowing
eye.

“Oh!” Izuku’s eyes widen and he quickly turns off the glow, a blush rising. “S-sorry about that.”

“I thought you didn’t have a quirk?” Shinsou questions, his tired face baffled as he points in Izuku’s
general direction.

With the adrenaline gone the fear returns to the boy full force. He had just shown not just the truth
about his eye, but his arm as well, in the middle of PE, against a bully who would have no issue
sharing that information. Everyone was going to know. Everyone was going to judge him and…
Izuku takes a deep breath, glancing away. No, he had taken his time and now he was ready to reveal his full self. He would no longer be afraid. He couldn’t be. He was strong, and he had his friends to support him.

But Mashi isn’t standing behind him anymore, he notices with a jolt. She’s moved a few paces away with Inazumi, letting Shinsou and Izuku talk, while she speaks lowly with the shell-shocked boy. He didn’t look good, but he was grasping at the redhead’s hands, head down, nodding as she spoke, seeming to at least be a little better. Izuku feels a sense of pride that his friend was looking out for their newest addition, that she was able to move past their differences and bickering and be there for him.

She really was amazing.

But he couldn’t be focusing on that right now. He would speak with Inazumi in a moment, make sure he was okay, but for now he had Shinsou to deal with.

“I don’t have a quirk,” he says, finally looking back up at the purple-haired boy, expression as steady as he can make it. “I was in an accident when I was six. Now I’ve replaced my arm, my eye, and my spine with machines.”

Shinsou stares at him for a long moment, looking him over. When one knows to look for them the seams in Izuku’s arm are obvious, showing where the panels fit together. The tall boy instinctively reaches out towards the arm and Izuku instinctively flinches away, cringing at his own reaction while Shinsou yanks his own hand back.

“Sorry,” Shinsou says quietly.

“It’s okay,” Izuku says just as quietly back.

An awkward silence settles between them, neither looking at each other. Izuku still felt awful for having pushed Shinsou before, the guilt angrily gnawing at his stomach.

“And sorry… for before,” the purple-haired boy cuts into Izuku’s thoughts before they can get much worse and they look at each other. Shinsou looks sheepish beneath his exhausted exterior, his hand right back to the back of his neck. Was that a nervous tick?

“What do you mean…?” Izuku questions, brows furrowing. He wasn’t sure what Shinsou could be apologizing for. He’d done nothing wrong. If anything they all should be thanking him for helping them with Kinasa.

But Shinsou obviously feels regretful for something, his face twisting with his discomfort. “For lunch?” he says quietly, shoulders slumping a little, and now Izuku’s eyebrows lift in surprise. “I didn’t mean to snap at you guys, you were just trying to help. I…” Shinsou takes a second to let out a weary sigh, bracing himself for what he’s going to admit. “I’m not really used to people actually… supporting me like that? And you don’t even know me…”

“Doesn’t matter,” Izuku cuts in with a shake of his head. “Everyone deserves the right to determine their own future. The beliefs that quirks choose what you’ll be when you grow up is a toxic way of thinking.”

“Yeah…” Shinsou says slowly, brows furrowing, not certain how to deal with Izuku’s strong and knowledgeable words. “Well… I wasn’t used to it, and I reacted poorly because of it. That wasn’t fair…”

“We shouldn’t have pushed you, though,” the shorter boy argues, looking up at Shinsou with a
pleading look. He didn’t want the other boy to take all the blame onto himself. It wasn’t right.

“Yeah, well, you weren’t wrong…” Shinsou says grudgingly, looking away. “I always get so frustrated with people throwing around their ‘heroic quirks’ like they’re so superior, acting better than everyone else, but I’ve never actually… spoken up against it.” He shakes his head, obviously frustrated with himself, and Izuku wants to say something but he isn’t done. “And you guys don’t even have quirks to back you up, but you’re still doing something about all this…”

Shinsou shakes his head and looks to Izuku, a hard look in his eyes that keeps Izuku from speaking. He wanted to hear what the tall boy had to say next.

“You all are completely insane, and I want in.”

Izuku actually chokes on his own spit, coughing in surprise and Shinsou steps closer, hands raised as if to help, the hard look in his eyes replaced with alarm. “Are you okay?” the purple-haired boy questions as Izuku clears his throat.

When he feels better the genius turns determined eyes up at Shinsou, expression serious and hopeful. “Really? You want to be part of our club?!”

The other boy is baffled at the complete turn around and how quickly Izuku recovers, but he soon sets his own face into something serious and nods. “That’s what I said, didn’t I? I… wish I’d said it earlier, but I was having that freak out…”

Joy bubbles up inside Izuku. Joy, hope, excitement, and everything good. Shinsou Hitoshi wanted to be part of their club. He wanted to join them and make the world better for people like them. He believed in them and agreed with them. This was a huge step forward, for quirks and the quirkless, even if it was just four kids in a single Junior High.

“Wait, for real?!” Mashi’s voice calls as she and Inazumi head back over. The small boy is still quiet, pressed to Mashi’s side, their arms hooked, but he wasn’t shaking. He looked exhausted, but that was a step in the right direction.

“I’d like to,” Shinsou says, looking over to the other two. He takes a nervous step closer to Izuku when Mashi leans towards him, all big, wild energy.

“Fuck yeah! Fourth member in the house! We can finally get this thing going!!”

“So…” the purple-haired boy begins slowly, looking to Izuku while Mashi cheers and Inazumi quietly watches her, a very small look of disapproval on his face. “I’m… in?”

Izuku turns to look up at him and gives him the biggest grin he can muster. “I’m… in?”

Izuku slowly smiles back down at Izuku, his eyes still tired but a small, happy light filling them up. “Glad to be here,” he says slowly, an eager lilt to his voice.

“Hey wait a minute…” Mashi suddenly cuts in and they look to her. She’s giving Izuku an odd look and pointing at him while he keeps smiling. “Isn’t the ‘Cut’ a place in Horizon Zero Daw—“

“OOPS SORRY CAN’T CHANGE THE NAME NOW IT’S TOO LATE!” Izuku yells in a sudden stream of words, grinning bigger, and Mashi lets out a surprised shriek of laughter, Izuku quick to join in.
The Club of Unrecognized Talent was now, officially, ready to go.

Chapter End Notes

Ah, what better way to bring out the character of people than by throwing a bully at them?

Hope you guys enjoyed! There was a lot in this one, but it's gonna lead to a lot of good things!

Also you may have noticed this story is part of a series now? That's cause there's another work where all my requests will be placed! Check it out!

Chapter Song: Ben Rector - Brand New
The Club

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! I'm working on some art references for some of the characters and should have Inazumi up soon, but my back is killing me.

Also Mashi's facts are up now! Right here

Edit: Inazumi is up!

The Club of Unrecognized Talent meets in a second floor classroom that day. Inazumi is still quiet, Shinsou is looking around like a weary animal, and Izuku isn’t really sure what he is supposed to do. His closest friends – Katsuki, Mashi, and Mei – were all very outgoing and usually took charge when it came to conversations, but this was different. Izuku was the one trying to get them to come out of their shell. He was the one that came to them, not the other way around, and he needed to lead the conversation. He didn’t want to rely on Mashi doing it for him all the time.

“So…” he begins slowly, tapping his hands on the podium, looking over everyone. Inazumi has taken to sitting at a desk in the back, quietly looking at a manga, but obviously not reading it, his eyes distant. Shinsou is sitting at a desk in the front row, looking out of place and anxious, but that could be because Mashi has decided his desk is the perfect place for her to perch. “I guess… Our first order of business is making it clear what the club is for.”

“Proving everyone wrong!” the redhead yells, grinning proudly as Shinsou leans away from her in surprise, his tired eyes widening. Izuku felt for him. It would take a while to get used to the girl’s energy.

“No…” Izuku raises his hands to hopefully calm her down at least a little. “No, we aren’t here to prove anyone wrong… We’re here to work on becoming the best we can possibly be. We are not going to allow how others see us change what we can become.”

“So…” Shinsou leans to the side, looking around Mashi and at Izuku with a blank expression, “We’re proving everyone wrong.”

Izuku stares at him for a second, then to a victoriously grinning Mashi, then sighs, defeated. “Fine, yes, we’re proving everyone wrong.”

“Good,” the purple-haired boy nods then settles back into his seat.

“But that’s not why you should be here!” Izuku splutters. He was not doing too well at this. “You should be here for you, and for others like us, not out of spite…”

“I dunno! Spite’s a pretty damn good motorcycle! Wait…” Mashi’s brows furrow as even she realizes she said the wrong thing.

“Motivator.”

“Right! Motivator…” she waves a finger at Izuku, smiling brightly, then hesitates. “Hey, Zuzu, could
“Maybe when you’re older…” the green-haired boy’s head drops forward into both his hands as Mashi cheers, taking that as a yes, because why not? This meeting was already a disaster.

“I think…” Shinsou suddenly speaks up and both Mashi and Izuku turn to look at him. His lips pinch shut at the sudden attention, eyes widening marginally, before he clears his throat and schools his expression. “I think it’s fine to do things both to better yourself and out of spite.”

“Or just because you want to…” the quiet voice is just loud enough for them to hear and they glance back at Inazumi. He’s given up on his manga and set it down, watching them with a tired but familiar bored expression.

Izuku, after the initial surprise of hearing the boy speak again, nods slowly and ducks his head in shame. He was right. People did things for all kinds of reasons, or maybe they had the same reason, but different ways of practicing it. Izuku was realizing that quickly, especially with these two new additions to his group, and he felt terrible for assuming his own way was the only right way.

That didn’t solve anything. That didn’t better the world.

His whole goal in life was for people of all kinds to understand and respect each other, to work together despite their differences, but he had only been looking at the physical differences, and that was no good.

“You’re right,” he replies, running a hand through his loose hair, “You should do this for whatever reason you like, but… our goal is still the same!” Izuku stands up straight and raises his robotic hand to clench it into a fist, a strong look in his eye. “We’re here to better ourselves and get ready for the world.”

“Ready for the world?” Mashi repeats, one brow arched, before she smirks and sticks her chin up high. “PSH! The world should be ready for US!”

Izuku snorts at her but nods. “Yeah, that works too,” he agrees before addressing his entire audience of three, a bit more confident in himself now. “Now, the way society is built we were all born with a disadvantage. Everyone is expected to succeed naturally, rather than work hard. Well, we’re going to work hard, and we’re going to help each other, and we’re going to show the world never to look down on us again!”

“FUCK YEAH!” Mashi cheers, leaping off the desk, and throwing both her fists in the air.

“Woo,” Shinsou waves his pointer finger in the air sarcastically before leaning both arms on the desk and looking up at Izuku with a slightly suspicious expression, “All this is great wishful thinking, but how exactly are we planning on doing any of it?”

“Oh!” Izuku straightens up and his eyes immediately begin to sparkle, a smile growing on his face. “You’re right, not much save for some planning can really be done here, which is why we have another location that will serve our purposes much better!”

“Right…” Inazumi begins slowly, scratching at his cheek as he thinks back to something, “You did mention last week we’d mostly be here to plan and do homework…”

“If we work together we can finish that here more quickly, and then we can get down to the serious stuff,” Izuku agrees, remembering talking about that with the other quirkless boy.

“So… where exactly is this other spot?” Shinsou questions, eyes thinning dubiously.
A ding inside Izuku’s head alerts him to a new message in his chatroom and for a split second he pulls it up. He had been simultaneously messaging with Katsuki this entire time, the conversation reading:

_TheMightyTitan_: Hey, Kacchan, you remember that club Mashi and I were trying to start?

_KingKill_: The club for unfortunate nerds? Yeah, what about it??

_TheMightyTitan_: We finally got our fourth member and wanted to bring them by the clubhouse today. You going to be there?

_KingKill_: When the fuck am I NOT here??

_KingKill_: Of course I’m going to be there!!

_KingKill_: Why? What the fuck do you want??

_TheMightyTitan_: Well…

_KingKill_: Is it something stupid???

_TheMightyTitan_: How do you feel about being in charge of showing the newbies around?

_KingKill_: Is scaring the shit out of them an option?

_TheMightyTitan_: Nothing too graphic.

_KingKill_: I’m fucking in

Izuku smiles at the most recent message and turns to Mashi, nodding. She grins back at him, a knowing look in her eyes, then turns to their two, new friends.

“We are so fucking glad you asked!”

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When they had first posed the suggestion of bringing the CUT to the clubhouse Katsuki had not been pleased. He had yelled about how this was no one else’s space but theirs, had been furious at the thought of opening it up to strangers, but Mashi had been the one to talk him down.

This had begun as a clubhouse, and they were definitely the founders, but it was quickly turning more and more into a headquarters instead. This was where they worked and prepared for the future, and where they were safe from the judgmental eyes of the world and its views. Yes, they had started it, but its purpose was so much bigger than just them.

Plus, it was a huge building, and they hardly even used half of the space already fixed up for them. There would be plenty of room for two more kids.

Eventually Katsuki had conceded, and they’d managed to get him fully out of his grouchy mood by watching a movie of his choice. There would be plenty of time for him to get used to the idea of allowing some new people into their clubhouse/headquarters.

Now that it was actually time to bring their two new friends to the clubhouse, despite Katsuki’s agreement, Izuku couldn’t help but be nervous.

When the CUT had first entered through the cloaking shield they hadn’t been given much time to
admire it before Katsuki was in their faces, letting out a series of loud, colorful explosions. Shinsou freezes up, eyes wide, Inazumi shrieks, Mashi falls backwards, and Izuku smacks a palm to his face. Well, Katsuki certainly was living up to the “scaring the shit out of them.”

“Wellcome to hell, assholes!!” Katsuki roars, a wild grin on his face, hands up as he lets off a few more colorful explosions thanks to his Rainbow Rockets.

“You bitch!” Mashi roars, suddenly in his face and swinging at him. The blond lurches back, avoiding the strike, grin turned sneer, and the two begin throwing strikes and explosions at each other, screaming insults.

While they work out their issues Izuku turns to Shinsou and Inazumi, a sheepish smile on his face. “Uh… right, so welcome to the clubhouse! It is entirely cloaked and hidden from the outside world thanks to my EAARDs. No one can see or hear us while within the dome, and…” Izuku turns towards his loud, arguing friends. They weren’t yelling insults anymore and were instead on the ground, grappling and screaming nonsense. “That is my oldest friend, Kacchan.”

“He’s a dick…” Inazumi mumbles irritably, trying to recover from the scare, while Shinsou looks between the fighting kids and Izuku, his grip on his bike handles that he had been walking with since the school tightening.

“Your friends are…” the purple-haired boy begins but fades off, face pinching as he tries to think of an appropriate way of describing the two.


“Colorful?” the tall boy offers with an unknowing scowl. Apparently he was going the friendlier route.

“Bat crap crazy?” Inazumi offers instead, obviously NOT going the friendlier route.

Izuku eventually manages to break the two apart, yanking Mashi away with the superior strength in his robotic arm, knowing she was volatile, but wouldn’t instinctively attack him like Katsuki would. Shinsou and Inazumi watch on, unimpressed and mildly concerned.

Once everyone has calmed down Izuku and Mashi give Katsuki the reins, letting him show their newcomers around, following and adding on tidbits of information as they go, like the purpose of all the plants outside or some of the details about the EAARDs.

Shinsou and Inazumi, now that the fighting is over, look around them with varying degrees of wonder. Shinsou mostly looks normal, walking with his hands in his pockets, his bike set back against the wall, but his eyes are wide and flicking around quickly, taking in the environment. Inazumi was a bit more open with his shock and amazement, but not by much, his head up and turning back and forth at everything.

“You… seriously built all this?” the tiny boy questions as they reach the front door, looking back at Izuku, his brows raised. Shinsou looks back as well and Katsuki, up front, crosses his arms and waits grumpily for the attention to come back to him.

“Uh… y-yeah, I did,” Izuku says sheepishly, ducking his head and blushing a little, one hand playing with a strand of hair dangling in his face.

“And your arm…” Shinsou says, tone careful. He looked anxious and hesitant, but it was obvious curiosity was getting the better of him. “You built that, too, didn’t you?”
“And his eye!” Mashi exclaims, grinning as she throws an arm around Izuku’s shoulders and pulls him close, “And his spine!! Isn’t he just the coolest?!”

“Mashi…” Izuku whines quietly, blush growing as the embarrassment grows. Yes, they knew about his arm and his eye, now, but that didn’t mean he wanted to brag about it or anything. And honestly, despite them being part of their club, he didn’t know how they felt about disabilities like his, or how they treated them.

“That… is pretty cool,” Izuku looks up in surprise, catching Shinsou’s impressed, purple eyes. The tall boy startles at the eye contact but quickly is back to his neutral expression.

“The coding for something like that must be extensive…” Inazumi whispers, looking down at his feet, a hand at his chin.

“I could get you a copy of some of it… I-if you wanted to look at it,” Izuku offers hesitantly, now looking to the small boy, nerves fraying more and more when blue eyes look up at him, wide and surprised.

“Really?” Inazumi questions and Izuku, after a moment, nods. They stare for a second, silent and uncertain where to bring the conversation now, before slowly a small, thin smile grows on Inazumi’s face. He hadn’t smiled in a while, not since PE, and it felt like an invisible weight was suddenly lifted.

“Fuck, you’re another nerd?!” Katsuki cuts in, arms still crossed as he’s suddenly leaning into Inazumi’s space. The white-haired boy’s shoulders stiffen and he leans away, eyes widening in surprise as the angry blond stares him down.

“He likes coding,” Izuku cuts in the second he sees Inazumi go into panic mode, the white-haired boy shutting down and ducking his head. Katsuki looks to him, eyes narrowed, then back to the silent boy. He must notice the tense air, the way everyone has seized up, ready to spring to action if necessary, and he slowly, slowly leans away. He gives Inazumi a look, then glances over at Izuku, saying with his eyes that he wants answers later, before he turns away with a scoff.

“Whatsoever. Just don’t get obnoxious,” the blond growls and pushes open the front doors.

Izuku and Mashi exchange a look and release their held breathes. That could have gone a lot worse, but it still wasn’t perfect. They glance over to Inazumi, who has fallen completely silent as they move into the building, and the redhead quickly shuffles over to his side, not saying a word, just letting him lean towards her space as they walk.

Izuku can’t help but smile at them, as Mashi continues to stand strong for their new friend, and they continue on with the tour. The entry room is still pretty devoid of furniture, but they’ve cleaned it up a lot more.

“We’re thinkin’ of painting it!” Mashi exclaims and Katsuki, who had been in the middle of talking, glares at her.

“We aren’t painting the damn room, it looks fine!” he snaps and Mashi hums in disagreement.

“I dunno! I think it could be better! White is so booooooring!”

“It is a little bland,” Izuku agrees absently, also looking up and around them at all the blank walls and columns. “But it’s really not our number one priority right now.” Mashi pouts at that, shoulders slumping, then growls when she spots Katsuki flipping her off with a smirk on his face.
Before they can begin fighting again Shinsou is taking a step forward and asking, “What do you even do here?”

“Preparing to fucking wreck the hero scene!” Katsuki announces loudly, grinning widely and flexing his hands.

“If you want!” Izuku adds on quickly. Yes, they were using the clubhouse to prepare for becoming heroes, but he had no idea what Shinsou and Inazumi wanted to do with their lives.

Katsuki glares at Izuku before scoffing and placing his hands on his hips. “Fucking fine!” he looks between Shinsou and Inazumi, his glare intense and irritable, “Preparing for whatever the fuck you wanna do, I fucking guess.”

“I have a worktable back home, but here I have a lot of room to work on a huge variety of inventions,” the green-haired boy offers, stepping through the group to join Katsuki at the front, “Including a lot of stuff for Kacchan and Mashi. He’s actually wearing an old invention right now!”

Katsuki had been grumbling angrily about the tour being taken over, but the second Izuku looks to him and gives him the opportunity to show off, he’s back to grinning and raising his hands. “My quirk is pretty fucking badass on it’s own, but with these I can out-style anybody! My Rainbow Rockets!” he exclaims, letting off a series of colorful explosions, much like as he’d done when he’d greeted them.

“I call them his Gay Guns!” Mashi yells over the explosions and he swings on her, regular explosions going off in his palms while she cackles. He opens his mouth to begin screaming but Izuku suddenly lurches in front of him, cutting off his view from the redhead.

“ANYWAY!” he exclaims, voice cracking and mildly panicky. He notices that Inazumi has lowered his head and his shoulders are shaking, but when he spots Mashi’s grin he realizes the small boy was actually laughing under his breath. Good, that was good. Inazumi was relaxing again, despite all the yelling and explosions.

Izuks turns his smiling face towards Shinsou now, hoping to see a similar reaction, that the other boy was relaxing and finding the teasing funny, but Izuku’s good mood quickly plummets.

Shinsou didn’t look happy at all. He didn’t look angry or sad either, though. He just looked lost, his head down a little, staring at the floor with a confused, baffled expression. Izuku was beginning to feel his anxiety build quickly as he steps towards the taller boy and everyone’s attention turns to them.

“You said… you’re working on becoming heroes?” Shinsou questions quietly. He can’t seem to decide on what to look at, everyone’s eyes on him, but when Izuku begins to speak the frantic, purple eyes focus on him.

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so close.

“I thought… You guys were just talking about leadership training, or something. I didn’t realize you were aiming to be heroes,” he says quietly. Izuku bites his lip and looks back frantically at Mashi, who shrugs, uncertain what to do herself.

“You don’t have to do what we’re doing but… If this is too intense…” Izuku turns back to Shinsou, trying to figure out the best course of action. “You don’t… have to be in our club anymore…” The desire to see the purple-haired, tired boy succeed was still strong in Izuku’s heart, but hero work couldn’t be for everyone.

But then Shinsou is looking up again, an intense look in his eyes that makes Izuku jump, his hands clasped into fists at his sides. “My entire life I always wanted to become a hero, but no one thought I could with a quirk like mine.”

Izuku’s eyes widen at the admittance, standing up straighter. Wait… Shinsou wanted to be a hero too?

“Heroes always inspired me. I never really knew WHY I was drawn to them, but I just… was. All my life,” Shinsou continues, a quiet flame building behind his eyes.

“The whole point of CUT, and this place, is to get ready for our dreams!” Mashi calls over, her emerald eyes gleaming. “And you wanna be a hero just like us?! Hot damn!! We’re gonna be the most badass hero team EVER!”

Izuku grins and nods at that, but he doesn’t take his eyes off Shinsou, watching as the boy straightens up even further, the flame growing. “Shinsou-kun… I think this very well might be fate,” the genius says, grinning even wider, and the taller boy snorts a little in good humor. Slowly, a small smirk grows on his face and he nods down to Izuku.

“I guess it is,” he replies quietly. He looked excited, but also very tired, like this kind of energy was foreign to him and he wasn’t sure how to manage it.

“Man, I just wanna be a programmer,” Inazumi suddenly comments once everyone falls silent and Izuku snorts in surprise, turning around and smiling at the smaller boy. Katsuki is giving the boy an odd, slightly unimpressed look, while Mashi grins a bit more nervously.

“Aaaaand… we will support that too!” the redhead says, trying to keep up the energy as best she can.

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The energy does, in fact, stay with them. They tour through the fixed up areas of the building, showing off Mashi’s room filled with her old timey memorabilia and her massive pile of blankets and pillows where she relaxes. Katsuki won’t let them see his room and Izuku isn’t at all surprised. Katsuki was a relatively private boy, after all.

The workshops are a big hit, making both Shinsou and Inazumi stare in wonder. The biggest room is filled with what look like robotic animals scattered all over the place. Izuku explains they all will have some purpose controlled by a specific AI, each named after a Greek god or goddess, and will help him in his hero work.

After the tour is done they let Shinsou and Inazumi pick out empty rooms for themselves, which seems to get them excited. Inazumi picks a room far down the hall, away from everyone, and immediately begins talking about filling it with his computers, his video games, and his anime stuff,
which makes Katsuki sneer and say, “Uhg, he’s a nerd AND a weeb?”

“I know, right?” Mashi whispers back at him and Inazumi shoots them both an icy glare.

“It’s called style,” the boy snaps, sticking his nose high in the air.

“Are you super sure about that?” Shinsou replies dryly and Inazumi makes an offended noise that doesn’t sound like it should come from a human being, making everyone giggle.

Inazumi shoos them away angrily so he can get back to planning his room and Mashi and Katsuki decide to head outside and spar. They’d been doing that a lot lately after Nemuri had suggested it. They both needed to work on their techniques since they weren’t getting the in depth training Izuku was from Aizawa, and since they always wanted to fight each other anyway, why not do it in an actually helpful form?

Often times it still ended up turning into a brawl, though…

Izuku goes off on his own to one of his smaller workshops while Shinsou looks for where he wants to put his room. This workshop is a bit more private, a curtain put up in the doorway since they still hadn’t gotten any doors for the interior of the building. Katsuki had used a curtain for his own room, which was where Izuku had gotten the idea.

Inside it is littered with parts and half built arms, eyes, and spines. This was where he worked specifically on the parts that connected to himself. He had all kinds of ideas and varieties for everything, mostly his arm, but working on these things was… intimate. He didn’t want other people seeing this, or being part of the building process.

He didn’t know how to exactly explain it, but by keeping this to himself it felt like he was taking back some of his control of the situation. Even with robotic replacements… he still didn’t have an arm, or an eye, and his spine was still jacked up. Yes, he could function again, but actual parts of himself had been ripped away from him. He had been fighting to retake control for years now, and he still struggled. He struggled every time his back began to ache, or a thunderstorm made him stiffen, or the phantom pains made him cry.

Yes, Katsuki helped him plan, Mashi helped him install, but the building? This was all his, and his alone. It was great having support from the people he loved, but this was HIM taking back his own control, on his own.

Izuku looks down at his humanoid, robotic arm. He was sure he would still need it one day if he ever wanted to go incognito, but… Now it was time to be himself. He couldn’t control how people saw him, but he could control how he reacted, and he was going to show them that yes, he was broken, but he was not destroyed.

He removes the humanoid arm and lays it in a cushioned, specialized drawer just for it, sliding it closed with a vacuum hiss, and then opens another and removes his usual arm, the shiny, silver-blue metallic Hera gleaming back at him, hiding black cords and all kinds of features.

For a second he allows himself to admire his work. He was proud of what he had accomplished, and now it was time to show it off.

“Whoa,” the voice startles Izuku as he was about to attach the arm and he swings around. His eyes are wide and wild, hair everywhere, and Shinsou, who is standing there in the doorframe, startles backwards, his own eyes widening. His mouth opens and closes for a while, not sure what to say in the suddenly tense atmosphere. “Uh… I was… I was just going to ask something, but… I-I can
“I-it’s fine…” Izuku mumbles and falls back into a chair. He was exhausted, he realizes. After the school day, the bully, worrying about the club meeting, and now worrying that everyone was happy and getting along it seemed he was finally crashing with this unexpected situation. “This is just kind of… a private workshop.”

“I’ll… wait outside, then,” Shinsou finally decides on, voice falling quiet as he backs out, looking anywhere but at Izuku.

When he’s alone again Izuku lets out a long breath and finally attaches the arm, feeling relieved at the familiar feel as he goes through the process of checking all it’s movements and functions. He takes his time as he also switches out eyes, using a hanging mirror as he inserts the eye that has more functions, but that definitely looks more robotic.

When he steps back out into the hall he frowns when he sees Shinsou standing, leaning against the wall, looking blankly ahead. Before Izuku can say anything, however, the other boy is saying, “Maybe I shouldn’t be here,” and Izuku’s stomach drops.

“W-What?! Because you saw my workshop?!” He questions and Shinsou shakes his head, lips pinching together, a stormy look on his face. Izuku wants to press for answers but he’s reminded suddenly of Aizawa, and how he gathers his thoughts before he speaks, or Mashi and how she has issues with her words and needs time sometimes. Maybe Shinsou just needed a second?

“I keep screwing it up, it feels like,” the purple-haired boy whispers, which has Izuku’s brows furrowing in confusion. Okay, he knew now to allow the boy time for his answers but… Screwing what up? “I usually don’t care too much about what people think of me or how I act. I’m a weirdo, I get it, but… I keep staring at your arm, or your scars, and I keep doing stupid stuff that makes you uncomfortable.”

“When did I say I was uncomfortable?” Izuku questions, brows lowering, and he moves to stand across from Shinsou in the hall, leaning slightly against the wall as well.

The other boy looks up at him. Now it’s his turn to look confused. “Aren’t you, though?” he questions and his eyes snap towards Izuku’s arm, before looking back at him, a guilty shine to his eyes, and just like that Izuku understands.

“You aren’t used to dealing with handicapped people, are you?” the boy says slowly, a small, gentle smile growing on his face, and Shinsou looks away, his ears turning pink and a hand coming up to lay on the back of his neck.

“I’m not used to dealing with people,” he admits quietly and Izuku can’t help but laugh a little. Yes, he thinks he understands that some.

So Shinsou was worried he was making Izuku upset. He thought he was doing some kind of reprehensible damage to Izuku by being inexperienced and curious. “Well, first, don’t assume anything,” Izuku begins, tilting his head, “Like whether I’m uncomfortable or not. Yeah, I don’t like my arm, face, or back being touched by new people, but that doesn’t mean I’m uncomfortable. Just… do what you’re doing now and talk to me.”

The taller boy looks up at him, brows rising marginally in surprise, and Izuku smiles back at him. “What about… right there?” he asks, motioning with his hand towards the closed, maroon curtains leading to Izuku’s private workshop.
“It’s not like you knew about that,” the genius shrugs, “And it’s not like it’s a secret that I don’t have an arm. Not anymore.” Shinsou doesn’t look convinced so Izuku shakes his head and tries again. “All I, and anyone else, ever wants is for people to respect me and treat me as a normal human being. I have boundaries and limitations just like everyone else, except most of society isn’t built to work with my particular limitations…” Izuku tilts his head and smiles, “And if you don’t know about a boundary just ask. I’d much prefer you asking me first instead of assuming anything and making something more difficult than it needs to be.”

For a long moment Shinsou is silent, staring down at his shoes, and Izuku waits. “What if I have a question about something? I don’t want to make things bad or make you upset…”

“That’s more than can be said than other people…” Izuku mumbles, remembering back in elementary school, or during his public volunteer experiments, some questions people would throw at him with little care for his feelings. “Questions are fine. This is a part of who I am…” Now it’s Izuku’s turn to look down as Shinsou looks up to watch him. “It took me a while, and I still have a lot of trouble, but I’m proud of who I am. I’m proud of what I’ve accomplished. Honestly, people asking me questions would be great, just don’t be invasive or rude.”

“How do I know if I am or not?” Shinsou asks and Izuku reaches up to adjust his curly hair a little bit.

“You might not,” Izuku admits. “Usually you will, common sense and all that, but it’s not like you can read minds and know what questions are okay or not until you ask them. Here’s the big difference though…”

Izuku looks up at Shinsou meaningfully, raising his flesh hand to point at him and he stiffens. “If you ask something that I don’t want to answer, I am going to tell you I don’t want to answer it. It’ll be awkward, especially the first few times, but if you’re being nice and accept that I don’t want to answer something than I’m happy and we can move on. It’s when people actually get rude and demand I answer something or say I’m being wimpy or just… don’t respect my answer not to answer… that’s where it’s a problem.”

“Do people… actually do that?” Shinsou questions, his brow furrowed and his expression looking slightly mortified under his tired eyes and Izuku can’t help but be a little grateful that this is Shinsou’s response.

“Oh yeah. One time someone was getting a little too interested in the… specifics of my accident and I asked them to stop. They ended up yelling that they were only asking, that we – Mashi was there too – were being rude for no reason, and that if I didn’t want to share anything than I should have just said so.”

“But… that’s what you did…?” Shinsou whispers, mortified look turning baffled and disbelieving. Izuku finds he quite liked the boy’s expressions. They were refreshing and a little silly when compared with his bored, tired look.

“Yep!” Izuku nods, mouth thinning in frustration at the memory.

Shinsou falls silent again, looking away as he considers all this new information. “I’ve never… had any friends before,” he admits eventually and Izuku stiffens. “I’ve never had any reason to give a shit about what people thought of me. I guess I just don’t want to screw it up…”

“You aren’t,” Izuku says immediately, taking a step forward and holding up a fist in front of his chest. “You’re doing great, Shinsou-kun! I promise!” he smiles brightly for a second, before his own shoulders slouch and he steps back again. “Honestly, I’m not very good at making friends either…”
All my close friends are the one’s who tend to take charge and be really brave and easygoing, I hardly had to do anything…”

“So we both suck at this…” Shinsou observes, his body slowly beginning to relax and Izuku huffs a small laugh.

“Yeah, I guess so,” he agrees with a nod.

“Well… so far I like you, Midoriya-kun” the purple-haired boy stands up from against the wall and Izuku huffs another, brighter laugh, smiling up at him.

“Well, so far I like you, too, Shinsou-kun!”

They have a moment where they say nothing, finally finding themselves at a kind of understanding, moving forward in their friendship, until it begins to get awkward and Izuku clears his throat. “So, what did you need to ask me?”

Shinsou blinks slowly, expression back to the bored, tired look, before he looks down the hall towards where everyone’s rooms are located. “Oh… yeah… I wanted to know what I could bring for my room.”

“Anything you want, really,” Izuku says and they both turn to walk down the hall, at ease, a calmness to their nerves. “What were you planning?”

“Nothing crazy, just a few things here and there…”

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For a while Izuku helps Shinsou plan out his room, looking over the space and mapping out everything in his eye. He offers to help out Inazumi as well, but the boy shoos him off, saying he’s got it all handled.

As they plan, it becomes abundantly clear Shinsou intends to really make this into his space, planning for a bed, clothes, a desk, and all kinds of other things Izuku wasn’t expecting.

“You know… we aren’t expecting you to move in or anything,” Izuku half-jokes at one point, but Shinsou doesn’t reply, just pauses for a second then gets back to planning. It’s concerning, but Izuku doesn’t think they’re close enough for him to begin prying into his personal life.

“Where’s the living room?” says someone behind Izuku and he turns around to see Inazumi in the doorway, arms crossed and looking impatient. When Izuku just stares at him he groans like this is a bigger issue than it really is. “Living room? Or break room? Or family room? Take your pick, where is it?”

“Uh… we don’t have one?” Izuku offers finally, voice getting higher at the end like it’s a question, and Inazumi looks absolutely insulted.

“Don’t have one? This place is huge! Look at all those empty rooms, and you honestly don’t have a living room?” he questions, scandalized and Izuku glances back at Shinsou, who shrugs at him, telling him this is his problem, not Shinsou’s.

“I guess not?” Izuku turns back to Inazumi. He hadn’t really thought of everything they could actually put into the clubhouse until now. Mostly he had been interested in getting the necessities finished, like having working plumbing and electricity, and getting his workshops running, but now that Inazumi was asking it probably wasn’t a bad idea to begin considering other rooms.
“You can make one, if you like, I wouldn’t mind,” Izuku continues, “And everyone can help, of course.” Inazumi gives him a side glare for a little while longer, weighing the option, before huffing daintily and turning around.

“I suppose I must,” he says, hurrying off at a speed that reveals just how excited he actually is to do this.

It has Izuku thinking, though, and he forgets he’s helping Shinsou plot out his room. A living room wasn’t a bad idea at all. A place where everyone could meet up, relax, play, eat. A kitchen would be a great addition as well, especially since Katsuki was such a good cook. This place was supposed to feel safe and homey, so adding these rooms could only help in the long run.

There were also plenty of additions they could add on to assist with their work, not just Izuku’s workshops. A gym, a firing range, testing rooms… It would take them a long, long while to actually do all of this… With more space to work Izuku could probably build more efficient robots than his Bendies to work on the clubhouse, but even then it would take a long time.

It was still a good plan, Izuku thought, and he makes a note of it in his built in computer. He had… a lot of notes and ideas. He really needed to organize those.

The calm of the moment doesn’t last much longer, Shinsou quietly working on his plans as Izuku considers an organization system, as suddenly he hears the front door being slammed open in the distance.

“GET OUT HERE, YOU NERDS!!” Izuku hears Katsuki scream.

“WE GOT A LITTLE PROJECT FOR YOU!!” Mashi yells next and, oh no, that can’t be good. The two of them were working together? Weren’t they sparring? What had happened there?

Slowly, after a glance between them, Izuku and Shinsou make their way out to the entry room, cautious but curious. Mashi and Katsuki are standing next to each other, looking wild and intense, Mashi grinning and Katsuki scowling. Nothing looks too out of the ordinary thus far…

“HEEEEEY!!” Mashi shrieks towards the doorway leading to the majority of the rooms in the clubhouse. “GHOST BOY, HURRY UP!!”

“Ghost boy?” Izuku questions, brows furrowing. She obviously meant Inazumi, but where had that nickname come from?

“’Cause he’s pale as shit,” Katsuki growls with an eye roll, like that was supposed to be obvious.

Before Izuku can ask any follow up questions there’s a stomping from the hall and Inazumi is storming out, looking furious and frazzled. “I was working, you loud savages! What do you want?!”

“Rite of passengers!” Mashi yells.

“Passage,” Katsuki snaps.

“Passage of passengers!” Mashi yells just as loudly as before.

“I actually hate you right now,” Katsuki turns his red glare on the girl, but she doesn’t flinch, fully aware of what she was doing to infuriate him.

“Noted!” she grins, not missing a beat, still focused on the three boys in front of them.

“Aaaaaaaanybut! You both have picked out a room, right?” Shinsou nods and Inazumi crosses his
arms, not responding, just waiting for them to get to the point already. “Well, now we got a little project for you!”

“We had to do this shit, so now you do, too,” Katsuki says angrily and turns and stomps back outside. Mashi is close behind, expecting them to follow.

“This is a waste of time,” Inazumi snarls as they walk after the two loudest members of the group. Shinsou shrugs, not seeming to really care what they were doing now. Not getting the response he wanted Inazumi snaps his head forward and down and begins grumbling to himself.

When they finally step outside Izuku lets out a surprised bark of laughter, the pieces finally coming together for him.

Five box planters are set on the ground, cleaned and fixed up, and the Haganehato cart has been filled with tons of new flowers and dragged onto the grass. Izuku isn’t sure when Mashi and Katsuki had planned to do this, or when they had executed their plan, but he was definitely impressed.

“When we first were able to work in the clubhouse we also planted toooooons of flowers and plants!” Mashi explains as Izuku comes over to inspect the cart of flowers, leaving Shinsou and Inazumi to stand together, very much confused.

“We noticed that,” Shinsou says, trying to be sarcastic, but too confused for it to fully come out right.

“Well, we all also got our own personal planters for our rooms and got ‘em all pretty and shit!” the redhead motions over the empty planters in front of them with a big flourish.

“NOW IT’S YOU NERDS’ TURNS!” Katsuki roars, right beside Mashi, making her jump in surprise, then turn and glare at him. He smirks right back at her.

“Why are there five out, then?” Inazumi questions, moving hesitantly closer, like he’s worried the planters will bite or something.

“We already did ours, yeah, but it’s a good bonding experience!” Mashi says as she lifts up a large bag of soil from the cart, luging it over to the five planters and dropping it in the middle, “And there’s a bunch of other planters that need flowers anyway.”

“Our challenge is agreeing on which flowers should go in all the other planters,” Izuku comments, scanning over all the little plastic cups of flowers with his robotic eye to read their names and meanings.

“Easy! Me and Firework over there already figured it out!” Mashi says, sliding over with a wide grin, and Izuku gives her a cautious expression. They had already decided? And AGREED? What on earth was happening? What alternate dimension was he suddenly in?

The redhead ignores her friend’s baffled look and picks up a big tray of a colorful assortment of flowers. “Chrysisissis! No, wait… Uh…” Mashi lifts up the tray to get a look at the labels on the flowers, brows furrowed. “Chryseesus? Chrysmasumum? Chrysthusmum? Christmas— I give up.”

“Chrysanthemum?” Izuku asks, a smile on his face at Mashi’s attempts, and the redhead nods.

“Yeah! That’s the one!”

“So you want us to… make our own flower planters?” Shinsou questions, walking over to the cart as well. He looks over all the flower options, brows raised in surprise.
“Didn’t we say that?” Katsuki snaps and Shinsou looks over at him with an unimpressed look, frowning a little deeper, before turning back to Izuku and Mashi. The green-haired boy smiles up at him apologetically for his explosive friend.

“This is so ridiculous!” Inazumi exclaims, standing by the five planters and glaring down at them like they had somehow offended him. “I didn’t come here to get dirty, I came here to get my brother off my back and to practice my coding in peace!”

Mashi lets out a harsh, frustrated breath, setting down the tray of chrysanthemums on the cart. “You’re just planting some flowers, chill!”

Izuku can see the argument mounting. Even with Mashi defending Inazumi and being by his side, it was clear that didn’t mean they suddenly would get along on a normal basis.

“Inazumi-kun!” he cuts in quickly, raising his hands towards the pale boy. “I have some spare lab coats inside you could borrow? And we have plenty of gloves, too!” Inazumi turns to him, his blue eyes still thinned in his frustration, but he relaxes a tiny bit while addressing Izuku.

“You want me to do this, too?” he questions and Izuku shrugs.

“Honestly? Yeah… They aren’t wrong, it’s a nice bonding experience, but nobody is going to make you do it if you don’t want to. RIGHT, Mashi?” Izuku looks to his side where the redhead is pouting angrily, arms crossed. When she realizes she’s being addressed she looks up, brows rising in surprise, before huffing and nodding.

“Yeah, yeah, we won’t make ya…” she grumbles.

“Good,” Inazumi snaps, “because I’m not doing it.” He turns with a snap and marches right back into the clubhouse, not allowing anyone to argue against his decision any further. Izuku frowns sadly at the boy’s prompt retreat, shoulders falling a little. He wanted Inazumi to be included and happy, but if he honestly didn’t want to do this than they would need to accept that.

“I like these,” Shinsou says and Izuku looks over to him, he had approached the cart so quietly, as he holds a few flowers in his arms. One of his choices is a pretty assortment of anemone flowers in multiple colors and the others are beautiful phlox flowers the deepest purple Izuku has ever seen.

“Oooooh!” Mashi leans towards him, looking over his choices with sparkling eyes.

“Great! Can we get fucking started already?!” Katsuki snarls as he marches over and picks up the chrysanthemums since Mashi wasn’t bringing them over. Izuku arches a brow as the blond storms back to the planters, thoughtful and amazed.

He wasn’t sure if Katsuki was in a good or bad mood. He was actively working alongside Mashi, he was volunteering to do activities he had previously been furious to do, and he was even eager to show off their clubhouse, if just so he could be in charge. Izuku had been so happy that things were going well with him, but now he was beginning to wonder. It felt so out of character now that maybe it wasn’t such a great thing? Perhaps something else was going on he couldn’t quite see.

Izuku knew Katsuki had issues when it came to being left out, that he got angry and insulted, taking almost everything more personally than they needed to be. Izuku didn’t blame him for that, he knew Katsuki didn’t actually mean to feel that way, didn’t WANT to feel that way, but he also knew that no one was truly to blame. Not Katsuki, not Izuku, not Mashi, not the CUT, not anyone. It was all usually just a big misunderstanding.

Izuku is suddenly being nudged roughly in his side and he looks to his left at Mashi, brows furrowed
in confusion. She’s looking back at him with an earnest expression, frowning lightly. “Stop worrying, he’s fine,” she says quietly, pulling him over by his arm to pick up some more of their flowers.

Izu’s brows rise in surprise, but really he shouldn’t be. Of course she was able to read what was bothering him. Of course she knew what was going on in his head and the things he was worried about. “How do you know?” he questions lowly, taking a tray for his own planter. Shinsou has since gone over to pick his own planter and is currently sitting on the ground and staring at it, uncertain how to begin.

“Well… he wasn’t earlier,” Mashi replies, pulling at her braid and releasing a few wild strands of hair. She bites her lip and glances back at their explosive friend, who is grumbling as he preps his own flowers and soil. “We came outside to spar and he was… extra angry? So we talked while we were fighting, he got some angry crying in, punched me in the ear, which HURT, and then I suggested we do something all together because… y’know… we’re all a team, now, whether he’s at school with us or not.”

“That was really amazing of you, Mashi,” Izuku whispers. He hadn’t noticed his two, closest friends bonding that much. What he had seen was them bickering, and yelling, and fighting, but evidently he had been missing something. Evidently they had connected at some point, even if they still argued, and Izuku had been completely unaware. He felt a little bad for not paying close enough attention, but it was short-lived for the flood of joy and pride in his friends.

“I actually suggested he be part of CUT, too, even though I really, really didn’t want to,” the redhead grumbles, glaring down at the flowers in her arms. “He turned it down, though. Said he didn’t want to be part of something for ‘nerds like us,’ which I think means he recognizes he isn’t ‘Unrecognized,’ or something.”

Izu glances back towards Katsuki, who is now yelling at a very irritated Shinsou for not doing something right, and they really should head over soon to make sure they don’t kill each other, but something in what Mashi had said makes him pause. He turns back to her.

“Why didn’t you want him to join…?” he asks, leaning in some to make sure their conversation stays private. He was just beginning to assume she and Katsuki had been bonding, so why wouldn’t she want him to join the CUT? Yes, Katsuki was right, he wasn’t Unrecognized, so he wouldn’t really fit into the purpose of the club, but why was Mashi so against it?

Honestly? I didn’t really want Purple-zawa to join, either,” the redhead mumbles and Izuku has to take a breath so he doesn’t laugh at Shinsou’s nickname. It seemed he wasn’t the only one that noticed the tall boy’s similarities to Izuku’s neighbor.

“Why not? He’s been mistreated by society, too,” Izuku replies gently, and Mashi looks away, obviously frustrated.

“Yeah, I know that, but… After everything people with quirks have put us through, it’s… it’s hard to… I don’t know, it’s just hard!” Mashi snarls, shaking her head, giving up on finding the right wording, and Izuku cringes in sympathy.

He couldn’t really blame her, could he? They were both quirkless, had both been treated terribly for it, and to suddenly be faced with the reality that the quirkless weren’t the only ones harmed by quirk society… It didn’t feel right. Not for any of them.

“The world isn’t as black and white as we’d like it to be…” Izuku says, looking down at the flowers, summing up what his friend was saying, nodding in agreement. Maybe, for this particular situation,
being handicapped had been an advantage for him. He had seen kids, with and without quirks, in that children’s ward all those years ago, all hurt and trying their hardest to recover and go back out into the world. They all knew, at such a young age, that it wouldn’t be the same, that they would be treated differently, and it had nothing to do with their quirks.

Izuku had already seen that society saw what it wanted, labeled as it pleased, and anyone could be a victim. Mashi didn’t have that. Not quite to the same level. She had only ever been quirkless, she hadn’t seen all those kids at the hospital, her only frame of reference was that people with quirks beat down those without.

“I’m trying, Zuzu,” the redhead suddenly says, voice cracking, and Izuku realizes there’s tears in her eyes. “I’m really trying to accept that… people with quirks get treated like shit too, because you’re accepting them, and you’re right about so much—“

“You shouldn’t do it for me, Mashi, you should do it for them and your own sanity,” Izuku cuts in and the redhead looks over at him, face wet and brows turned up in distress. She stares at him for a long moment before snorting and ducking her head.

“Yeah… you’re right…” she mumbles, “As always.” There’s a pause but it doesn’t feel like they’re done. “I like Purple-zawa…” she mumbles, “He’s awkward but he’s nice and he doesn’t judge us for not having quirks… I don’t like that people are mean for his quirk, a-and I want to want him in the CUT…”

“That’s all you can do,” Izuku says and the redhead sucks in a breath. “All you can do is try and work hard to be better. It’s not like we can just… flip a switch and forget years of abuse and prejudice.” Mashi lets out her breath and nods, head still bowed.

“Yeah…” she whispers and for a while she just stands there and breathes, trying to compose herself. When she finally seems to have calmed down and she rubs at her face with her shoulders, she turns to smile at Izuku, small but sincere. “Thanks, Zuzu… Now… Enough of the squishy feelings, please? Let’s go plant these flowers, already—“

She’s cut off when the front door to the clubhouse is slammed open, making them all jump and look around to see Inazumi standing there, wearing one of Izuku’s lab coats, frowning deeply at them all.

“Alright, alright! Nobody fret! I’m sure you all were very upset with my absence, but I have decided to join you and fill those big holes in your hearts,” he announces, sauntering down the porch steps and towards their group. On the last step the long lab coat catches under his shoe and he stumbles, arms flailing, but manages to catch himself at the last minute and stand back up straight.

Mashi deflates beside Izuku, grumbling irritably, and says, “You kill my heart, that’s what you do.” Inazumi shoots a glare over at her, but doesn’t offer any response, then glances back over at the planters. His brow furrows in confusion when his eyes fall on the pair currently trying to plant their flowers.

“What’s up with the explosion kid?” he questions and Mashi and Izuku look over to find Katsuki working on his planter, as they had last seen him, but now he is completely quiet, his eyes devoid of all emotion like a zombie. They all slowly look to Shinsou, who blankly stares back at them, blinking slowly and with no shame.

“He was very loud,” is all the purple-haired boy says and Mashi cackles loudly while Izuku lays his face into both of his palms.

“I’m certainly not complaining,” Inazumi huffs as he makes his way over to the cart of flowers, grabbing a couple of white roses and a large amount of lovely, blue hyacinths.
“Please release Kacchan, Shinsou-kun,” Izuku groans and Shinsou smirks a little bit at him, before conceding and releasing the blond boy. For a second it is silent, Katsuki sitting there, blinking wide-eyed, before he explodes, quite literally, and begins yelling at Shinsou.

“Don’t you fucking dare burn those flowers, Street Flare!” Mashi screams over at him, marching over with her own tray of chrysanthemums, leaving Izuku to exchange an exhausted look with Inazumi.

Despite all the yelling, and Shinsou’s smug little smirk, and Inazumi’s flaunting, Izuku can’t help but smile. This felt right, sitting down once they’ve mostly all calmed down, planting even more flowers for their clubhouse.

It felt like they were officially becoming a team.

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The flowers get planted and Mashi plays more music.

(“LET’S GET DOWN TO BUSINESS!” Mashi takes a big breath, “TO DEFEAT!” another big breath, “THE HUNS!”)

“Apparently she’s in a Disney mood,” Izuku mumbles after having listened to her sing along to at least six Disney songs on his Shoulder Speaker.

“DID THEY SEND ME DAUGHTERS!” Katsuki roars, voice cracking on his screams as he and Mashi belt out their favorite Disney song together. “WHEN I ASKED… FOR SOOOOOONS!!”

“Please let Shinsou shut them up now,” Inazumi growls, rubbing his temples, and Izuku tries really hard not to actually go with that idea.)

They all finish up with what they wanted to do at the clubhouse. Inazumi has a few pages of graph paper Izuku let him borrow with plans for his own room and a living room sketched on them. Shinsou mostly just has his plotted out in memory, though he also has Izuku’s helpful notes. Mashi got some more practice in working on her gunstaff, and Izuku and Katsuki worked together on a few more of Izuku’s large builds.

It was a full day, but as the sun began to set they decided it was time to go. Katsuki had to leave first and hurry off to catch a train home. Inazumi was next to leave. His home was in the complete opposite direction as anyone else’s and he wanted to leave before it got too dark.

In the end Izuku, Mashi, and Shinsou all walked home together as the last kids left. Shinsou’s bike tires click with every rotation as he walks with it by his side and Mashi yammers on about all kinds of nonsensical things. Izuku can’t help smiling as they go, listening with half an ear, a bit of sympathy for Shinsou as Mashi mostly focuses on their new friend. The tall boy looks a little anxious, leaning away from the loud redhead.

As they walk Izuku considers his previous thoughts on organizing his notes and plans. His super computer could manage a huge amount of data, WAY more than what Izuku was currently using. It needed to. With everything Izuku had planned for his eye and the computer built into his brain it would need to handle a lot of functions. That just meant Izuku would have even more he would need to figure out how to organize… but how?

He had a lot of systems he was planning on building, all being lead by some kind of AI, perhaps he should make another one? A personal assistant, of sorts, but what to call it, and what to make its job specifically? What would it focus on? What would it be required to think about and consider? All
were questions he would need to work out first.

“Earth to Zuzu,” Mashi cuts into his thoughts and he looks up to find they have stopped at a fork in the road. This was a familiar spot by now. This was where he and Mashi would split if they weren’t both heading to one of their homes. Izuku would continue straight and Mashi went right.

“Sorry,” he smiles sheepishly, looking between the knowingly smirking redhead and the curious but mostly tired Shinsou.

“Oh, I’m used to it,” Mashi shrugs, “But anyway! I’m off for home! Mama’s cookin’ tonight!” Now that sounded good. Haganehato Mottai was a whiz when it came to cooking meats and making them just the right texture with just the right juiciness and tenderness, but Izuku wouldn’t be joining them tonight. He had his plans to work on, after all. Plus, he preferred to plan these things ahead of time with his mother, unlike Mashi’s spur of the moment visits.

“You enjoy that, then,” Izuku smiles and Mashi grins back, yanking him into an expected, but still jarringly powerful hug. She luckily spares Shinsou, just giving him a strong smack to the back instead of a hug, and then she’s jogging off, braid swaying behind her like a tail.

“She’s really… energized, isn’t she?” Shinsou questions, rubbing his back where the girl had smacked him, scowling a little. Izuku shrugs and nods. What could he say? Shinsou was right, and it wasn’t like much else could be added that he didn’t already know.

They start walking again, both heading straight, the sound of Shinsou’s bike the only thing filling the silence that settles between them.

“You know… I could see if I could fix that… if you want,” Izuku says into the tense air. They still weren’t certain how to be around each other. When they had something to do, like planning Shinsou’s room or planting flowers, it had been easier, but this was just walking.

“My bike?” Shinsou questions to clarify, glancing down at the front, clicking wheel. It was an old thing, the color it once was long faded and chipped away. It was held together now just out of sheer stubborn energy. “There’s really no point,” he says with a shrug, looking forward again. “I’d be better off just getting a new one… if that could ever happen.”

Izuku stares at him for a long moment. There was a lot in that single statement, a lot that needed unpacking, but he wasn’t sure where to even begin. So he continues with what he knows. “I could still see what I could do. Maybe upgrade it some.”

The purple-haired boy turns to look at him, eyes sharp and considering. “You’d really do that? Why?”

“We’re friends now, aren’t we? Besides, I like helping people out!” Izuku offers up a big smile, “Makes me feel all nice and warm inside.”

Shinsou’s eyes stay on him for a while longer, silent as he thinks, and Izuku begins to sweat at the stare. This was nothing like their conversation in the hallway. Shinsou was guarded now, perhaps because the subject matter had more to do with him than anything. “You can take a look at it,” he finally concedes, looking back down at his bike, and the green-haired boy lets out a tense breath.

“Great! I promise I’ll be gentle!” Shinsou looks back at him, one brow arched, and a pink blush creeps onto Izuku’s cheeks. He clears his throat and looks away quickly. “That came out wrong.”

The taller boy hums in agreement, but from the corner of his eye Izuku sees a smirk grow on the other’s lips.
“Do you live nearby?” Izuku asks, looking around them at the buildings. There aren’t many apartment buildings in this particular area until they get to Izuku’s home, but perhaps Shinsou lived past that? Or he might split off soon like Mashi had.

“You want to take a look now?” Shinsou questions, one brow arching as he gives Izuku a baffled look. The boy just shrugs. Why not? There was plenty of time for him and a bike fix really shouldn’t be too hard, so long as he wasn’t taking Shinsou too far off his path.

The purple-haired boy sighs deeply, realizing all he was getting was a shrug from Izuku, and looks ahead of them down the street. He looked frustrated for some reason, and Izuku wasn’t sure why. “I live a few blocks down this way,” he explains, then proceeds to give Izuku the directions to his home from where they are. So he was past Izuku’s apartment, and not too far away either. They were hardly neighbors, but out of everyone in their group they were definitely the closest.

Izuku explains where he lives, and how they’re getting nearer, and Shinsou takes a few beats to think about that, before his back straightens. “I could stick around while you look over my bike, then. Then I don’t have to come and get it later,” he suggests.

The green-haired boy begins to nod, thinking the idea is reasonable, and it would give them a chance to get to interact more, but then something in the back of his head begins making noise. Warning bells, but not for his own safety.

Pieces of a puzzle begin to piece together, pieces he has only gathered today in the short time he has known Shinsou Hitoshi, but they are beginning to make a lot of sense.

Izuku stops walking and Shinsou does too, looking down at him with a confused curve to his brow. The quirkless boy stares back, a thoughtful, and slightly concerned look to his eyes.

“Shinsou-kun… is everything okay at your home?” Izuku asks slowly, voice careful and not at all combative. He didn’t want to start any arguments, but he wasn’t sure if he was pushing the boundaries of their not-even-one-day-old friendship.

When the purple-haired boy stiffens Izuku begins fretting, rambling quickly, “I-it’s just, you seemed pretty eager to come to my house instead of heading to your own, which was fine, but you also were pretty set on making your room at the clubhouse like a bedroom and you were quiet when I joked about it and I really don’t want to pry but I’m worried, I’m a worrier, it’s what I do and—"

“Midoriya…” Shinsou cuts in suddenly, his head ducked, and the smaller boy chews his lip but falls silent. Right, Shinsou was the kind of person that needed time to consider his answers. “There’s nothing wrong back at my house…” he begins and Izuku is about to let out a breath, planning how to apologize for assuming when he had told Shinsou not to assume anything about Izuku, but then the taller boy continues. “Because there’s nothing at all back at my house. My parents don’t really… care what I’m doing. They just feed me, make sure I have a roof over my head, and do everything parents are required to do by law and that’s it. I don’t…” Shinsou hesitates and the look on his face looks like he’s physically hurt by what he’s trying to say. “I don’t even think they ever really wanted me…”

Izuku stiffens, a heavy lump forming in his throat and his eyes widen. He had been worried something was wrong back home for Shinsou, but he hadn’t actually been prepared for what it might be. “I’m sure that isn’t true…” he whispers. It was a little tough to breath all of a sudden.

“One time I ran away from home. I was gone for three whole days. When I got back they hadn’t even realized I’d left,” Shinsou all but snarls, glaring down at the pavement with an anger Izuku has never witnessed before. An anger from hurt, from betrayal, from a child to their uncaring parents. It’s
so alien to him.

“I…” Izuku begins but stops the apology forming on his tongue. No, that wouldn’t help Shinsou at all. “I wasn’t expecting that…” he decides on lamely, his own head falling as tears begin burning at his eyes. What right did he have to cry? He wasn’t the one hurting, yet somehow, because Shinsou wasn’t, Izuku felt like maybe he should instead.

“You asked,” the purple-haired boy shrugs and now he just sounds tired and lonely and Izuku really, really hates it.

“I’ll help you move your bed into the clubhouse?” the smaller boy offers, half joking but honestly prepared to help out any way he can. It must be the right thing to say because Shinsou lets out a surprised, weak chuckle and Izuku looks up at him. He was eying Izuku oddly, like he was trying to figure out a puzzle.

“How about you just focus on the bike, first?” Shinsou says, voice quiet but a bit clearer. He seemed almost relieved they were quickly moving away from the subject of his home and his parents.

“Hey, now, I’m a great multi-tasker! I work on all kinds of projects at once. Moving a bed and fixing a bike at the same time would hardly be a challenge,” Izuku huffs, pouting a little bit and Shinsou smirks at him.

“Good to know,” is all he says, and it sounds like they should keep walking but Izuku is still glued to the spot, considering the purple-haired boy. Shinsou shifts from one foot to the other, head tilting in uncertainty.

“You can come over to my apartment whenever you want,” Izuku finally decides and Shinsou’s brows rise in surprise, not expecting that.

“What?” he questions, his hands on his bike’s handlebars tightening.

“Yes! Anytime you want. My mom won’t have an issue, I know it. If anything she may end up wanting to keep you,” Izuku continues and Shinsou’s ears turn pink, a hand coming up to rub at the back of his neck. “I’m serious. She has a habit of taking in people she thinks might need it.”

“Sounds fun,” Shinsou coughs, looking away, obviously not sure how to react to that information. Izuku smiles at him, finding the response to be pretty funny, before finally they turn to start walking again. “I’ll… consider it,” the taller boy laments after a while.

“That sounds fine,” Izuku agrees, smiling over at the other boy. “Did you still want to come over tonight? You could join us for dinner.”

“What are you having?” Shinsou questions, looking back at the smaller boy, who shrugs.

“I’m not actually sure. Mom didn’t tell me what she was making tonight,” he admits and an odd look passes over Shinsou’s face and he quickly looks away.

“Home cooking?” he whispers, half to himself, and Izuku’s brows furrow, before he realizes with a sympathetic pang that if Shinsou’s parents were really as uncaring as he said, they likely never made food for him at home. Home cooking was probably a rare, or even a foreign experience, and Izuku really hated that. He hated that Shinsou had to put up with this. He hated that any parent would ever treat their child this way.

“Yeah…” he whispers back, “Home cooking.”
Shinsou nods a few times and looks off to the side so Izuku can’t see his face. The taller boy takes a second to scrub at his face before he clears his throat and turns back to Izuku. “Sounds like a plan,” he finally agrees, voice carefully blank.

Izuku offers up a kind smile and he nods. He had been joking about his mother adopting Shinsou the second she saw him, but it was quickly becoming apparent she wasn’t going to have the chance, because Izuku was doing it for them. It seemed like both the Midoriya’s were eager to take in those in need, to look after people that lacked someone to look after them the way a family could.

“Yeah,” he breathes and Shinsou slowly smiles back at him, “Sounds like a plan.”
Hey y'all! Thanks for being patient with these recent updates! I've been crazy busy with school, work, and trying to get some more art out. I'm afraid I'm going to ask for more of your patience, however, because I have some major projects due soon and it may be a while before I can get to the next chapter.

Also! Fanart!!

Here by fingerspellingtopassthetime

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Inko was accustomed to her son returning home with one of his friends in tow. Usually it was Mashi, the redheaded girl charging into the apartment like it was her own home, and sometimes it was Katsuki, the two boys going back and forth over some idea or other. She suspected Izuku’s newest friend, some boy with near-white hair that Izuku had told her about, would be showing up eventually, but… this boy was none of the above.

Outside in the courtyard Inko watches as her son leads a tall, purple-haired boy in through a side hall. The new boy is looking around like a nervous animal, a bike at his side, which explains why they were coming in from the back. Izuku is talking animatedly to the new boy, motioning multiple times to the bike, and the new boy nods every now and again, but is mostly focused on taking in his surroundings.

When they move to the side, just out of Inko’s view, she finally jumps out of her surprise, and her chair, and rushes over. She opens the sliding door and steps out, looking around for her son and his new visitor, finding them by the wall between Aizawa and her own apartments.

They have placed the bike up against the wall and Izuku is crouched in front of it, just looking it over.

“What are you doing?” the boy asks him, standing behind him and watching.

“Taking measurements,” Izuku responds, not looking away, but bringing up his hand to tap at his temple right beside his robotic eye, and Inko realizes with a jolt that Izuku is wearing his normal robotic arm and eye. Why was he wearing those? Had he not been concerned with keeping on his realistic prosthetics?

Inko was baffled. Had something happened? Izuku was bringing home a new kid and he didn’t seem to concern himself with hiding his robotic parts. Inko was still curious, but now she mostly felt worried.

Standing around wasn’t going to do her any good, however.

“Izuku?” she calls and both boys’ heads flick up to look at her and something in her heart jerks at the startled, almost frightened look on the taller boy’s face. It could just be that the boy was skittish, but Inko couldn’t help but let it pull at her heartstrings.
“Hey, mom!” Izuku says, sitting up straighter, not yet standing up. He hesitates and bites his lip, glancing sideways at his friend, before smiling at his mother nervously. “This is one of my classmates, Shinsou Hitoshi. He joined our club! I thought, maybe, it’d be okay for him to hang out tonight?” Izuku bats his lashes at his mother and Inko can’t help but smile at him. She might be a little biased but her son really was adorable.

Now, as for the other boy…

Inko looks up at the purple-haired boy – Shinsou Hitoshi – and gives him a once over. He was tall, especially for his age, with deep bags under his eyes and arms and legs lanky and awkward. He must have hit puberty a little early and had a sudden growth spurt, at least Inko hoped so, otherwise the thin limbs… well, they could mean a lot of things, but Inko’s mind immediately went to the worst-case scenario. Add on no child should ever have bags under their eyes like that.

Inko realizes, when she sees the new boy begin to squirm, that she’s been silently staring too long, so she offers a kind smile. “It’s so good to hear you’ve found your last member!” she says, because it was good, and she was so proud.

Izuku immediately brightens and nods. “Yeah! We’re officially a club and we can get down to business!” he replies and Inko turns to smile at her son.

“That’s wonderful, sweetie,” she says softly, “I’m proud of you.” Izuku looks away sheepishly, fiddling with a strand of his hair, a small smile on his face. Inko giggles at him, before looking back at Shinsou, who has been completely silent. He’s looked away and Inko feels even more worried at how sad he looks. What was going on in that poor boy’s head?

“You’ll be staying for dinner, won’t you?” she asks Shinsou, and he looks up, surprised again, before he’s drawing in his face and carefully keeping it blank. “We need to put some meat on those bones,” Inko smiles up at him.

Shinsou glances over at Izuku, and the smaller boy smiles as well, nodding as if encouraging him, and then he looks back at Inko. “If it’s not too much trouble,” he says softly and Inko’s smile turns into a bright grin.

“No trouble at all! Do you like tonkatsu?”

Shinsou just nods, still looking skittish and out of place, but Inko had every intention now of making sure this lost boy felt comfortable and safe. “I’ll go add some more, than,” she says, reaching out to squeeze Shinsou’s arm, and she doesn’t miss the way he moves into the touch. It makes her heart hurt, her imagination making up scenarios that could cause this.

She lets go and looks to her son. She hadn’t forgotten him, nor the fact he was wearing his normal prosthetics in front of a newcomer, but he had seemed at ease, not distressed, so she would ask him about it later rather than now.

She gives the boys a final smile and good luck on whatever they could be working on, before heading back inside to prepare a little more dinner than she had previously planned.

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“Your mom is… nice,” Shinsou says softly, still staring at the now closed sliding doors where Midoriya Inko had retreated through.

“She’s pretty awesome,” Izuku agrees, back to observing the bike in front of him. He was reaching out, now, and physically looking over everything, trying to understand what might be causing any
issues. “I may just end up making you a new bike, at this rate,” he sighs, examining the damages.

“What?” Shinsou looks over, having forgotten what they had been doing previously, and quickly shakes his head out. “Oh,” he mumbles, his brain back on track, and he steps closer, hand on his neck, looking over Izuku’s shoulder at his bike. He didn’t mean to be so spacey, but so much had happened in the span of a single day, it was beginning to get hard to keep up.

Izuku looks back at him, brows furrowed, and Shinsou tries hard not to follow the way the scars on his left side pull with the movement. “Would that be an issue?”

“I won’t argue it,” the purple-haired boy shrugs noncommittally. Honestly, it sounded a bit better that way. It meant he could keep hold of this bike while Izuku did his work. And how could he argue against a brand new one?

“Alright. Let me get a few more measurements of this one to work off of,” the smaller boy says, turning back to the bike and scanning over it with his Eye doing heaven knows what.

“Yeah, no problem,” Shinsou mumbles, mostly to himself, then steps back to look around. The courtyard in the center of Izuku’s apartment complex was decently sized, if pretty bland. The grass was mostly dead, with a few trees along the edges, and… Shinsou’s squints his eyes when he sees what look like scorch marks in the center. Well, Izuku did mention he did experiments here as well, Shinsou just had no idea what those experiments might entail.

Shinsou wasn’t sure what to make of Izuku. The boy was smarter than any person he had ever heard of, and he was only twelve. Shinsou always thought that anyone with some kind of power in some kind of form, including intellect, would be cocky in some sense, like on television, or like Shinsou’s own experiences, but Izuku wasn’t. Perhaps it was the fact he had been through so much out of his control, but he was a humble and caring boy that Shinsou had not been prepared for.

His friends were loud and rude, but they weren’t mean, so Shinsou didn’t mind them, and now Izuku’s mother was being kind and offering Shinsou a homemade meal he had never had. It was all so alien and stressful, if he was being honest. He felt more exhausted than he usually did.

His thoughts are cut off by a pressure against his leg and he looks down, curious. What he finds is the last thing he had been expecting.

A fat, orange munchkin cat is rubbing against his shins and staring up at him with big, blue eyes. It doesn’t have a collar, but it couldn’t be a stray, it’s too clean, well fed, and eager to interact with him. And it might also be one of the cutest things he’s seen in a while.

His purple eyes widen and he crouches down, the cat not startling away, and holds his hand up for the little thing to smell. The cat hardly takes a second to sniff his fingers before it’s bumping its head against his palm, begging for pets.

“Oh my god,” he whispers to himself, watching as this blessing of an animal lets him rub over it.

“Looks like you met Pumpkin.” Shinsou looks up and over at Izuku, who is sitting cross-legged on the ground, with multiple other cats weaving around him, and Shinsou thinks maybe he’s gone to heaven. “It’s feeding time soon, so they all came out. Pumpkin, there, is easiest to pet because… well, he isn’t the brightest of the bunch…” Izuku explains and slowly Shinsou joins him sitting on the ground, letting Pumpkin flop ungracefully into his lap. A few of the other cats shimmy towards him, eyeing him uncertainly.

The purple-haired boy, in a bit of a daze at what is happening around him, reaches out his hand for
the other cats to sniff, staring wide-eyed at all the felines. This was not a turn he had been expecting
this visit to take.

“Whose are these?” he questions softly, although, from the looks of them, they appear to mostly be
strays.

“They’re nobodies,” Izuku replies and Shinsou nods. He was right, then. “They’re really friendly
with most people, Pumpkin especially.”

“Yeah… I noticed that,” Shinsou mumbles, looking back down at the tabby in his lap, who has
curled into a tight, little ball. “He must be owned by someone, right?” he questions, glancing back up
at the green-haired boy for a moment.

“No, no, he’s a stray too,” Izuku says, looking a little exasperated at Pumpkin, lips twisted. “He’s
just… hm…”

“He’s just really bad at it,” comes a new voice and Shinsou looks up. Izuku is looking back towards
the building, a big smile on his face, as a raggedy looking man in dark clothes, a long scarf, and
greasy hair comes walking towards them. Shinsou immediately sits up straight, eyes widening at the
sight, some stranger danger siren going off in his head.

“Nii-chan!” Izuku says brightly, throwing both his hands up in excited greeting, and the man has a
moment where he looks just the tiniest bit flustered before it’s gone and he’s giving Izuku a bored
look as he steps over to stand above him.

“Hey, kid,” the man grunts, leaning down to scratch at one of the cats’ head.

Shinsou stares between them with a slack jaw, purple eyes flicking back and forth and back again.
This man was Izuku’s sibling? He looked so different from Izuku though, so tired and downtrodden
and tired. Although, that was just the mood… Shinsou tilts his head, squinting a little as he observes
the two.

They… could be related? Maybe? They both had dark hair, though the man’s was closer to black,
and Izuku’s was a lot curlier, but it was similar enough.

The man seemed to be a lot older, so it was a little hard to tell if their facial structures were similar –
Izuku still had a lot of his baby fat – but Shinsou supposes he could see Izuku’s face eventually
thinning like the man’s…

“So you… have an older brother, Midoriya?” Shinsou finally asks when he realizes he hasn’t said
anything and Izuku and the man are in their own little world, talking about what sounds like training.
The man looks over, expression partially hidden by his hair and scarf, but definitely tired. Izuku
jumps, startled, before growing flustered.

“Oh! I guess I never mentioned… Well, uh, yes… and no? You see—”

“Yes. I’m his brother,” the man cuts in bluntly and Shinsou looks up at him. The tone was sharp and
simple and made Shinsou a little relieved. He liked it when people were straightforward like that; it
made things easier for him.

Izuku, however, seems to grow even more flustered, face turning pink, his hands frantically moving
around. “Yes! He is! Not by blood, though, so please don’t get confused…” the boy’s voice fades
off at the end pathetically, ducking his head and wiggling a pointer finger at one of the cat’s so they
bat at it.
“You’re not actually related…?” Shinsou questions, brows furrowed as he looks between the two. Now that he had looked for similarities between the two it was hard to miss. They looked like they could actually be related, but now he was being told they weren’t.

“Nope,” is all the man says before turning around and walking away. Shinsou blinks in surprise at the abrupt departure, but then watches as the man only goes over to the porch beside the Midoriya’s own and picks up a bag of cat food. The hoard of cats surrounding Shinsou and Izuku quickly rush over, meowing eagerly at the prospect of being fed.

Izuku laughs nervously, scratching at his head and adjusting some of his hair. “Yeah, he’s actually my next door neighbor… His name is Aizawa Shouta. We met years ago and he’s just kind of been part of my life ever since,” he explains, looking up at Shinsou through his hair, an apologetic smile on his face for the confusion.

The purple-haired boy doesn’t mind and he watches thoughtfully as the man – Aizawa – feeds the cats, patting any that allow him, still looking tired and bored, but more at peace amongst the felines. There was an air about him, too. Like he was dangerous, but too done with life to be an immediate threat, and Shinsou felt like maybe he could relate a little.

“He’s kind of… cool,” the taller boy finally observes and Izuku sits up straight, his eyes widening in surprise, before immediately morphing into glee.

“I know, right?” Izuku whispers, scooting forward so he can get closer to Shinsou, just about vibrating as he speaks. “Nobody ever sees that at first, but he’s one of the coolest people I know!”

Shinsou looks back to the boy in front of him, his tentative friend, and he realizes something. He’s hardly known Midoriya Izuku for a day, but he already feels like he’s one of the most trustworthy people Shinsou will ever meet. After everything he’d seen, and everything they’d said, his opinion of Izuku, while incomplete, was already pretty high, and if he thought that highly about Aizawa… that must mean this man deserved it.

“He actually knows self-defense,” Izuku is continuing, and he actually is bouncing now, which is oddly endearing. “He’s been teaching me since I was little! He—” Izuku cuts himself off, staring at the purple-haired boy in front of him in realization, and Shinsou isn’t sure what that means.

With a snap that startles Shinsou into nearly falling backwards, Izuku turns to look back towards the apartments, where Aizawa is putting away the bag of food. “Aizawa-nii!!” he calls and at first the tired man doesn’t respond, he just keeps doing what he’s doing. Izuku doesn’t seem to mind, just vibrating eagerly as he waits, and once the man is done with his clean up, he turns fully back to them, hands in his pockets.

“Hm?” is his only sign for Izuku to continue.

“This is Shinsou Hitoshi! He’s our final member for our club at school, and he wants to be a hero too! Could he join us in our training today?”

Aizawa’s eyes move slowly and suddenly Shinsou feels like he’s being pinned down by the remarkably sharp gaze. Gone was the relaxed, leisurely atmosphere he had while talking to his designated “little brother,” and now Shinsou felt like a criminal in a line up. Aizawa looks him over, silent and searching, and the tall boy, with every fiber of his courage and willpower, manages to sit up straight. He’s sweating like crazy, but he doesn’t flinch. He won’t. He’s hardly even processed what Izuku had asked of him, but Shinsou doesn’t want to be looked down on or turned away.

As quickly as the mood had changed, it morphs back, the heaviness lifting as the man shrugs. “Yeah,
sure,” he says casually, turning back to Izuku. “Did you get your running in already?”

Izuku falters and begins to splutter, saying he’d forgotten but agreeing to run double tomorrow when Aizawa just stares hard at him. As they speak Shinsou feels a fog setting in over his mind as he thinks, blocking them out.

Shinsou doesn’t fully know why he wants to earn this man-he-just-met’s respect, but he realizes, as he’s ushered back to standing for some self-defense training, that he does. He doesn’t know why he wants any of these people to think highly of him, he hardly knows any of them, but they’ve already shown him more kindness than anyone, including his own parents, ever have.

The fog doesn’t lift as he watches Aizawa put a hand on Izuku’s head to stop him from bouncing in excitement, if anything it begins to thicken, before they get started. He thinks he should be excited and thankful for being included, for Izuku even thinking to include him, but he’s suddenly very confused, tired, and emotionally exhausted.

It’s draining and he realizes, when he blinks and he’s in a stance he wasn’t in before, that it has just now, finally, caught up with him. Everything is weighing on his mind in ways he isn’t familiar with, mostly good, lovely things, but it’s too much. Too much to process. Too much to handle.

He makes notes in the back of his mind as he watches his body move on autopilot. Izuku is more advanced, but not much. Despite having been learning from Aizawa for years now, he only recently has been able to train to his fullest thanks to his prosthetics.

Aizawa is clear about what he wants, but he isn’t great at repeating himself. Shinsou, luckily, is able to pick up on the man’s way of speaking and ordering rather quickly. He taught in a way that spoke well to Shinsou, clear and concise, not allowing for many mistakes, and despite not fully being mentally present Shinsou is able to work with it. He isn’t cruel, but he isn’t scared to shove them off their feet when their stance is wrong, or thwack them where their blocks don’t cover, or even counter an attack that isn’t thrown properly.

Shinsou is covered in fresh bruises by the end, and he feels slightly grateful for that. They’re something he can focus on as he distantly tries to work out all these new emotions.

Midoriya Inko calls to them for dinner and Shinsou looks over as Izuku begins walking, muttering about something that he can’t hear. The purple-haired boy begins to follow as well, slumped forward, when a hand on his shoulder stops him.

He feels like what he assumes the people he hypnotizes feel like, like puppets or zombies, just following numbly.

He looks back at Aizawa, blinking up at him curiously as the man takes back his hand and puts both in his pockets. The man stares down at him, somehow both calculating and blank. Some part of Shinsou is aware that Izuku has stopped somewhere by his door and is looking back at them.

Nothing is said, Aizawa just keeps looking at him, before turning away and walking away a few paces. Some part of Shinsou tells him not to leave his spot, so he stands and waits, just staring as the exhausted man approaches some of the stray cats that have been watching them work out. A series of meows erupt upon his arrival and he bends down to pick up one of them before heading back.

In a blink Shinsou has an armful of an orange, fat cat that’s mewling for no apparent reason. He stares down at Pumpkin, surprise registering somewhere in his brain, before looking back up at Aizawa for an explanation.
The man shrugs. “Looked like you may need him,” is all he says before turning away and heading for the Midoriya’s apartment, Inko calling out one more time for them to come in to eat.

Izuku scurries back over, looking at Shinsou and Pumpkin, obvious worry in his eyes. “Are you okay?” he asks softly. He gives the taller boy a slightly closer look, trying to understand, while Shinsou gives a small, weak shrug, looking back down at the lumpy, purring cat in his arms.

“Cats help,” is all he can figure to answer and when he looks back up at Izuku he finds a thoughtful expression, which he’s seen on the boy’s face plenty already, but also something Shinsou wasn’t expecting. Understanding.

Shinsou doesn’t know what Izuku has been through, doesn’t know what the boy suffers from or has held onto all these years, but he suspects that he must be familiar with dissociating because of that look. Shinsou feels pity that anyone else has to deal with this. He’s grown up with it all his life, suddenly separating from reality, watching through his eyes like he’s watching a movie he can’t control. It comes on either without warning or when too much has happened, like today. He thinks he should probably be used to it by now, be more familiar with the warning signs, but he hasn’t. To a degree it feels nice. Like he’s taking a break or escaping something painful.

That doesn’t mean he wants other people to have to deal with it, and it’s clear Izuku must.

“Yeah, they do,” Izuku agrees, reaching out to scratch under Pumpkin’s chin. The cat moves to follow the scratches, but forgets he’s being held and nearly twists right out of the arms he’s splayed out in. Shinsou scrambles to catch him, getting a better grip on him, and Pumpkin now lays on his back in his arms, looking nonplussed.

The two boys stare at the cat, brows raised, before looking to each other. Izuku laughs first, a quiet, somber sound for the atmosphere, but it’s enough to get Shinsou smirking, his own shoulders shaking with his quiet laughter.

Yes, cats helped, but so did a good friend.

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Izuku’s muttering fills his bedroom as he writes and sketches over pages and pages of notebooks and graph paper. He, Shinsou, Aizawa, and Inko had all eaten dinner together, Shinsou not saying much unless prompted, but at least still speaking some, Pumpkin curled around his feet.

Izuku recognized, now, that the taller boy wasn’t entirely there, anymore. He wasn’t sure when the dissociating started, but Izuku knew it could come on quickly. Obviously, the ever-observant Aizawa had noticed first, and had helped the issue quickly and quietly, and now Shinsou lay back in Izuku’s bed, playing with Pumpkin while Izuku worked at his desk.

It had been a little awkward at first, the silence that set in around them, but once it became clear Shinsou didn’t mind and Izuku got to planning, it became a lot more peaceful. The silence, besides the genius boy’s muttering, didn’t have a heaviness to it now, and Izuku felt that was a step in the right direction.

“What are you doing?” The question catches Izuku off guard and he looks back, voice cutting off, eyes wide. Shinsou is still leaning back, but his eyes are more alert now, looking over at him thoughtfully. It takes a second for Izuku to actually figure out that he should be answering him, and when he does he clears his throat and looks back at everything he’s been jotting down.

“Oh, well… I had a few new ideas so I’m planning them out,” he says as he lifts up one of the graph
papers that has multiple sketches of robotic parts that probably mean nothing to most people. He still lifts it so Shinsou can see. “Science is a lot of plotting, planning, preparing, and writing,” he explains, then smiles a bit brighter, “In the wise words of Adam Savage, ‘The only difference between screwing around and science is writing it down.’”

Shinsou stares at him for a long moment and Izuku’s smile turns anxious when he receives no immediate response. Mashi and Katsuki knew that quote, he’d dragged them along plenty of times to watch reruns of Mythbusters, but maybe Shinsou hadn’t?

“Cool,” the purple-haired boy finally says, voice bland, and Izuku lets out a breath. “What are you planning, then?”

Izuku looks again at all his notes and the mess he’s made on his desk, a nervous chuckle escaping him. “Uh, well two things, actually. One is I’m trying to plot out some kind of AI that can help me with some of my stuff in my super computer. I need to be able to focus on certain things if I’m going to be a hero, so the assistance would be a big help. The other is a robot you inspired me to make, actually…”

“Me?” Shinsou’s brows raise in surprise and he sits up on the bed, Pumpkin rolling onto his lap, not caring in the slightest, just settling in where he lands and meowing for more pets.

“Uh… yeah, you…” the green-haired boy spins in his chair to fully face Shinsou, but he keeps his head down, hair falling into his face like a protective curtain. “It wasn’t anything big… Just, when you said ‘cats help,’ it gave me this idea of a robot cat that can go around with first-aid devices built into it. Help out people on the street with small injuries, or even help out rescues during hero work…”

“Like a little nurse,” Shinsou says with a small nod, looking thoughtful, and Izuku smiles up at him, happy he wasn’t uncomfortable at him taking inspiration from just a small, simple line.

“Yeah! A neko nurse!” he laughs and Shinsou smirks, wiggling his fingers at Pumpkin to grab at.

“You should call them that.”

“What? Neko Nurse?” Shinsou nods as way of answer and Izuku lifts up one of his pages of notes on this particular robot. It was a simple, cute name, but maybe that was exactly what it needed. This was something he wanted to have interacting with the public, having a name like Neko Nurse could help people like them and feel more comfortable. “Yeah… yeah! Neko Nurse! That’s perfect!” he was getting excited anew, bouncing slightly in his chair as he turns around to get back to work on his notes. He’ll realize later that he completely cut off his and Shinsou’s conversation and apologize profusely, but for now he was too wrapped up in his writing, Shinsou quietly watching and listening to his muttering.

They’ll continue like this for a while, Izuku isn’t sure how long, until he’ll yawn and realize how tired he is. When he turns back around, not certain what Shinsou may want to do now that it was getting late, he’ll find the boy sound asleep, Pumpkin curled up beside his neck, looking content.

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“This is remarkable!” Inazumi exclaims not for the first time.

He and Izuku sit at a long table against the wall in one of Izuku’s workshops, both of them working at their computers, Izuku at his homemade one, now with an All Might decal on the back, and Inazumi’s a shiny, rose gold.

The smaller boy is leaned in close to his screen, his blue eyes sparkling as he looks over some of the
coding Izuku had given him. It was a lot, and for a lot of different devices, but from the little Inazumi had looked over he was immediately impressed.

“You actually did all this all on your own?” the white-haired boy whispers in awe and Izuku looks over from his own work. He had some new code he was working on up on his screen. Only last night had Shinsou stayed over at his house –Izuku had been unable to will himself to wake him and had pulled out the futon for himself – but already he was working on possible programs for his AI systems.

“You actually did all this all on your own?” the white-haired boy whispers in awe and Izuku looks over from his own work. He had some new code he was working on up on his screen. Only last night had Shinsou stayed over at his house –Izuku had been unable to will himself to wake him and had pulled out the futon for himself – but already he was working on possible programs for his AI systems.

“Yeah, I did,” he replies honestly, looking over some of the codes Inazumi was currently looking over. “There was a lot of trial and error, though,” he admits. He didn’t want to make anyone think he was some kind of god when it came to his tech, like he could come up with anything with no issue, because he couldn’t. He failed all the time. That was how science worked. Failure was everywhere, it was what led to the solutions.

Inazumi snorts and sits back in his chair, arms crossed. “That’s coding in a nutshell,” he agrees, nodding, and Izuku smiles a little bit.

“Trial and error? Yeah, no kidding,” he chuckles in agreement.

“Google is a programmer’s best friend,” Inazumi huffs and Izuku snorts a little louder while the other boy smirks over at him, enjoying their jokes. It was so nice having someone around who understood these kinds of things with Izuku, even if it was just the coding aspect.

Before more can be said the loud booming of music echoes through the clubhouse’s halls and Inazumi scowls deeply. Izuku was accustomed to this by now, Mashi or even Katsuki playing loud music when they worked. It used to be when they were training, plotting out attack moves and maneuvers, but nowadays it also included Mashi practicing her gunstaff builds in her own, personalized workshop.

From the sound of the music Izuku immediately recognized it to be Mashi’s.

“When are you planning on getting doors in here?” Inazumi growls as the upbeat music plays, the redhead’s loud voice joining in with the singer’s occasionally. “You said the walls can be soundproof, but lot of help that does us without any doors!”

Izuku chuckles sheepishly and glances over at the empty doorframes. “Ah, well, I was hoping to hire a friend of mine to make those, actually. A sculptor named Hatsune Āto.” He occasionally still saw the woman when he was at the Haganehato scrapyard and she dropped by, but it was so rare now, and he really did love her sculptures, so he’d asked if she would be able to make some doors. She’d laughed, saying of course she could, and if Izuku let her make them a little extra artsy than she’d even give him a discount, but that she would still need payment.

“How? You’ve said that you’re poor as a brick,” Inazumi questions, apparently reading the issue at hand immediately.

“You’re not wrong…” Izuku sighs, turning back to his computer with a sad little frown. He clicks open his emails, which he could easily just pull up on his Eye, but he wants Inazumi to see. He opens a few choice messages and turns his computer towards the other boy, who leans closer to get a look. “I’ve been working really hard for a really long time now to get some licenses for Hera. Not many people have wanted to take me seriously, but with some help from some of my friends in the scientific community I’ve gotten a few people to listen, finally.”

Izuku had published a series of his discoveries over his lifetime, but he’d always gone under the
pseudonym Masamoto Isshin, which meant it was difficult to cite his works. With the help of the community and scientists that DID know about him and who he was, however, he had managed to get a few companies’ attentions, which led to communication, which led to research and legal works.

Now he was just waiting, and it was driving him up a wall.

“Whoa…” Inazumi breathes, leaning away, then arching a brow as he looks over Izuku. “You’re twelve and you’re already getting paid? Hot diggity Doolittle…”

“I’m not getting paid yet… They’re working out some legal stuff, doing some testing, seeing how everything can be applied…” Izuku explains, scratching at his head and pouting. It was a long, drawn out process, but it would be worth it in the end, he hoped. These were big companies, with all kinds of sponsors, so he hoped the percentage he would get would be worth all of this.

“Still…” Inazumi breathes, looking back and forth between their screens. He flinches when suddenly Mashi changes the song and ups the volume, scowling furiously before leaning back in his chair and yelling as loud as he can, “TURN THAT GARBAGE DOWN!!”

He certainly has a talent for reaching such a high volume, his shriek making Izuku’s ears ache from how close he is, and he chuckles nervously when he hears Mashi scream back, “NOW I KNOW YOU DID NOT JUST CALL MY QUEEN OF BACCHANAL GARBAGE!”

“NO ONE UNDERSTANDS WHAT THAT MEANS!” Katsuki’s voice rises from somewhere in the clubhouse, probably his room, sounding furious and the music is finally turned down just so he and Mashi can have a screaming match across the building.

Izuku groans, leaning his elbows against the desk, and his face in his hands. “Look what you did,” he groans towards Inazumi, who scowls and huffs.

“Not my fault we’re surrounded by a bunch of barbarians,” the boy scoffs, nose held high, and Izuku gives him a long, unimpressed look, the screaming continuing around him.

“Who’s a barbarian?”

Inazumi yelps and jumps out of his seat, swinging around to stare wide-eyed at the speaker. Shinsou had entered quietly and undetected by either of them. Izuku looks back at him, trying to cover up his own surprise with a bright smile in greeting. “Hi, Shinsou-kun, where have you been?”

Inazumi is grumbling under his breath, clutching his chest, as he slides slowly back into his chair and turns to his computer, trying to recover from his momentary freak out. Shinsou looks blankly at the back of the smaller boy’s head for a moment, then turns fully to Izuku.

“Outside. I practiced some of those moves your brother taught me, and I tended to some of the plants…” he says with a shrug. “Wasn’t really sure what to do, now.”

Izuku blinks in surprise, both grateful at Shinsou for helping with the exterior of the building, and confused by what he means about not knowing what to do, but then it hits him. The reason everyone was here was to practice and prepare for becoming heroes – as well as the best programmer the world had ever seen – but nothing was really set up for Shinsou to work on. Katsuki practiced his quirk outside, but Shinsou’s quirk, and subsequent practice, required a partner, and if everyone was busy what was he supposed to do? Sure, he had the option to train his self-defense, which would be really important, but there needed to be more for him… but what?

“I’m sorry Shinsou-kun! This place has been built for really specific stuff so far, it isn’t really set up for you, yet… It will be!” the boy quickly looks up at Shinsou, hands rising slightly. “It definitely
will be! I just… hadn’t realized that yet…”

“It’s fine,” the tall boy says, placing a hand on the back of his neck and looking around at the room they were in. It wasn’t Izuku’s largest workshop, but it still had a lot of inventions here and there. Izuku mostly used this room for computer work, though. It had a single window that got some of the best light. “I like just hanging out.”

Izuku chews his lip. True, this was meant to be a hang out spot, too, but he hated that Shinsou just didn’t have much to do…

“Midoriya, really, it’s fine,” Shinsou quickly cuts into his thoughts, staring at Izuku sharply, trying to stop the negative thoughts from forming in the smaller boy’s head.

“I could… develop your devices for your hero suit? And you could train with those,” the genius tries to offer, desperately thinking of what he could do. Maybe he could teach Shinsou how to build, too? Like he was teaching Mashi, but he wasn’t sure what he would teach the purple-haired boy what to build.

Shinsou shrugs, however, seeming flippant about the offer, and says, voice still firm, “You’ll get to that when you get to it. It’s not your job to make everybody happy.”

“But you—“

“Don’t have anything to do? Yeah, that happens with me everywhere. I was going to ask if I could just sit and listen,” Shinsou cuts him off and gestures over to a free chair over by another desk.

“Wouldn’t that be a bit boring?” Inazumi questions, finally joining the conversation, turning around in his chair to look at Shinsou with furrowed brows, but the other boy shakes his head.

“I like sitting around people. Being forced to talk or DO something is exhausting and annoying. I like just… listening.”

Izuku thinks back to the night before. Yes, Shinsou had been having issues with being fully present, but he still had seemed entirely content to just sit and listen to Izuku mutter and work. It wasn’t an alien feeling. Sometimes Izuku liked to just listen to Mashi or Hizashi or both yammer about something, maybe this was the same?

“Oh… y-yeah, sure, we don’t mind,” the genius stutters and Shinsou nods before going and pulling up the third chair to sit on the opposite side of Izuku.

“Hope you don’t mind TRASH MUSIC!” Inazumi screeches the last part, glaring again at the doorframe, timing his yell perfectly between Mashi’s and Katsuki’s.

“SOCA IS NOT TRASH MUSIC YOU DOUCHENOZZLE!”

“Oh dear…” Izuku mumbles as the screaming match turns to Inazumi and Mashi instead. It certainly doesn’t help that Shinsou is smirking through it all, apparently enjoying the chaos, while Izuku loses his mind.

“At least it’s not boring,” Shinsou mumbles and Izuku turns a dirty look on him.

“Please don’t encourage them…”
Hizashi’s eyes are intense, more intense than Aizawa has ever seen them. He stares, hard, over the top of his pink sunglasses, judging, measuring, planning. It’s amazing, the kind of concentration on his face, a bead of sweat slowly running down the side of his face.

Through all their careers, fighting villains of all varieties, weaving through tricky media and rowdy students, Aizawa doesn’t think he’s ever seen his friend this drawn up and tense, brain taking turns it has never made before.

He moves his Rook three places forward.

“Checkmate,” Izuku says blankly as he moves around the space Hizashi just made and sets up the perfect ambush on his King.

The blond yells into the air in anguish, falling backwards onto the ground, while Mashi lets out a string of obnoxious laughter, pointing at the miserable man on the floor of the Midoriya apartment.

It was a calm, Saturday evening, with Aizawa resting on the Midoriya’s couch, Nemuri and Inko chatting about some book they and Mitsuki had all been reading, Hizashi and Mashi talking animatedly together on the floor, and Izuku working on his computer on the couch beside Aizawa. It had been Mashi’s idea to pull out the plastic chess set, curious how good the genius in the room was when it came to the game.

“It’s not the same as building machines,” she had reasoned, and Izuku had actually agreed she had a point, and Aizawa found the look of surprise on the girl’s face momentarily humorous.

They had put the board on the coffee table, and Nemuri and Inko had turned a pair of kitchen table chairs around so they could sit closer and watch. Izuku sat on the floor between the couch and the table, while Mashi sat on the floor on the other side.

Izuku won almost immediately and Mashi had just slowly lain down on the ground with her face buried in the carpet while Hizashi patted her back sympathetically, grinning the whole time.

Surprisingly it was Nemuri who wanted to go next, and while she lasted a bit longer, she too was quickly defeated. It was clear that, yes, Izuku’s talents were different from chess, it didn’t change the fact he could think plenty of moves ahead in plenty of different scenarios.

Then it was Hizashi, and he’d tried his hardest, actually taking his time, and Aizawa was honestly impressed by his friend, but he was soon defeated as well.

“Zuzu is the undefeated champion!” Mashi yells, throwing her fists into the air, not at all showing the same sympathy to Hizashi that he had shown her. Izuku didn’t look too excited; actually he looked kind of bored.

“Can I go back to work, now?” he nearly whines.

“NO!” the redhead yells, and Aizawa really wishes she’d lower the volume. He’d left his POMs at his apartment by mistake… “Now Catman needs to try!” she points a dramatic finger at Aizawa, who stares blankly back at her.

“No.”

“Aw…” It says something about how much this kind of interaction has gone down that Mashi knows she won’t be able to convince Aizawa past this point.

He knows he’s a clever man, he has to be, but he also knows full well his limits and that there is no
way he’ll be able to beat Izuku. Looking at chess like it was actual battle, and applying real world strategies to it, wasn’t actually the most efficient method to work it out. People didn’t think like chess pieces moved, after all.

Izuku also seems relieved he doesn’t need to play anymore, moving back onto the couch so he can continuing working on some kind of code on his computer. Aizawa knew next to nothing about code, but he was pretty sure that was what that was, even if it wasn’t green text on a black background.

With Izuku out Hizashi and Mashi decide to play each other, which takes a lot longer and is infinitely more entertaining because halfway through they begin narrating their pieces’ lives. Aizawa doesn’t react to it, but he does keep his eyes open to watch some.

Nemuri decides to keep sitting there on the floor, watching the game, and Inko goes to get them all something to drink. The tea is served as it always is, Izuku gets a strawberry smoothie, and Aizawa gets decaf coffee for now so that he can keep resting. Once all the drinks have been handed out Inko takes a seat beside her son, who wordlessly scoots closer so she can play with his hair while he types.

It’s one of those evenings that Aizawa lives for, everyone at peace, not too crazy, and enjoying each other’s company. He gets to rest before going off to work, Hizashi gets to rest too, since his evening radio show will be soon, and Nemuri, who was always scheduled for longer shifts so more people could see her, could recover from the long day.

At some point the chess game ends and somehow Hizashi ends up pulling out some of his hair products from his messenger bag and shows Mashi how he styles his hair for hero work. This quickly evolves into Mashi styling back her own hair, with Hizashi and Nemuri’s help. She still had crazy, disobeying strands of hair, but now they’re all slicked backwards and held in place and it’s a surprisingly good look for her. Nemuri refuses to let them go near her hair.

“Oh, hey! Hizashi-san!” Izuku speaks up, looking up and seeing the scene. “That reminds me! I made something for you and your hero work. Actually… you all could use this,” the boy mumbles the last part and sets his computer down on the table before springing up and rushing to his room.

“Is it a laser? I’d love a laser!” Hizashi calls, grinning, a few strands of hair falling free since he hadn’t put full effort into styling it back for his demonstration.

“I want a laser too! After my motorcycle!” Mashi calls and Aizawa’s brows furrow, silently watching.

“Motorcycle? Izuku, what is she talking about?” Inko calls, asking the question that had been on Aizawa’s mind, and Izuku comes back looking a little irritable at his friend.

“I only said ‘maybe when you’re older,’ I never actually agreed to it,” he huffs. He’s carrying what looks like a spray can in his robotic hand.

“Motorcycle!” Mashi yells, not at all caring about the looks she was getting.

“Anyway…” Izuku sighs, deciding moving on was their best option, and he steps over to Hizashi and hands him the can. “I developed that for you.”

“OH IZUKU!” Hizashi crows excitedly, taking the can, and though he doesn’t know what it is, he certainly doesn’t care. He’s just excited to be getting a present. “What a LOVELY gesture!”

“Hey now, where’s my gift?” Nemuri pouts and Izuku glances over at her, but it’s Mashi who
“I-I’m sure he made you something! He must have! You deserve everything in the world and—”

“It can be for everyone,” Izuku cuts her off before she can embarrass herself, laying a hand on top of her spiky, frozen, yet somehow still soft hair. Aizawa knows it’s still soft from experience, since Hizashi STILL liked to stick his cockatoo hair in his face to get him to touch it.

Mashi deflates, happy Izuku had stopped her, but still very much embarrassed by her inability to speak to women she found pretty or cute, which was most women…

“What is it?” Hizashi asks, turning the can this way and that, but there’s no label on it.

“It’s a fireproofing spray specifically for hair,” Izuku replies and Hizashi’s head flicks up at him, eyes widening comically, and mouth falling open. “Y-yeah, uh… I noticed one time the brand you used to style your hair was actually pretty flammable…”

“VERY flammable,” Aizawa cuts in, voice blank, remembering the multiple times Hizashi had had to roll on the ground to put his hair out while on duty, or even one time needing another hero to stomp on his hair. That video had made it onto the internet, and then onto Aizawa’s phone. He still made gifs of it and sent it to his friend at random times to irritate him.

“Oh,” the green-haired boy blinks over at him, then turns back to Hizashi, saying, “Right, so I thought this would help, but anyone here could use it and…” He trails off when he sees Hizashi’s lip quivering and big tears forming in his eyes as he clutches the can close to his chest. “Um…”

The blond is springing forward too fast to follow and wrapping his arms around Izuku’s shoulders to hug him tight, rubbing his cheek against the top of the boy’s curls, crying big, probably real, tears as he exclaims, “YOU’RE THE BEST KID IN THE WOOOOOOORLD!”

Izuku looks surprised where his face is visible in Hizashi’s embrace and finally Aizawa stands and moves over, taking his friend by the back of his jacket, and dragging him off. “Alright, enough of that,” he says in exasperation while Izuku takes a big, relieved breath and fixes his mussed up hair.

“But Shoutaaaaaa! I wanna keep him!” Hizashi cries, still clutching the can close.

“If you think you can wrestle him away from Midoriya-chan, go for it,” Nemuri calls, a sly grin on her face, and everyone looks over at Inko, who is still sitting on the couch sipping her tea. All the woman does is smile back at them, just smile, but something about it is very out of place and Hizashi visibly shudders.

“NOPE! Sorry, not happening,” he quickly says, scooting away.

“Wise idea,” Inko says sweetly and this time everyone shudders. How could such a sweet woman be so terrifying?

“Right, so…” Hizashi shakily turns back to Izuku and tries to grin. “I wanna give this a shot!” he announces, the energy slowly coming back to the room and Aizawa moves to sit back on the couch, watching as Hizashi sprays a mist of the stuff into his hair.

“I’ll get the matches!” Mashi exclaims, jumping to her feet.

“No.” Aizawa says again, the redhead’s shoulders falling and she plops back down with a pout, arms crossed. He actually felt a little proud of himself for being able to control the volatile girl like this. She hardly actually listened to anyone else…
“I got it!” Izuku announces, sitting down beside Hizashi on the floor and raising up his pinky finger on his right hand. With a click the tip of the finger opens and a small flame appears. Aizawa and Inko both already knew about the addition to his hand, he made sure to keep them updated on these things nowadays, but the others didn’t.

Hizashi and Nemuri both jump in surprise while Mashi scurries forward, her emerald eyes sparkling. “Whoa whoA WHOA!” she exclaims gleefully and Izuku sits up a little straighter, a small blush to his cheeks for the praise, but still proud.

“Be careful with that, sweetie,” Inko warns, sitting forward a little as Hizashi and Nemuri move closer to get a better look.

“Yes ma’am,” Izuku replies but is still mostly focused on his rapt audience. Inko sighs and sits back and Aizawa watches as she fiddles worriedly with her teacup. She was trying hard to not hover as much as she used to, but she was still a mother and she still wanted to look after her son.

When Aizawa looks back to the group on the floor Hizashi is vibrating excitedly like a child while Izuku holds the flame up to his hair and nothing happens. Mashi is cheering off to the side, demanding more fire, while Nemuri nabs the can of spray to sprits some into her own hair and demand Izuku do the same to her. The woman’s hair remain fire-free as well and the can is passed to Mashi, who coughs when she accidentally squirts the stuff into her face, but still gives a thumbs up for when she’s ready.

Izuku is just about laughing as he’s called over to hold the flame up to each of their hair do’s, none of them getting tired of watching the flame flicker against the strands with no effect, when suddenly the boy stops, looking forward at nothing.

The room falls silent, the atmosphere dropping at the change, everyone looking to the green-haired boy in concern. Aizawa shifts in his seat, ready to get up, brows furrowing, when he sees the boy’s eyes flicking back and forth like he’s reading. Immediately the underground hero is pretty sure he knows what is going on, but that doesn’t change how jarring it actually is.

“Izuku?” Inko questions worriedly. She actually is standing, her teacup still in hand, and her son shakes out of his stupor. He looks back at her, then at all the others staring at him, and blushes deeply.

“I-I’m sorry! I just… I got an email I was waiting for…” he stutters, pointing at his robotic eye, and Aizawa nods. He’d been right. He’d spotted plenty of times when Izuku and he would just be relaxing the boy suddenly look up at some invisible thing like he was reading the air. After the first few times Izuku had explained it was his super computer and that he was looking at emails, or messages, or readings on some of his machines back at his mysterious clubhouse.

“An email?” Mashi questions, perking up suddenly, and Aizawa’s eyes narrow. Was he missing something? Those two had been sure to share as much as possible with them and Mashi’s mother, but that tone had sounded like she knew something they didn’t. What kind of email would Izuku be waiting for, anyway?

“Y-yeah, just… give me one second,” he says and closes his eyes. Aizawa also knew it was much easier for him to work his screens on the back of his eyelids, but it still looked a little odd, the boy just standing there, silent. No one else spoke, just stared, officially invested in whatever might be going on.

When Izuku makes a noise that sounds like it may be a sob of some kind Aizawa stiffens. The boy opens his eyes and quickly looks over to his mother, expression serious, but his lip is quivering. “H-
hey mom?"

“Yes, sweetie, what is it? Are you okay? What do you need?” Inko quickly questions. She’s still holding her tea and Aizawa suspects she’s forgotten about it.

“Could you… could you look at your checking account real quick?”

The question seems to surprise everyone present, Hizashi looking over at Nemuri before they both look to Aizawa, wanting answers, but he shrugs. He’s just as clueless as them. Mashi is still staring at Izuku, expectant, and Inko hesitantly turns and picks up her phone, setting her cup down finally.

“Sure, sweetie…” she says slowly, her brows furrowed. For a second she stares at her son, trying to understand, but eventually she looks down and begins tapping at her phone.

“I’ve, uh… I’ve been working on licensing my Hera material lately,” Izuku begins to explain and Aizawa tilts his head. Hadn’t he started doing that a long time ago? Was he still trying to even now?

“I actually have been talking to… to two companies, recently. They’ve been curious and been testing it, applying it, talking with legal and their sponsors and…” Izuku looks down and scratches his head. He’s shaking and Nemuri stands up, moving closer to lay both her hands on the boy’s shoulders from behind, standing slightly to his left side.

Izuku hiccups but keeps going, his mother’s tapping on her phone going quicker, wanting to understand what had her son so upset. Had these “companies” tricked Izuku and somehow gotten into his mother’s account? That didn’t sound right to Aizawa, the kid was too anal about his research, there would be no way someone could pull a fast one on him like that.

“O-o-one of them, they make sports gear, ah…” Izuku sniffs again and Hizashi is also reaching out, now, just holding out his hand until the boy takes it and holds it tight with his robotic one. “Th-they agreed and… and they want to use it…”

“That’s great news, kiddo!” Hizashi says, but he still looks worried, and Aizawa couldn’t blame him. This was great news, but Izuku didn’t sound done.

“Y-yeah, but… that was a while ago, and I w-wanted to surprise y-you and…” Izuku takes in a deep breath, shaky and filled with emotion, “They just emailed me… their upfront p-payment just w-went through…”

It’s almost like it’s planned, but a moment after he says that Inko is letting out a cry and dropping her phone. She’s soon to follow, collapsing to the floor on her knees and this time Aizawa is up and moving. Nemuri is close behind, while Hizashi stays with Izuku, and Aizawa crouches beside Inko, hand on her back, trying to lean into her line of sight.

“What’s going on? Are you okay?” he just about demands in his worry and he sees the woman’s face already streaked with tears. She’s shaking and both of her hands are to her mouth, but after a moment she nods at the question. Aizawa isn’t sure what to do, but then he hears Nemuri gasp and he looks up. She had Inko’s phone in her hands and her eyes are wide in shock.

“I-I don’t have a b-bank account, so…” Izuku is saying, but he trails off as Nemuri turns to show the phone screen to Aizawa. He doesn’t gasp, but he does sit up straight and his eyes widen.

Shown on the screen, on the very top, is a direct deposit to Midoriya Inko’s account of a whopping 600,000 yen.

Aizawa stares at it, then over at Izuku, then back at the phone. That was… a lot. A lot of money, a lot to take in, a lot to process and…
Aizawa, for the first time ever, he thinks, is completely frozen, unsure what to even begin to do.

Izuku, the twelve-year-old genius, had gotten a license for one of his brilliant inventions, and apparently had another one on the way, and had just made him and his mother six hundred thousand yen just like that. Well… not “just like that,” he’d been working incredibly hard, and apparently for a long time, to get this going, but already it was paying off.

“Th-that’s the upfront p-payment,” Izuku stutters, overrun by his own emotions, “I-I’m supposed to get 2% royalties e-every month.” Aizawa shakes his head. This boy was still trying to explain himself. Was he afraid that they were upset he’d kept these last few steps a secret? It wasn’t out of the realm of possibilities, the kid always worried about those things, but how could any of them be mad? They all knew how the Midoriya’s struggled with money. This, depending on the royalties for both licenses, could very well mean Inko would never have to work another day in her life.

Inko makes a desperate noise and flaps her hands, unable to speak, and by some miracle Aizawa understands and motions at Izuku. “Come here,” is all he says and Izuku hesitates, but ultimately knows to follow his orders. Hizashi squeezes his hand once more before letting him go and Nemuri steps back for the kid to move in.

When he’s close enough his mother reaches out sharply and yanks him into a crushing hug. It’s what breaks the dam, both mother and son weeping as they hold onto each other for dear life, unable to do anything else with all of this.

“My Izuku,” Inko manages to croak, love and pride dripping from every word, “My genius, amazing, perfect boy.” It manages to make Izuku cry harder, clinging desperately to his mother.

Aizawa feels suddenly out of place, crouching so close to them. The others are watching from a distance, they’re fine, but he feels like he’s intruding on something private and personal.

He shifts to get up and step away, but something is grabbing at his sleeve and yanking him back down with surprising force. Inko grasps at him, arm strong where it now wraps around his shoulders. She doesn’t let up even when he’s stiff as a board, eyes wide behind his curtain of messy hair.

She was hugging him. She was hugging him and including him in this moment that should just be for family.

He nearly startles out of his skin, feeling much like a spooked animal now, which he isn’t a fan of, when Izuku’s small hand grips the front of his shirt, helping keep him in place.

It happens all in the span of a few seconds, but Aizawa feels like it may have been a few minutes, or hours. Inko and Izuku are still crying, but now the woman is looking at him through her damp lashes, a strong, stubborn look that said he wasn’t going anywhere, that this was where he belonged.

Slowly he raises one arm to lie across Inko’s back, and he puts his opposite hand on Izuku’s shaking back. He doesn’t squeeze back much, but he gives enough for Inko to relax, certain he won’t bolt.

They stay like that for an uncertain amount of time, Aizawa isn’t sure, but slowly he begins to relax. He doesn’t cry, if anything he just stares, but a peace settles into the air that feels like rejuvenation.

But it doesn’t last, of course it couldn’t, because suddenly Mashi and Hizashi are both screaming. Nemuri had stepped back and finally shown them Inko’s account, it would seem, and those two weren’t really ones to cry when they were overwhelmed. Instead they get a blur of red crashing into them, making them all fall over, as Mashi screams her joy, hugging the group as best she can. Her young arms are still too short to reach all the way around, but Hizashi’s aren’t, and he’s soon falling
on top of them, also eagerly yelling his joys, hugging the group properly.

Izuku begins laughing through his tears almost immediately, while Inko yelps in surprise, hesitates, but also begins to giggle. Aizawa groans and begins berating the two for being so loud, but then someone is lying against his back and Nemuri is covering his mouth and saying in his ear, “Let them have this.” He manages to wiggle the giggling woman off with a scowl, and she moves over to lay on the other side of the group to pat Izuku’s head and hug Inko and laugh with her.

Aizawa lets his head flop onto the ground, trying to appear irritated by all the sudden loud noises and people in his space, but when no one is looking he lets a small smile slide.

These were the evenings he lived for, after all.

Chapter End Notes

Wanted to say again that I will be very, very busy soon and unable to update much.

Also if you missed him! Here is Inazumi!

Chapter Song: Andy Grammer - Give Love

Also, the song Mashi was listening to: Destra - Set It Off
The Invitation

Chapter Notes

It has been so long, hasn’t it???

I had a much, much needed and full summer vacation, and I’m sorry for being gone, but I really did need it. And now I'm back! I plan to be taking more time, but I intend to properly be back this time.

Now! Links!

The upgrades to Nemura, Hizashi, and Aizawa Izuku has been meaning to make: here!

A very crude clubhouse layout: here!

Aaaaaand fan art!!

Art by captain-sailamander!

Art by my good buddy aj-tzi-bal!

Art by akcugrai!

More art! by fingerspellingtopassthetime

And lastly some art by brodoroki!

You guys are all so spectacular and important to me. Thank you for all your love and support!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I told you this was a terrible idea.” Inazumi huffs daintily as he comes marching over to everyone huddled together, handing Izuku a roll of bandages.

“Inazumi-kun, please, is now really the time?” Izuku sighs deeply, near begging the pale boy not to rub this in their faces. Shinsou grunts in agreement, a wad of cotton in one hand, soaked with alcohol that he dabs at the many cuts covering Mashi’s body.

“Now is the perfect time! When else will you listen to me?” Inazumi’s voice cracks, obviously frustrated.

Katsuki groans loudly, louder than is necessary, and glares at the small boy. “Just shut the fuck up, you transparent extra,” he growls, eyes thinning dangerously, making Inazumi shrink away. The small boy tries to control himself a moment later, standing straight again and glaring over at the explosive boy.

“I most certainly will not! This whole incident could have easily been avoided if you had just listened to me. This whole thing was—“

“Awesome…” Mashi giggles from her place sitting in one of Izuku’s workshops in the clubhouse,
her head laying back, cuts and bruises littering her body. Inazumi shoots her a glare, which she ignores.

“Terrifying…” Shinsou mumbles in contradiction, mostly to himself, but Izuku hears him.

Despite wearing protective gear accidents did happen sometimes. Like today.

It wasn’t hard at all for Izuku to get working on Shinsou’s new bike. The design and engineering of a bike was elegant for such a small device, but nothing too hard for the child genius. He’d designed, planned, and built a new bike within two weeks time. Rather than just making another, regular bike, however, Izuku had put on some of his own, personal flare. That was where the problems arose.

The bike was thin and lightweight, a sleek white, and the number of turns of the wheels corresponding with a single pedal had been increased. Problem was… he might have increased that last part too much.

They had gone to the street in front of the clubhouse to test it. Mashi, of course, volunteered to ride the test bike first, eager to experience it and to help any way she could.

They had counted down, she had begun to pedal… and she had shot straight off like a rocket. Losing control almost immediately she had swerved and crashed right into a lamppost. Katsuki had been no help, laughing at the whole thing, while Izuku and Shinsou had gathered a banged up but ultimately fine Mashi. Thank goodness for helmets.

“At least we got some good data,” Izuku mumbles, but cringes when he spots Inazumi and Shinsou’s disapproving looks. Not the right thing to say?

“Yeah! Data!” Mashi cheers, not at all offended. She was proud to have been of any help.

“Now we know what NOT to do,” Katsuki smirks, and Izuku sighs, giving his childhood friend a pleading look to stop.

“Alright, I get it, I went too far,” he grumbles, pouting as he wraps the bandages around Mashi’s wrist. Nothing was broken, thankfully, a quick scan from his Eye assured him that. “It’s a bike, Deku, not a rocket.” Yes, yes, you were right,” Izuku’s voice lowers as he mimics Katsuki’s voice. Thankfully the blond is too proud to be told he’s right to get upset over that.

“Really, you don’t need to do anything special, Midoriya-san. I just need a normal bike to get around,” Shinsou says as he finally sets down his cotton swab and focuses on the green-haired boy, but that only makes Izuku pout more.

For the last two weeks CUT had been going great. They would meet after school, finish up homework, and then go to the clubhouse, joining Katsuki who was always already there.

In that time Inazumi had begun plotting out a “lounge” space, creating a code to upload to the builder bots on the property so they could start working on it. Mashi had further improved her gunstaff builds but mostly she and Katsuki would spar outside. Katsuki had begun planning out a new hero outfit design and was helping Izuku work out his AI ideas. Izuku had of course built the bike, but had also begun building Neko Nurse prototypes and designing his AI systems. And Shinsou…

Shinsou, at the clubhouse, had finally gotten a mattress into his designated room and begun personalizing it. He mostly tended to the plants and avoided interactions with anyone. Sometimes he got roped into a sparring match or two, sometimes he sat and listened to Izuku or Inazumi work, but mostly he kept to himself, studying, sleeping, or finding something to do.
On the other hand, outside of the clubhouse, most days he had begun following Izuku home afterwards. He very rarely continued on to his own apartment, sometimes staying at the clubhouse, but most often joining Izuku and his mother and “brother” at their home. He would train alongside Izuku, Aizawa’s tutelage being strict and unforgiving. He would go out and walk with Izuku, sometimes also with Aizawa and Hizashi. He would stay for dinner and let Inko fret over him. He would help Izuku bounce ideas off of him, even if he understood none of it.

It had only been two weeks, yet Izuku felt like Shinsou had quickly integrated himself into his home life. When he didn’t come over Inko always asked after him, and if she didn’t Aizawa did, in his own way. A silent glance around, as if looking for someone, then arching a brow at Izuku was usually his way of asking.

They’d never done this with Katsuki or Mashi. Inazumi, who had dropped by to work on some coding once or twice, didn’t get this treatment either. But Shinsou?

Shinsou needed people looking out for him, needed people to care about him and look for him and ask after him. He deserved it. And Izuku firmly believed he also deserved nice things, like a suped-up bicycle… Which he had, very obviously, gone a little too far with.

“Sorry, Shinsou-kun. I’ll pull back some on the next one,” Izuku mumbles, looking at the tall boy sheepishly. Shinsou doesn’t smile, but his face is relaxed, which is a good sign, and he offers a small nod to Izuku, saying both “thank you” and “it’s okay” in one motion.

“Uhg!” Izuku suddenly has the palm of a hand smacking over his face and he frowns against it, already knowing whose it is. “But that’s so boring!” Mashi whines, lightly shaking Izuku’s head. She’s fully patched up now, so Izuku shoves off her hand and steps away.

“The bike isn’t for you, Mashi,” Izuku says flatly before gathering up the remaining medical supplies.

“Finally, people are talking sense again,” Inazumi sighs, sounding relieved, a hand to his chest.

“Enjoy it now,” Katsuki huffs, one brow arched as Mashi slides down the chair she’s in until she flops out and lays on the floor. “It won’t last long.” He moves over to jam his toe into her side and she swats at his leg, grumbling incoherently.

Izuku had been frightened for Inazumi and Shinsou, uncertain how the new members of their group would integrate and if they would feel welcome and happy, but he had also worried for Katsuki. The explosive boy had grown more withdrawn for a while at the start. He was still loud and destructive, and to any outsider he may have seemed entirely unaffected, but Izuku knew him better than anyone. Knew his constant battle with loneliness. His need to be needed.

Katsuki was quieter. He kept to himself even more than usual. He was more violent with his sparring and more frustrated at every little thing, yet when he exploded it seemed to have no target. Izuku had tried to keep him included, but soon he saw he wasn’t helping anything along. Katsuki would always be an important part of his life, but he needed to work through his issues on his own this time around.

Slowly but surely, after one week, he had begun to act normal again. He still mostly avoided Shinsou and Inazumi, but… honestly, that was fine. In the end Izuku, Katsuki, and Mashi would always be the originals. They had a bond stronger than anything Izuku could ever explain, and if they were the only ones Katsuki cared to stick to, and was happy about it, than Izuku was happy too. No one could force a friendship, after all.

“Now is probably a good time to head home,” Izuku announces when he comes back over to their
little group, used supplies disposed of and unused put back in their rightful locations. There were medical supplies all over the clubhouse. With the Destructive Duo: Katsuki and Mashi, plus all the experiments, it was important to always have some nearby. “If you’re feeling well enough, Mashi?”

The redhead flops onto her back, still on the floor. She hadn’t even flinched while they had patched her up. She’d hardly even been affected by the crash, just momentarily dazed before she had begun to laugh. But it never hurt to ask.

“Yeah… okay. I’m not happy about it, though,” she finally replies. Izuku could tell she was at least tired from everything.

Katsuki snorts. “You try anything else you’ll probably fucking die,” he comments, apparently also noticing just how exhausted she seems. He pauses after he makes his comment, before smirking wickedly down at the girl. “Actually… Maybe we should try another experiment!”

Mashi immediately throws a kick that catches the back of Katsuki’s legs, knocking him over and onto his back with a loud thud. The moment he’s down she begins cackling and calling over, “You deserved that!”

Katsuki is springing up, ready to dive at her, when Izuku frantically slides between them, facing the blond boy, arms making an “X” in front of his chest. “No! No fighting! Going home now! Mashi! Apologize!”

“I’m sorry you suck at dodging!”

“MASHI!”

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Shinsou doesn’t join Izuku at home that night. It’s a little sad, but also makes perfect sense. Whenever things get a little too exciting at the clubhouse Shinsou tends to prefer to be alone entirely.

In addition Izuku isn’t the only one heading back to his apartment that night.

When Mashi is over Shinsou is fine to sit back and watch, content to keep to himself but still be present. They aren’t buddies, but Shinsou and Mashi get along well.

But when Katsuki comes over things can get tense. While he can be just as loud, he is also rather… antagonistic. He never outright is cruel to Shinsou, he’s not really “cruel” to anyone anymore, but there’s a feeling in the air that makes things stressful and difficult.

Izuku hates it. Hates that he doesn’t know what to do about it. Hates that sometimes it feels like it is his fault, trying to make new friends and everything, but then he kicks himself for that way of thinking.

Maybe, once Katsuki becomes more comfortable having Shinsou and Inazumi just in his presence he will be able to bond with them. Maybe he’ll even make friends with them!

“And maybe we’ll one day colonize Venus…” Izuku grumbles to himself.

“What?” Katsuki questions, looking over to the other boy on the couch with narrowed eyes, and Izuku’s own widen, not having realized he’d said that out loud.

“Ah, sorry, nothing. Just thinking about…” the genius boy hesitates, “Space travel?”
Katsuki sits on the other side of the living room couch, sprawled out like he owns the place, a notebook in his hands, Pumpkin curled up in his lap. He arches a brow at Izuku, looking the boy over like he’s entirely insane. “Don’t work yourself to death, idiot. I still need my costume’s gear,” he says, trying to sound bored, but Izuku can spot the edge to his voice.

The tension leaves the smaller boy’s shoulders and he smiles at Katsuki, trying to show he’s okay. “Careful. I’ll make your gear pink out of spite,” he decides to play along and the other boy scoffs, looking back at his notebook.

“I’d make it work,” he says absently, and Izuku doesn’t doubt it.

They sit in silence for a while longer, the only sound Katsuki’s pencil scribbling on paper, Izuku’s tools working at an open panel in his palm, and Pumpkin purring whenever Katsuki scratches his head.

It was an odd night. Inko had been roped into having a night off, which she sorely deserved, by Nemuri and Hizashi. She had been jittery when Izuku and Katsuki had arrived, double checking Izuku had all the ingredients for a good dinner, triple checking Izuku didn’t need anything and both he and his childhood friend knew all the important phone numbers, and promising multiple times she would come straight home if they needed anything.

“You think I should make mom some kind of housekeeping bot? Make her life easier?” Izuku had wondered as they’d waved Inko out the door with Nemuri and Hizashi.

Katsuki had shut the door as they turned around, saying almost immediately, “No robot butlers, those things are creepy as shit.”

“Well now I have to,” Izuku pouts when Katsuki walks past him and hits their shoulders roughly together. Inko enjoyed doing things around the house, They both knew that, but her day job tended to drain her quickly, making everything more difficult when she returned home. Hopefully that would soon be a thing of the past, though.

With the upfront payment for Izuku’s Hera products currently moved to savings – no one wanted to spend anything too quickly – they now had royalty payments to wait for. 2% of the company’s earnings from Hera would be transferred to Inko’s account on a monthly basis, and after talking to some of the representatives from the company Izuku was getting pretty confident in just how much that would be.

For now, though, they tried not to change too much in their lives. To be safe. They didn’t want to make any assumptions and regret it later.

“What are you working on over there, anyway? Some new nerd device?” Katsukie eventually looks over the top of his notebook, hand falling to Pumpkin’s back. It was remarkable how that cat trusted anyone, even explosive, temperamental boys.

“Please define nerd device,” Izuku replies absently, because really. Everything was a nerd device to Katsuki, he really should specify.

“You: nerd,” the blond begins, reaching out with his pencil to jab into Izuku’s side. “That: device,” he waves the pencil in the direction of Izuku’s prosthetic. Once he’s made his point Katsuki leans back, smirking, and his green-haired friend arches a brow at him.

“So… everything I build is a nerd device?”

“Obviously!”
“Yeah… you’re getting pink gauntlets.”

A pillow comes flying at his head in way of retort, making Izuku grin and giggle, peaking over at his childhood friend, not frightened by the glare shot his way. This was good. This was normal.

“Just tell me what you’re working on, fucking Deku!” Katsuki snaps. The effect of his furious tone is lost when Pumpkin moves, sits back on his butt, and flaps his front paws at Katsuki’s face, trying to get him to pay attention and continue his petting.

Izuku turns away so he doesn’t outright laugh at that, raising a screwdriver back to the panel in his palm to calibrate a little device inside. “Just something I’ve been wanting to do for a while,” he says, tongue poking out the side of his mouth. He’s silent for a moment as he works, finishing up the new upgrade and giving a noise of joy when he’s done. He sets the screwdriver down and clicks the panel closed then extends his arm towards Katsuki, palm out. There is a faintly glowing circle in his palm now and with a quick message from his brain, which takes a while to figure out, it buzzes with sudden electricity.

Katsuki’s brows rise up immediately, the crackling of the electricity unmistakable. “You built a Taser into your hand?!” he nearly yells and Izuku brings back his hand to look at his palm himself. He turns the electrical charge off and on a few more times, trying to get accustomed to the necessary messages his brain needed to send to his arm in order to get it to work. It would take practice, just as everything did, but this was thankfully not too difficult.

“I built a Taser into your hand?!” he nearly yells and Izuku brings back his hand to look at his palm himself. He turns the electrical charge off and on a few more times, trying to get accustomed to the necessary messages his brain needed to send to his arm in order to get it to work. It would take practice, just as everything did, but this was thankfully not too difficult.

“Yeah, basically,” Izuku shrugs, examining how the rest of the hand handles the charge. He’d done some previous tests before, but this was the first time he’d fully put it into his attached hand. “It’s a great defense weapon for battle. Just one zap from this thing can down just about anybody for a little bit, so long as their quirk doesn’t directly protect them.”

“Holy shit, Deku!” Katsuki exclaims in disbelief and Izuku slowly turns to look at him, amused.

“How is this surprising to you? How is anything I do surprising to you anymore?” the smaller boy questions. This was hardly the craziest thing he’d ever built.

Katsuki scowls at him and looks away with a huff. “Everything you do is crazy!” he bites right back, not happy for being called out like that. There’s a pause between them, Izuku watching Katsuki carefully.

“Okay, so what are you working on, then?” the genius boy questions and Katsuki’s head snaps over to him, eyes thinning dangerously. It didn’t help the blond was so pale that when he blushed, even a little, it was clear as day. Like right now.

“It’s just a stupid sketch. go away, fucking Deku!” Katsuki snaps and Izuku is smiling now. Now, what was he hiding?

“Hey, I showed you my Taser palm! It’s not fair if you don’t share,” the green-haired boy whines, leaning forward, eyes sparkling in excitement. Katsuki had taken up sketching a lot more often lately, he was bound to have gotten better than when he first doodled his hero costume idea, and Izuku wanted to see. Was he still only working on hero stuff? Or was he doing other stuff now, too?

“Back off! I agreed to nothing!” Katsuki leans away, but is stopped from going too far thanks to the fat, orange cat in his lap. It seemed even Bakugou Katsuki wasn’t immune to the “I can’t move, there’s an animal in my lap” effect.

Izuku takes advantage of that and flops unceremoniously against Katsuki’s side, giggling like a
Izuku knows he’s the only person who gets to act this way with Katsuki. Mashi is close, but usually they end up actually fighting and grappling around, so it isn’t quite the same.

The smaller boy reaches up at the notebook in vain, grabbing at it, Katsuki yelling at him to get off already, when Izuku gets a devious idea.

“Cold hand!” he yells then immediately puts the back of his metal hand to Katsuki’s neck. The explosive boy lets out a very undignified shriek he will deny later, body reflexively curling away, and arms coming down to push at Izuku. The smaller boy rolls away, laughing loudly, while his friend holds his neck where he’d been shocked by the cold, glaring death at his friend.

“YOU BASTARD!” Katsuki roars, but his eyes widen comically, body freezing, when Izuku waves the notebook he’d managed to snag last minute. Mission accomplished!

Except Katsuki’s hands are beginning to smoke, and his red eyes are turning to a very bad angle, and his shoulders are rising dangerously. “Dekuuuuuu,” he hisses and Izuku’s eyes widen. Okay, that was bad. No more playing and teasing, that was bad. Katsuki was always angry about something, but this was bad angry.

With a weak, nervous chuckle Izuku slowly extends his hands, notebook out, apologetic and shaking. With a snap Katsuki is snatching it back, fury in every inch of his being, but with the notebook back he seems momentarily sated. The blond slowly turns away, movements jerky, and sits slouched on the couch, looking forward at the wall, teeth grinding. Izuku sits back up as well, also facing forward, hands in his lap.

These moments still happened sometimes. The moments where Katsuki got so angry it scared Izuku. The moments where Izuku saw the old Katsuki peaking through. They were getting farther apart, these moments, and it only happened when they were alone, but they still happened. They still happened and Izuku didn’t know how to help. Or if he even should help.

No one ever got hurt anymore. It came close on occasion, but Katsuki always pulled away before it went too far, a haunted look hidden deep in his eyes.

“I’m sorry, Kacchan,” Izuku whispers as the silence continues to mount, heavy and choking. He’d admit it; he’d pushed that one. The two boys could rough house a little, but that had been a tiny bit too far, stealing his notebook like that, and he would be the bigger man and admit that.

For a while Katsuki says nothing, just glaring ahead, but his shoulders had slowly begun to relax. Pumpkin had run off at some point, even that dumb cat realizing he shouldn’t be nearby when things got that hairy.

“I don’t like people looking at these,” the blond suddenly mumbles, sounding sullen and still angry, and Izuku looks over with surprise.

“What? Your drawings?” he asks back, voice carefully quiet. Setting off Katsuki again was the last thing he wanted to do.

Katsuki offers a shrug in response, and for a while that’s all Izuku gets, but then, with a shuddering sigh, he deflates, curling slightly into himself. “Fuckin’… They aren’t ready yet!”

“Ready…?” Izuku repeats, brows furrowing, uncertain what exactly Katsuki meant by that. “Like they aren’t finished?”

“NO!” Katsuki snaps but falters, eyes flicking around like an animal looking for an escape. “Yes?
FUCK!” he raises his hands and viciously ruffles his hair, the spiky locks flicking right back into place when he lowers his arms. “I’m going to be the best hero around, you hear me?” he suddenly turns back to Izuku, pointing a vicious finger at him. “I’ll be number one! Better than you, better than that red wannabe, better than even All Might!”

“O… kay?” Izuku says slowly, quickly losing track of this conversation. They had started talking about drawings and now they were on to becoming heroes. How had that happened?

“I’ll be the greatest! The best in everything I do!” Katsuki goes on, voice rising, before suddenly he’s looking back down at his notebook, the energy puttering out of him, and slowly Izuku began to piece things together. It wasn’t that Katsuki’s drawings weren’t ready, it was that he believed his skills weren’t ready.

Failure was not an option for Katsuki. All his life he felt he had to be the best. It had taken all the willpower in the world for him to admit Izuku was smarter than him all those years ago, but that was about it.

“Kacchan…” Izuku begins, very slowly scooting closer, nervous to set Katsuki off again, but feeling now he may have the opening. “You are… amazing! You are great at so many things. You’re a natural at just about everything you try… But you do know you don’t have to be a natural at everything, right?”

Katsuki scoffs, a sharp, nasty sound, but he says nothing, just staring down at the notebook in his lap, and Izuku took that as his cue to continue.

“You can have stuff that you’re not perfect at, or not talented at. I think… I think it’s way more impressive you’re trying to better your skills anyway.” Katsuki has tilted his head just the slightest bit towards Izuku now, looking over at the smaller boy through the corner of his eye. “It’s WAY cooler that you saw something you weren’t naturally talented at and decided you liked it enough you wanted to be better at it!”

So, so carefully Izuku scoots the final bit towards his volatile friend and bumps his shoulder. “I think you’re really cool, Kacchan!”

Katsuki finally straightens up and looks over to Izuku, his expression drawn, just watching as the smaller boy beams a wide smile up at him. If a human being could sparkle, Izuku would have been in that moment, hoping to show just how spectacular he truly saw Katsuki to be.

“BAH!” the blond spits, rolling his eyes and looking away. “God! Shut up, fucking Deku, that’s so cheesy!” he complains, scowling over at the far wall, and Izuku momentarily worries he’s said something wrong, but than Katsuki is smacking the notebook into his chest. “Just fucking look at them already, JEEZ!”

Katsuki continues to grumble things about sappy speeches and stubborn, quirkless brats, but Izuku sees him scrubbing violently at his face, ears bright red, and the atmosphere finally begins to lighten. The genius boy keeps smiling as he opens the notebook to page one and begins to skim.

Izuku remembers the first sketch of Katsuki’s hero costume. It had been atrocious. This was certainly not that.

It was hardly pro work but already Izuku saw improvement. No way this was Katsuki’s first notebook. There was absolutely no way. He must have been practicing with many more before today.
It’s filled with a variety of things. A lot of hero costume drawings, mostly variations of the same thing, and a lot of ideas for gear. There’s also candid sketches, which Izuku lingers most on. Drawings of Katsuki’s classes from his desk, some of nature, some of the Bakugous household, some of the Midoriya apartment, some of the clubhouse. Katsuki has the hardest time with people, but still Izuku can recognize familiar faces when they show up, like himself and Mashi working at the clubhouse, Shinsou asleep under a tree, Inazumi at his computer, both Bakugou parents watching television.

It’s all very impressive. He could see how Katsuki could improve over time, and Izuku makes note of some of his new ideas for his hero suit, but then he runs into the most intriguing of Katsuki’s drawings.

Inventions. Ideas that have nothing to do with hero work and are probably more just doodles of silly ideas, but inventions nonetheless.

“When were you going to show me any of these?” Izuku questions, eyes wide as he stares at one that looks like a laser gun. Simple, maybe, and also half of them probably aren’t possible, but the fact remains…

“They’re just stupid doodles,” Katsuki grumbles, glaring over at the notebook in Izuku’s hands. He’s blushing again, but the genius boy is too absorbed in the sketches to care.

“I beg to differ!” he retorts, not looking up, as he finally comes to the sketch Katsuki had been working on today. It’s another invention idea and as Izuku looks over it his eyes begin to sparkle.

It’s a raccoon, but it’s not. It is obviously drawn to look like a robot, and the picture depicts the creature picking up garbage and incinerating it in some kind of internal, fiery core. It’s a loose, silly little sketch, and written above the top in big letters is the word “Racuum.”

And it is the best thing Izuku has ever seen.

“I’m building this,” he announces, eyes wide, plans already flying around in his head, and when Katsuki looks back over he groans.

“That’s just a shitty idea I was going to throw out!”

Izuku looks up at Katsuki, his eyes narrowing. “Oh no you are not. I am building this! Let me build this! Come on, Kacchan!”

The blond leans away, scowling at Izuku’s growing excitement. “It’s just a shitty doodle! See, I knew you would react like this, you stupid nerd!”

“It is NOT just a doodle! This is spectacular!” Izuku insists but the blond just snarls and leans over to snatch back his notebook.

“Just. Doodles,” he grounds out, “You’re the inventor, here, not me! Leave me out of it!” Izuku tilts his head, thoughtful and considering. Was this the same thing as the drawing thing? Katsuki didn’t feel his capabilities were as perfect as he would like so he was keeping them to himself? Or maybe he really did just not want to be part of that?

“Come on! Let me just build that one! Please?” Izuku presses. Maybe, just maybe, if he could build this one Katsuki would see he had promise. That ideas could come from anywhere, even doodles, and they were all worth something.

Katsuki looks away, scowl deepening, and he mumbles something Izuku can’t fully catch. It sounds
“Something like… “You have enough to do…” But that can’t be right… Can it?

“What was that?” Izuku asks, voice suddenly lowering, brows furrowing in concern. He must have heard that wrong…

“I said fine!” Katsuki finally snaps, shoulders rising defensively, glaring up at Izuku, and to his dying day he would deny he was pouting, but he totally was. Izuku blinks in surprise, brows rising, but then he is grinning all over again, beginning to bounce up and down.

“Great! I’ll go get my stuff to start planning!” he says eagerly and scurries off, muttering to himself as he goes.

He must have heard wrong a moment ago. Had to of. But… DID Izuku have too much to do? Working on his AI’s, working on the clubhouse, working on his licenses, working on his arm upgrades, working on his friends’ gear, working on the Leeches, working on the Neko Nurses, working on his self defense and cardio training, working on school, working on CUT, working on his animal bots, working on… Izuku takes a sudden breath, a hand shooting out to hold onto his desk to balance himself. Oh… that was… a lot.

Izuku looks over his desk in his room. He had a lot to do. A lot planned. Whether he had heard Katsuki right or not, it was still true. He was just a twelve-year-old kid. Genius, sure, but only twelve, with a life he should be living. Was he taking it too far? He had done it before when they had first gotten their clubhouse. Was he doing it again?

He had so much he needed to do, but rushing it certainly couldn’t be helping him. Pushing yourself was important, but it was entirely possible to push yourself too far. He lectured Katsuki about it when he trained outside until his wrists nearly broke, and Mashi about it when she sparred and worked out until she nearly passed out, and Mei about it when she stayed up for days on end hyper focused on a new device.

Was Izuku being a hypocrite?

With a shaky breath Izuku picks up a few writing tools, mood suddenly mellow, and straightens his back. He stares for a long moment at all the blueprints he has strewn about or tacked onto his board, then turns around and returns to Katsuki more slowly.

“We’ll just focus on this for a while!” he announces, plopping down on the floor across the coffee table from his friend. Katsuki eyes him, considering him, obviously surprised by the suddenly more subdued mood. “Yeah! Just… one thing at a time, right?” Izuku clarifies. It might slow things down for a bit, but… maybe he needed that. Maybe he needed to slow down.

“Yeah… Sounds good,” Katsuki says slowly, still eying Izuku, before turning to the set up in front of him, finding it all familiar for the two of them.

It did sound good, didn’t it?

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Two months later finds Izuku sitting comfortably at home one Saturday evening on his brand new couch. It’s nothing fancy, but it is plush and soft and currently stainless. That last one probably wouldn’t last long, but there was no telling.

The apartment is still small and cheap, but finally improvements can be made. A new dishwasher, better plumbing, new bed mattresses, and so on. Izuku’s royalties had been much higher than they had hoped. With the upfront payment being 600,000 yen Izuku had hoped for something similar to
that amount or even a tiny bit more per month. What they got instead was an average of about one
million, two hundred thousand yen, a complete double the upfront payment, every month. Inko and
Izuku had both near fainted on cue when they’d seen how much had been transferred to them the
first time.

The issue was… they didn’t know what to do with it all. Plus Izuku had an entire second, pending
license that would only increase their monthly royalty fees. They weren’t snobby people, nor needy.
They liked the simple life and honestly…

Izuku looks over at his neighbor on the couch beside him, sitting upright in his sleeping bag,
completely asleep. This had become their home. They had family here. They couldn’t just up and
leave for a “fancy” house. Just because they were finally getting paid a decent amount didn’t mean
they should stop being who they were.

So they’d simply improved where they already lived. Better furniture was a must, and they’d even
offered to help Aizawa out a little, but he had declined. They didn’t splurge, still too nervous to
spend too much… at least not on themselves. Izuku had snuck out at one point and bought his
mother a pretty, new tea set, and one day after school Izuku had come home to find a limited edition
All Might action figure on his bed. So… yes maybe a little splurging, but for each other.

Yet still they were careful. Inko had finally left her work, but not necessarily quit. She still would go
in if they needed help or someone else called out, but very quickly she was back to being a
homebody, more content than Izuku had seen her in many, many years. She enjoyed cleaning and
preparing her home. She enjoyed being able to go out and see Mitsuki again, or now be around
Nemuri, Hizashi, or Aizawa more. And she certainly enjoyed the extra help from the Racuum
scurrying about, picking up trash or vacuuming up filth.

The Racuum had been a surprisingly simple build, but was certainly a big hit. He’d made one for the
Bakugou, Hatsune, Haganehato, and Inazumi households, as well as a few for the clubhouse. They
had been painted the same as real raccoons, but were obviously still made of pliable but hard Hera
plating. And when they were in their sleep mode they curled up and compressed into a ball.

“You’re staring at it again,” a voice to Izuku’s side startles him out of his musings and he looks over.
Shinsou is sitting down on the shorter boy’s free side, handing over a glass of blueberry smoothie, a
mug of hot chocolate between his own hands. Izuku really had no idea how Shinsou could drink that
stuff when it was beginning to get so hot outside.

“I can’t help it! I’m just… really proud of it!” Izuku replies, motioning at the Racuum across the
room, currently dragging its belly across the ground, vacuuming the carpet. Izuku had all kinds of
animal machines back at the clubhouse, but hardly any of them were prepared enough to go into
practice.

“It is pretty impressive,” Shinsou nods in agreement. They both can hear Inko moving around in the
kitchen, humming a tune as she prepares a simple lunch.

“Yes. Did I mention it was actually Kacchan’s original idea?” Izuku looks up at the purple-haired
boy with a big, proud smile.

“A couple million times, yes,” Shinsou immediately replies, tired eye looking back down at Izuku,
looking bored but also with a tone of “Are you serious?”

Izuku chuckles anxiously, a little more high pitched than usual, and looks away, a blush on his face.
“A… sorry about that…”
“It’s fine,” Shinsou shrugs, looking back to his mug, blowing on it before taking sip. He falls silent after that, never one to say too much, and Izuku leans back in his seat, screens flashing into his Eye’s vision. He scrolls through lines and lines of code, adjusting a few things he spots, then opens up a new screen and begins typing out new codes using only his mind.

“What are you working on now, Izu?” his mother’s voice cuts in as she comes into the room with sandwiches, smiling at her son when he focuses properly on her.

“Some finishing touches to the Neko Nurse systems. I have some prototypes built and ready for testing!” he announces cheerfully, setting down his drink so he can take the food offered to him. Shinsou does the same, quietly mumbling his thanks, averting his eyes, still uncertain how to properly act around a caring household. Inko smiles gently at the purple-haired boy and takes a moment to adjust a few stray hairs on his head for him, then moves on.

“That sounds good. I know you have been working for a long time on those,” Inko says, stepping around the coffee table, setting a sandwich down in front of Aizawa, then moving to try to gently coax him awake.

“I’ve been trying to… take my time lately,” Izuku admits slowly, glancing down at his food. “It IS still complicated procedures, but… I didn’t want to burn out or anything.”

“That’s very good to hear,” Inko pauses to look back at her son, smiling in approval, and Izuku can’t help but smile back.

“He’s still working on, what? Twenty things at once?” Shinsou says, lazily leaning around Izuku, who looks back at him with an angry pout.

“Am not!” he yelps. Sure… maybe the “one thing at a time” idea hadn’t really stuck for more than a week, but Izuku was still taking his time and being more careful with his wellbeing. Both Katsuki and Mashi had seemed the most pleased out of his friends and Izuku had felt some of his anxious energy slowly fade away. “It’s just the Neko Nurses, my personal AI, and some animal machines on the side!”

“Also my bike.”

“Hey, I finished that a month ago, that doesn’t count,” Izuku grumbles just as Aizawa finally begins to awaken from Inko’s gentle nudging.

“Finished what?” he yawns, not really sounding like he actually cares, but Izuku hardly pays attention to that. He never did before.

“Shinsou-kun’s bike. He’s trying to say I’ve been doing too much lately,” the green-haired boy complains.

Aizawa rubs at his eyes, trying to free himself from any residual blurry vision and sleep gunk. “I thought you were taking it easier lately?” he observes, looking up and nodding at Inko as thank you for the food. He hasn’t even glanced over at the two boys despite holding a conversation with them.

“Yes! Thank you!” Izuku exclaims, holding both hands out towards the exhausted man and giving Shinsou a pointed look like that solved everything.

“Though… you were just the other day muttering about building an entire suit of armor for yourself…” Aizawa finally does glance over at the boys, a single brow arched, eyes half-lidded.

“And I remember you mentioning wanting to work on some kind of… metal whips? Or were they
grappling hooks?” Inko chimes in, taking a seat in a new love seat beside the couch, a sandwich for herself in hand.

“Ha,” Shinsou says dryly, but still smirks down at Izuku, who throws his hands upwards as he falls backwards against the couch.

“My own family! Betrays me!”

“Don’t be so dramatic,” Aizawa huffs, but he hardly has any bite to his tone. If anything he was still teasing, and Izuku groans loudly in response.

When lunch is finished they relax for a while longer, Izuku going back to his coding and Shinsou and Aizawa very pointedly talking over his head and Izuku very pointedly ignoring them. When the food finally settles is when Aizawa stands, stepping out of his sleeping bag, and looking to the two boys, arms crossed.

“Alright, training time. Go get changed.”

It hadn’t taken long for Shinsou to begin stashing clothes at the Midoriya apartment and at the clubhouse. No one said anything since no one had a problem with it, and it certainly came in handy when they suddenly needed to go outside.

Shinsou is out of his seat first; his speed a direct contradiction to his laid back, tired appearance. He shoots a small smirk back at Izuku, who pouts. Whoever got to the bedroom first got to change first, that was the unspoken rule, so Izuku sits right back in his spot and crosses his arms, waiting.

His mood changes when he sees Inko and Aizawa exchange some kind of meaningful look, the two nodding at each other like they knew something Izuku didn’t, and the genius boy sits up straighter, brows furrowing. “Izu… sweetie, could you join me in the kitchen for a moment?” Inko asks, looking to her son. Her expression wasn’t bad, but it was more serious all of a sudden and Izuku can do nothing but nod.

He follows his mother into the kitchen, worry building up in his gut. Had he done something wrong? He had been doing so well keeping his mother informed and doing as he was supposed to, he thought. Had he screwed up somewhere? But where? How?

“M-mom,” he begins once they’re facing each other. He can hear Shinsou coming out of Izuku’s bedroom and Aizawa ushering him outside, saying Izuku will be joining them in a moment.

“Whatever I did, I’m really sorry.”

“No no no!” Inko’s eyes widen, quickly waving her hands in front of her in a panic. “You didn’t do anything wrong, Izu, I promise!” That has Izuku deflating in relief, at least a little bit, but still he can’t swallow the uncertainty from what might be going on.

“What’s going on, then?”

“Inko’s eyes widen, quickly waving her hands in front of her in a panic. “You didn’t do anything wrong, Izu, I promise!” That has Izuku deflating in relief, at least a little bit, but still he can’t swallow the uncertainty from what might be going on.

“Okay,” he whispers, looking up at his mother, his fingers fidgeting anxiously. “What’s going on, then?”

Inko takes a deep breath and smiles down at her son. She looks… proud all of a sudden as she reaches to pull what looks like an envelope from behind some jars. “I already had my own little freak out when Aizawa-kun showed me this, but… yes, well, we agreed it was best to give this to you privately.”

She holds out the envelope and Izuku gently takes it from her with his robotic hand. He looks up at her for a long, silent moment before turning over the envelope and looking down at it. Immediately he’s freezing in place.
Printed there, on the front of the envelope, clear as day, in bright, bold colors is the UA logo.

“So what all are ya gonna bring?” Mashi questions eagerly, a skip in her step, nearly dropping the box of gear she carries in her arms.

“Gosh… I dunno!” Izuku replies, just as eager a hop to his own steps.

Only yesterday had he received the letter from UA. The letter written by Principal Nedzu himself. The letter inviting him, Midoriya Izuku, to bring some of his inventions to the school campus for something of a show and tell for the pro heroes and agencies at the beginning of summer break. The letter also inviting Bakugou Katsuki and Haganehato Mashi, who were both privy to the secret identities of some of the teachers and considered “vital aspects” to Izuku’s building process. The letter that had sent Izuku into a happy crying fit.

Izuku had been entirely unable to focus on training. Once his tears had subsided he’d rushed outside and nearly tackled Aizawa in excitement, giving him a tight hug, then spinning towards an entirely clueless Shinsou.

He couldn’t share every detail with Shinsou. His friend was not aware of everything to do with UA. He did not know about some of the teachers like Izuku did. Honestly, Katsuki wasn’t SUPPOSED to know either, it was only supposed to have been Izuku and Mashi after that monster attack so long ago, but they’d told…

Izuku hated he couldn’t bring Shinsou and Inazumi, but it made sense. This was apparently about showing off some of Izuku’s inventions and Katsuki and Mashi were directly tied to a lot of his gear, whether because something was designed specifically for them, or they had assisted in some process of a build.

“Who do you think we’ll meet?” Izuku wonders aloud, adjusting his hold on the robotic cat in his arm, the bluish-silver of his metallic Hera gleaming off the creature’s body.

Knowing about the show Izuku was expected to put on for who knows who he had spent all night working on finishing his Neko Nurse coding to hurry along to the testing phase. He had accidentally kept Shinsou up most of the night, which was why today only Mashi was joining him, their purple-haired friend sleeping back at the apartment.

“Probably bunches of guys in suits, right? From all the hero departments and shit?” the redhead at his side guesses, glancing over at Izuku.

“Well… yeah, I guess so, but I meant heroes! I know Cementoss and Thirteen are openly teachers at UA,” Izuku says, thinking about all the possibilities.

“Hey, didn’t that Thirteen one build that one building? The, uh… OH! The USJ!” Mashi jumps with excitement when she remembers, the box nearly tumbling out of her hands, and Izuku swiftly throws out his metal arm to hold it in place.

“Yeah, Mashi, they did,” Izuku confirms, making his friend grin proudly.

“What do you think USJ stands for, anyway? Unexpected Ssssss… Ssss-yber… Jurisdiction!”

Very slowly Izuku turns his head to look over at Mashi, his expression quietly disbelieving. She looks back at him with a nervous, expectant smile. “Okay…” he breathes deeply, “Couple of things…”
“Yep I figured. Hit me,” Mashi nods, accepting that she had messed up.

“‘Cyber’ does not start with an ‘S’."

“Oh, shitfuck, I knew that!” the redhead curses at herself, cringing.

“And it’s Jurisdiction, not whatever you just said. Plus, USJ means Unforeseen Simulation Joint.”

“Sounds like they were stretching for something,” Mashi huffs, rolling her eyes.

They have to stop talking for a moment as they finally reach the park. They were doing volunteer experiments again, with the usual message sent out online, but this time it was only Izuku and Mashi. Inko hadn’t liked it too much, being asked to come into work when someone had called in sick with the flu, but they promised her they would be okay. They had done such a good job showing how trustworthy they were and it was in broad daylight, near the house, around familiar faces, and Izuku had a Taser in his hand now.

They set everything up nearby the playground equipment, Mashi disappearing at one point to clamber along the monkey bars before Izuku drags her back to help him. They greet a few familiar parents they’ve seen before at the park, Mashi makes faces at some of the babies in their strollers, and one baby throws a rattle straight into her face. She returns to Izuku’s side, pouting, while he grins at her.

“So what’s the plan, Zuzu?” Mashi eventually says, sitting on the wooden bench, legs crossed, a notepad in her hand. They have a few devices around them, this time also with a few cameras on tripods. Neko Nurse wasn’t just about doing a good job; it was about performance as well. It needed to be approachable.

“Okay, so, let’s run a few tests on how it moves before any volunteers get here,” the genius says, eyes on prepping the robotic cat. He has it set down to seem like it is sitting. “All I want you to do is take note of anything, and I mean anything, that may seem noteworthy.”

For a second Mashi is silent and Izuku looks back at her, worried. She has an eyebrow raised dubiously. “You sure I’m the best one for this?” she questions.

“Of course you are,” Izuku responds without hesitation, and then offers his friend a small smile when she looks at him. “You’re really observant, Mashi, more than you realize. You’re perfect for the job!”

Slowly a red tinge creeps up the redhead’s neck and she ducks her head, looking back down at the notepad, a smile on her face. “Yeah… okay. I won’t let you down!”

“Never thought you would,” Izuku keeps smiling, then turns back to the bot. He connects to it wirelessly with his Eye after a few seconds of finding the right signal in his brain to send.

Once connected he tells the Neko Nurse to power on and within a few seconds the whir of machinery can be heard and the cat bot’s eyes click open to show green lights. The bot goes through a few systems checks, Izuku overseeing it, before it stands up on its own and “stretches,” an action built into the machine to make it seem more realistic and approachable.

“Whoaaaaa!” Mashi says in amazement, flopping out of the bench to shuffle over, eyes big as she watches the cat come to life. She sits beside her friend on the ground, leaning forwards in amazement. “That is SO COOL! Zuzu! It’s alive! Holy shit!”

“It’s not alive,” Izuku laughs, nudging the girl beside him, smiling over at her. The Neko Nurse is
beginning to walk, motions fluid like a real cats. “It’s only running through basic motions for now. Can we focus on observations?”

“Oh. Oh right! Yeah!” Mashi is still grinning as she pulls up the notepad she had been given, flipping it open and beginning to scribble on the paper excitedly. Izuku sighs in relief and stands up to walk around the cat.

The Neko Nurse proves to move just fine. It can sit, jog, jump, lie down, and if knocked over can get back up. Its basic functions are perfect, recognition software doing exactly what Izuku needs it to. They are just about done with the necessary preparations and observations when someone calls out to Izuku.

“This is not what I was expecting at all,” comes a dry, rough voice and Izuku looks up. He’s standing up beside his invention while Mashi is sitting on the ground back where she started. Standing just down the park’s dirt path is a taller figure in all black save for some red sneakers. His hands are stuffed into his hoodie’s pockets and he’s slouched forward a little.

“You went from, what was it? Leeches? To cats. Aren’t you versatile.”

It takes a long second for Izuku to recognize the figure, but evidently Mashi figures it out quicker. She was always better with people, after all.

“HEY! It’s Sand Hands!” Mashi calls, pointing a finger at the figure. When Izuku shoots her a confused look she blinks and tries to explain. “Because he turned things to sand? With his hands?”

“He dissolved them, Mashi…” Izuku says slowly, brows furrowing, but Mashi just shrugs.

“Right! He dissolved them into sand!”

“No. No, see, he didn’t, because the particle size was more like silt, not sand—Wait… No I am not doing this. Not worth it,” the green-haired boy turns towards the figure who has come closer, standing in the grass a few feet away and just watching the back and forth with a mildly agitated look. “Sorry, sorry. Hello Tomura-san! I wasn’t expecting to see you here!” Izuku properly greets the older boy with a bright smile.

“I wasn’t expecting you’d remember me,” Tomura offers back, expression slowly morphing to something unreadable and almost a little suspicious.

“You left an impression,” Izuku admits, smile turning mildly nervous. He remembered a little bit about Tomura from their last meeting outside of his quirk. He had been an odd boy who had issues with heroes and a defensive, negative aura about him. Izuku had wanted to know more about the mysterious boy after he had left, intrigued and amazed, and now it seemed he was getting that chance.

“I’m surprised you’re here. Are you really just out doing errands again?” Izuku pushes when Tomura offers up no further information.

The pale boy is staring down at the Neko Nurse as it walks around the immediate area. “No, I saw your request for volunteers online again and came out for it,” he says dryly and he looks up at Izuku, head tilted and eyes shadowed by his hood. “I was expecting more Leech stuff. Not… this.”

“We do AAAAAALL KINDS of experiments!” Mashi calls over and she scrambles to get up as if she momentarily loses control of her limbs. When she’s up she comes trotting over, grinning wide and pressing against Izuku’s side. She seems a little tenser than usual, the green-haired boy notices, but then she is talking again.
“So you just, like… happened upon our request again?”

Tomura stares at the redhead for a long, silent moment as if he is trying to gauge how to feel about her. It isn’t an unusual reaction, considering who Mashi is, but the red gaze feels colder than usual. Izuku chews anxiously at his lip, his own body slowly tensing as well.

“I’ve been watching you, Midoriya Izuku,” the taller boy finally says, cold gaze turning to the smaller boy instead. Izuku’s eyes widen and one of Mashi’s hands latches onto his human arm, grip tight and steady. They stare back at Tomura, Izuku startled and frightened, Mashi glaring and defensive. The air turns thick and hot, a bead of sweat inching down Izuku’s back. Tomura stares right back, cold and harsh, head lowered so his face is cast in shadows.

It’s with a single blink that the older boy changes. Suddenly his lips are twitching and his eyes are squinting, then he’s snorting and throwing his head back to laugh, hood falling off. His smile is big, bigger than most, his chapped lips pulling in what looks like an uncomfortable way, but it’s a happy smile. Izuku and Mashi share a surprised and confused look before facing the pale boy again.

“Oh man, you should see your faces!” Tomura says as he comes down from his sudden burst of laughter, eyes still crinkled and large, pulling smile in place.

“W-what?” Izuku stutters, too confused to voice anything else.

“After that whole Leech thing I HAVE been keeping an eye out for you online, but relax. It’s only because I’m interested. Me and someone else, anyway. Who wouldn’t be?” Tomura explains, shrugging nonchalantly, eyes falling back to the Neko Nurse still walking around.

“Dude, fuck you! That was creepy as shit!” Mashi snaps, stepping away from Izuku a little and glaring at Tomura, but this time it’s not as dangerous a look. Not TOO dangerous, anyway. Izuku must agree with her, though. That had been really creepy.

“You said you and someone else? Who’s the other person?” Izuku asks, trying to shake off the heebie-jeebies still clinging to his skin.

“My Sensei,” Tomura replies and his red eyes begin to sparkle as he stands a little straighter. It catches Izuku’s eye and has the younger boy also straightening up, but more out of curiosity. Oh, so this was someone important to Tomura? “He rarely goes out, however, so you just get me.”

“Can we get a refund?” Mashi says dryly and Izuku elbows her, shooting her a glare.

“That’s a good one,” Tomura says, but there’s not as much mirth in his voice anymore, his smile tightening as he throws it at Mashi.

“Right, so…” the genius boy quickly cuts in, taking a step towards Tomura, offering a smile, “You came to check out the experiment? Maybe volunteer some?”

The pale boy turns to look at Izuku again, the edge to his stance while addressing Mashi going away quickly. So quickly it makes one wonder if it was there at all. “Yes, though I’m not sure how to volunteer with a… cat.”

“This is Neko Nurse,” Izuku begins, smile growing big and excited as he begins to introduce his newest creation. Mashi beside him decides to play Vanna White, making big hand motions at the bot, showing it off while Izuku commentates. “It is, to put simply, a mobile first-aid kit, though it has multiple other abilities. Neko Nurse has a series of chemicals inside its body that it can combine in multiple ways to create a huge variety of medicines, tonics, antiseptics, and so on. It is also able to help distressed individuals, either after a shocking event, or someone dealing with a panic attack or
psychological breakdown.”

“That’s… a lot,” Tomura says slowly, eying the cat as it just keeps walking around, Mashi trying to follow it to keep “presenting” it. “This going to go to the heroes or something?” The question has an edge to it that Izuku doesn’t like and the green-haired boy looks to the other sadly.

“Yes, but the majority of them I’d like to just… go around town. Help the small things heroes can’t get to. Help people that aren’t in ‘mortal’ danger, but still need help.”

For a second something flashes over Tomura’s face. Some mixture of sadness, surprise, and anger, but it’s gone quickly and the boy is looking away from the Neko Nurse. “That’s… good.”

“I hope so,” Izuku nods, voice quiet and gentle, uncertain of whatever was going through the pale boy’s head. Tomura was haunted. By what, Izuku didn’t know, but he could see it now. Something had happened and it was lingering… Could Izuku help? He certainly wanted to.

“So what am I supposed to do with this thing?” The snap has Izuku shaking out his head in surprise and looking properly at Tomura.

“Oh! Well… one second, let me put it into work mode.”

Izuku turns back to look at the Neko Nurse, his Eye flashing colors as he connects with the bot. Mashi has stopped her previous antics and returned to stand by the two boys, her arms crossed as she waits. As Izuku slowly works out the proper commands in his brain he hears his friend address Tomura again.

“How the fuck are ya wearing that hoodie right now, anyway, huh?”

“It’s comfortable,” Tomura says stiffly after a beat.

“You, Sand Hands, are crazy!”

There is no response after that, only tense silence, and Izuku tries to hurry along.

When the Neko Nurse is finally put into the proper mode Izuku looks back at Tomura with a grin. “Okay! First, call out to it.”

There’s a pause, Izuku and Mashi stepping back to watch and take notes on the next event, Tomura seeming to consider what he was doing, before he finally calls, “Neko Nurse!”

The robotic cat perks up as if it were alive, ears followed by its head turning towards Tomura, and then it is getting up and jogging over. It sits down in front of the pale boy and looks up at his face. “Hello sir, madam, or otherwise,” a feminine, robotic voice comes from the cat, seeming to surprise the human it is addressing. “You have called to me. Do you require my assistance?”

Tomura looks down at the robotic cat, then glances over at Izuku and Mashi. Both kids are grinning like fools and they both offer a thumbs up, silently telling him to go on.

“I don’t know,” Tomura says at length, turning his eyes back down towards the cat. He seems slightly agitated now, either at not knowing what to do or at being put in this position at all, it’s hard to tell.

“That is okay,” says Neko Nurse, “With your permission may I do a full body scan of you?”

Another glance at the two kids before Tomura is shaking his head in disbelief and looking skyward.
“Sure, fine.”

“Please reply with yes or n—“

“Yes!”

“Thank you. Scan commencing.” For a second the robot’s eyes begin to glow red as it looks up and down Tomura’s body before it’s eyes return to normal and it is looking up at the boy’s face again. “Scan complete. I have analyzed that you are suffering from sleep deprivation, mild dehydration, mild starvation, and high anxiety. Please, take this for later tonight to assist in sleep and I would recommend stopping for breakfast, lunch, or dinner soon.”

The Neko Nurse whirs for a second, chemicals being picked inside its body based off of Tomura’s scans, mixing them together and compressing them into a solidified form. A little compartment opens up on the bot’s chest with the sound of a jingling bell and Tomura kneels down to take the little pill presented to him, brows furrowed.

“Please also seek assistance from a trusted doctor to determine long term solutions for your sleep and anxiety. I hope I have been of assistance to you.”

With its duty seemingly over the Neko Nurse looks forward and stares blankly ahead, waiting for further commands or duties.

“It’s still a work in progress, obviously,” Izuku says cheerfully as he walks over, turning Neko Nurse off and looking up at Tomura with a smile.

“THAT is a work in progress?” the boy asks, baffled and uncertain what to do, his right hand held up uncertainly with his new sleep aid between his two fingers.

“Well, yeah,” Izuku nods, head tilting towards his creation. “Right now it gives just about anybody as many pills as they want, which is a big no, no. It also is unable to determine time and it is limited in how you can respond to it. The voice is also kind of cold, if I’m being honest. Approachability is a must, here.”

“Right… I should have known,” Tomura mumbles with a very pointed eye roll. “What about my scan, huh? What if I don’t want a scan of me floating around?”

“Already deleted,” Izuku quickly supplies, seeing the mounting anxiety in the taller boy, and he raises his hands just slightly to hopefully keep him calm. “When Neko Nurse is done with a patient it deletes all personal information for confidentiality.”

Tomura takes a deep, wavering breath and looks down at the cat, his eyes thin. “I don’t think Sensei is going to really care about this,” he mumbles, but it seems to mostly be to himself. It still hits Izuku like a smack. He tries to tell himself he isn’t doing this for the praise, but that still stings the tiniest bit. “Where’s your friend anyway?”

Izuku straightens up in surprise, brows rising and eyes widening. His friend? Mashi? Now that he mentioned it, it had been suspiciously quiet for a few minutes now.

The genius boy looks back where Mashi had last been, but she isn’t there. He looks around him at the surrounding area but sees no sign of her. She’s a hard to miss girl, too… Izuku turns his gaze back to Tomura, whose head is tilted and his brows furrowed, a question in his expression but nothing more.

“When did you see her last?” Izuku asks, a waver in his voice he hadn’t been prepared for. Where
was Mashi? Where had she gone? She had just been there. Had the monster shown up again? Had she been snatched? Was she hurt? Wouldn’t Izuku have heard something though? Had he failed? He was the only one that could see that thing, after all.

He doesn’t realize he’s hyperventilating until Tomura is stepping forward and bumping his knuckles against Izuku’s forehead. “Calm down,” is all the other boy says, but it hardly helps.

“Oh, calm down? Calm down? Yes, let me magically just make myself feel better with a flick of my wand!” Izuku snaps and immediately cringes, looking away and trying to catch his breath. “I’m sorry,” he chokes out, shaking his head viciously. “I’m sorry, I—”

“ICE CREAM, BITCHES!!”

The scream has Izuku’s mood flipping right back to furious and his head snaps up to glare in the direction of it. Mashi is walking back towards them with a cardboard tray with three ice cream cones in it. She’s grinning big, chest puffed out, her messy braid bouncing with every, chipper step.

“WHERE DID YOU GO?!” Izuku roars in a way he never has before, making the redhead stop midstep, eyes widening in shock.

“Uh… To get ice cream?” Mashi says slowly, pointing back towards the line of buildings across the street from the park. One of them is a bakery that serves ice cream during the summer, a popular place for the kids in the park.

“Why?” Tomura questions, sounding baffled and not at all angry like Izuku was. And why would he? He had no reason to worry about the idiot redhead. He didn’t know about the monster that they’d fought.

“The Neko Nurse said Sand Hands was thirsty and hungry? I thought it’d be a good idea,” Mashi mumbles, head down and looking up through her hair. She looked crestfallen and with a shuddering gasp Izuku tries to relax. She hadn’t been snatched. She wasn’t hurt. She just had terrible timing…

“You went and got ice cream…” he repeats, mostly to himself, and Mashi nods.

“You just… I got scared…” he whispers, takes another breath, then offers a smile towards the redhead. “That was really considerate of you, Mashi.”

Mashi sighs in relief, happy to no longer be in trouble, her kicked puppy look going away as she turns towards Tomura and hops up to him, holding out the tray in both hands. “Take your pick! I ain’t got no clue what flavor you like,” she says cheerfully, indicating the vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry options on the waffle cones.

When nothing more happens Mashi tilts her head and gives Tomura a closer look. He’s silent, just staring down at the ice cream, his face a mixture of shock, suspicion, and sadness.

“Are you okay, Tomura-san?” Izuku says softly, stepping a little closer towards the pale boy, brows curved in worry, his right hand raising like he’s going to lay it on the other boy’s arm but stopping in the air.

“You… got ME… ice cream,” the other boy says softly, voice much more emotionless than his face.

“Fuck yeah I did! The Neko Nurse said you needed it, so I went and go it! Used my own money and everything!” Mashi announces cheerfully.
“I’ll pay you back,” Izuku whispers.

“Thank you, I’m so poor!” Mashi says just as cheerfully, though she does make a small face of emotional pain.

“That’s…” Tomura begins to say something, but stops himself, and suddenly his face is shutting off from the world and he’s reaching out to pick up the vanilla ice cream cone. He eyes it for a long moment, holding the cone so he doesn’t dissolve it, one pinky out. After a long silence, Mashi picking up the chocolate cone and Izuku taking the strawberry one, he takes a lick and nods. “It’s good.”

He offers no thank you, but Mashi doesn’t seem to mind, just grinning, proud of herself, then turning away to go retrieve her notepad she’d left behind. Izuku stares at Tomura in silence, just holding his ice cream cone while the other silently eats.

This boy… he was… something. Haunted, for sure, creepy on occasion, apparently not above pulling jokes on people he hardly knew, and just in general a massive mystery. Izuku didn’t understand him at all, but a little, nagging part of him really wanted to.

“You know,” Izuku is startled by the voice, jumping when he realizes the other boy is addressing him. “You’re going to need to test your cat doctor in real situations. Dire situations, even.”

Izuuku glances back at the Neko Nurse, his brows furrowed, and slowly he nods. “Yes, eventually I will, once I get to a good enough stage. It’ll be harder finding that latter condition, however.”

“I can help.”

The smaller boy blinks up at Tomura, eyes widening, not realizing how close the other had gotten. “What—“

“I’m from a… less than savory part of town. Just the way it is, right? I know great locations to bring your little robot,” Tomura cuts him off, staring hard down at Izuku, who can only stare back in wonder. “It won’t be pleasant, but you want your robot to be able to deal with even the worst case scenarios, don’t you?”

“Of course I d—“

“Great!” Suddenly Izuku is being greeted by that creepy, too large smile and he can’t help but shrink away. “Take this,” something – a piece of paper? – is being shoved into Izuku’s robotic hand, and he flinches from the sudden contact. “That’s my online contact info. Let me know when you’re ready to seriously test that thing of yours.”

One moment Tomura is too far in Izuku’s space, the next he’s backing up, still grinning, but much more subdued. “I better head out,” he says loudly, eyes glancing over the green-haired boy’s shoulder, and Izuku glances back to see Mashi returning, guiltily trying to wipe off a drop of ice cream from her notepad.

“Seriously?” the redhead questions, then shrugs as she settles at Izuku’s right side, bumping his prosthetic in greeting, and his fist tightens around the folded slip of paper in his hand. “Eh, well, it was cool seein’ you again, I guess.”

“You as well… I guess,” Tomura gives Mashi a slightly colder look, but doesn’t seem too agitated. He flips his hood back onto his head and turns to leave, licking absently at his ice cream. “See you around, Midoriya. Mashi.”
“Yeah… bye,” Izuku mumbles, watching Tomura walk away, his own feet glued to the spot.

“Friendly advice? Invest in chapstick!” Mashi screams after him, properly startling Izuku out of his stupor and he nudges her, trying hard not to laugh. “Like… A LOT of it!”

“MASHI!”

Chapter End Notes

I think this may be the longest chapter yet! Hot damn! Rewrote it three entire times!

Hope y'all enjoyed it and I hope to write the next one soon!

Chapter song: Marianas Trench - Here's to the Zeros
The Show (Part One)

Chapter Notes

Well, the original rendition of the chapter got incredibly long, so I split it in half!

There is now an official If I Only Had A Heart blog right here!

And some art by akcugrai

Big shout out to spinlizardsplayinggta for helping beta this chapter!

“T’m going to throw up. I feel like I’m going to throw up. Then die. I’m going to die. One hundred percent expire right here. Donate my organs to the hospital than burn me, please.”

“Damn it, Deku, would you chill out?” Katsuki snaps where he is pressed close between the other boy and the truck door. Haganehato Mottai offered to use her big truck to help transport the kids and Izuku’s inventions to the UA campus some time ago. Inko would have come, but she couldn’t fit, what with all three kids pressed in tight to the front seat while Mottai drives to their right.

The months leading up to the UA exhibit had been filled with experiments, inventions, and jittery excitement. It had been stressful not telling anyone about it, or keeping certain pieces of information to themselves in Shinsou and Inazumi’s cases, but now it was happening and Izuku’s anxiety was betraying him.

“Kacchan, I want you to have my All Might merchandise. All of it. It’s yours. Mashi, you can have all my video games and pop culture stuff,” Izuku continues, acting like Katsuki had never said anything.

“Oh shit, maybe we shoulda killed him earlier,” Mashi deadpans, leaning around Izuku to smirk over at Katsuki. The blond snorts and Izuku smacks at the girl’s arm, shooting her a glare. She shrugs at him and leans back, smooshed between Izuku and her mother. Even Mashi, with her massive patience for Izuku’s freak-outs, had her limits. She would never snap at him, never get angry, but the sass levels were certainly escalating.

Not even five minutes into the two-hour-long drive to UA’s campus and Izuku had begun to mutter and, to put it simply, freak out. He was actually going to his dream school, he had been INVITED to his dream school, to show off his inventions. They were all excited, energy bouncing around the car, but quickly Izuku’s energy had turned dark and worrisome.

What if he messed up? What if he couldn’t speak? What if they didn’t take him seriously? What if they didn’t like him? What if he destroyed all his chances of ever getting into the hero world and ended up falling into a deep depression, quit building, and ended up a homeless and broken man with no one to blame but himself?

“No sir, none of that,” comes a strong voice and a big, callused hand lays on top of Izuku’s curls. Mottai ruffles his hair, properly messing up the nice braid Inko had put it into, and though she keeps her attention forward on the road, she cracks a smile and glances down at the panicking boy. “No
“gettin’ stuck in that big ole head o’ yours. You guys’re gonna do great!”

“You don’t know that!” Izuku nearly cries, frantically trying to fix his hair.

“Sure we do!” Mashi grins as her mother brings her hand back to the steering wheel.

“We have no evidence to support that claim,” Izuku retorts, falling back on the language he used while doing a scientific report or for some of his experiments. It was familiar and relaxing. Well… familiar. Nothing was relaxing right now.

“We’re fucking awesome, that’s your evidence,” Katsuki barks, arms crossed over his chest, leaning more against the door of the truck as they finally drove into the city. His red eyes were glued to the window, a slight sparkle to them as he watched the buildings go by.

“That isn’t an actual fact, it’s an opinion and—Mashi please let me fix your hair! Please!” Izuku’s attention moved from one childhood friend to the other, eyes desperate as he takes in the many loose strands of hair from the redhead’s otherwise nice hairdo.

“Nah, it’s cool,” Mashi shrugs.

“I am begging you here!” Izuku near cries.

They were all dressed up for the event. This was big and after some messages that came through Aizawa they knew a lot of executives and corporate people would be there. This was a chance to show off their tech and hopefully get their names out there as an inventing team and future heroes in training.

With the money the Midoriya’s were saving up they’d been able to get the three kids new outfits for the occasion. Izuku’s growing hair sat in a heavy braid against his back and he wore a nice, white suit, buttoned at the front, with a black shirt underneath, a bright blue tie – tied by his mother this go round – and dark brown loafers.

Mashi’s hair had also been braided and then bobby-pinned into a curl against the back of her head. She, as expected, refused to wear a dress, so she had also gotten a suit, a black one that she kept unbuttoned with a bright green button up, a black bowtie, and nice black boots.

Katsuki’s hair didn’t look much different than it ever did, there really wasn’t much one could do with the untamable hair, but his suit seemed to stand out the most. The pants were black, but the jacket was orange, suede of all things, with a slightly shiny black collar, a white button up, a black tie, and black oxfords.

They all looked spectacular, even if Mashi’s hair kept falling loose, and they hoped they’d make a good impression. When they got to the more labor-intensive demonstrations they did plan to change into more appropriate clothes, but for now they were dressed for success.

At least Izuku hoped it would be success. He hated all the waiting, his nerves just about ready to shoot him through the roof of the car. He tried to remember that Aizawa, Hizashi, and Nemuri would be there to support him. He tried to remember that Mashi and Katsuki would be by his side the entire time. He tried to remember everyone was going to fully understand he was a child unfamiliar with any of this.

He was going to be okay.
He was NOT OKAY.

Izuku nearly threw up for real when he saw the UA building come into view, the pure excitement and nervousness mixing together in a cacophony of noise in his head and his gut. It only got worse as they got closer and Mottai finally pulled the truck up to the front gates, parking the car. There were people standing in front to greet them.

Three were familiar – Eraserhead, Present Mic, and Midnight in full costume – but there were a few more Izuku had certainly never met. All the heroes were familiar, Izuku had sections in his notebook for all of them, and there were a few businessmen as well, but it just made the mishmash of excited anxiety grow worse. He wanted to meet all of them, wanted to ask so many questions, but at the same time the awareness of how ridiculous he might look crept up his very spine.

“Don’t nerd out on us, Deku,” Katsuki hisses, hand already gripping the door handle, ready to hurry out.

“Oh, now it’s worse,” Izuku ducks his head, eyes wide, lips in a tight line.

Mashi reaches over him to smack Katsuki’s arm none too gently. “Fucker, watch your shit mouth!” she snaps and Katsuki rolls his eyes at her.

“He needed to hear it,” he snorts, shaking his head and turning back to the door, pushing it open.

“Literally did NOT,” Izuku groans but suddenly his left, human hand is being taken and he’s pulled to the side. Katsuki drags him out of the truck with him quickly and they find themselves hidden away, the truck between them and the entry gate and all those heroes.

“Yes you did. Do not nerd out. Do not show weakness. We are in their turf now and we need to show we are fucking worth their attention and respect!” Katsuki jabs his pointer finger into Izuku’s chest, an intense look in his eyes. They had been close in the truck, but with Izuku’s freak outs he hadn’t noticed how his friends might be handling things. Now, this close and momentarily shaken from his own head he saw the stiffness in his friend’s shoulders and the very minute shake to his lips.

Was Katsuki telling Izuku all of this, or himself?

Either way, it was a decent enough pep talk coming from the explosive boy, and for now… for now Izuku would accept it. So he nods his head, setting his shoulders despite their shaking, and tries to take on a serious expression. No messing around, this was serious.

“Or, like… these guys are fully aware we’re fuckin’ twelve and probably don’t give a shit?” Mashi says, leaning out of the open door, one of her brows raised as she looks at the boys. Izuku clears his throat at that, shoulders immediately falling. Right… This wasn’t life or death either.

“Hey! I’m thirteen, fuckface!” Katsuki snaps back at the girl as she fully hops out of the truck. She sets her hands on her hips and sneers back at him.

“Congratulations,” she says dryly.

“You’re a little snippier than usual,” Izuku observes. Had his fretting really worn down her patience that much?

She turns her head towards the genius, eyes still pretty sarcastic, and replies immediately, “I’m terrified out of my fuckin’ mind so I’m masking it with sarcasm and witty remarks. And yes, I wish I was kidding.”
“I wouldn’t call them witty,” Katsuki smirks, earning another look from Mashi who then, as form of response, blows a raspberry at him.

“Good to see you all so lively!” The comment makes all three kids yelp and look up in shock. Standing on the top of the truck is a tiny, familiar figure smiling down at them.

“Shit… that’s Principal Nedzu,” Katsuki hisses in awe and Izuku remembers this is the blonde’s first time meeting the UA principal. Honestly, despite having already met him, the spike of giddiness still erupts through his own body.

“Hello young man, you must be Bakugou Katsuki,” Nedzu smiles at Katsuki and Izuku hears the boy make a tiny, itty bitty noise when the principal addresses him by name.

“Yes, that’s me!” Despite his obvious excitement Katsuki’s voice is strong and confident, ready to take on anyone.

“Well, it is very nice to meet you,” Nedzu nods his head like a small bow in greeting.

“Do you need help getting down from there?” Mashi questions, brows furrowed, one hand up to block the morning sun.

“I got him,” comes a rough voice as a hero comes walking around the truck, coat billowing in the wind at his entrance, “feet” making clicking noises with each step. The, quite frankly creepy, mask of the hero hardly bothers Izuku as he all but vibrates at the appearance, realizing who he is immediately.

Ectoplasm reaches up and easily lifts and moves Principal Nedzu back to the ground. The principal straightens his suit but Izuku’s attention is entirely on the hero now in his presence.

“Oh my gosh… Ectoplasm! The Clone Hero!” he squeals, but stumbles when Katsuki quickly elbows him in the side. He looks back at his friend, perturbed, but at his friend’s glare he straightens up and takes a deep breath, trying to calm down. “I am a really big fan,” Izuku continues, more in control of himself. He hears Katsuki snort behind him but ignores that.

This was Ectoplasm! An amazing hero with an amazing quirk… and amazing similarities to Izuku. He could see the prosthetics under the coat replacing the pro hero’s legs and he felt a lump build in his throat. They were hardly high tech at all, even high end prosthetics on the market couldn’t claim much, but that made it all the more amazing.

This hero was like Izuku and he had made it.

He was amazing!

Ectoplasm grins down at him… probably… Actually Izuku can’t tell, but he’s going to go with grinning, and the green-haired boy giggles. Actually giggles. “I’ve heard a lot about your accomplishments, Midoriya-san,” the pro hero says and Izuku could melt, he really could. “Would a few clones help in moving some of your gear inside?”

“Yes!” Katsuki is the one to reply and Izuku looks back at him, one eyebrow arched. Mashi is giving the blonde a similar look to his side. Right, as tough and cool as he was trying to look, Katsuki loved heroes too. Almost as much as Izuku.

Both Ectoplasm and Principal Nedzu give a laugh at the excitement. “Very well, then,” the pro hero nods and turns away.
“Why don’t you three go introduce yourselves to everyone while we get everything inside,” Nedzu suggests, smiling pleasantly at the kids and waving a paw at them as if to shoo them off.

“Definitely!” Mashi exclaims, grinning eagerly. While she didn’t have the same hero fever that Izuku and Katsuki had she still seemed eager to socialize to the best of her ability. She begins to run towards the front of the truck, turning around it quickly, but then pokes her head back around to look at her friends. “One of you guys come with incase I say the wrong word!”

“Do you mean when?” Katsuki smirks, hands going into his pockets as he turns to follow the redhead, also eager to meet all of the heroes and begin getting his name out there.

“I hope you choke on a hot chip,” Mashi deadpans, glaring at the blonde as he joins her. His smirk turns into a sneer and he shoves her as they both disappear around the truck.

Izuku doesn’t join them, though, not yet. Instead he turns back towards Nedzu, smiling weakly down at him.

“Principal Nedzu… I wanted to say thank you for this opportunity. I have no idea how I could ever make it up to you,” he says, his voice a little breathless as he thanks the amazing animal that was making this entire thing possible.

Nedzu laughs gently, smiling back at Izuku, his paws held behind his back. “You can repay me by becoming an amazing hero and saving lives. How does that sound?”

The words make Izuku choke and he has to duck his head and look away so Nedzu doesn’t see the tears welling up in his eye. “That—” Izuku stops himself when his voice cracks. He takes a deep breath and shakes himself out. “That sounds good,” he finally manages.

Izuku jumps and looks up when he feels a small paw lay on his human arm. He looks at Principal Nedzu, whose face has become soft and sincere. “You are a remarkable young man, Midoriya-kun, I could tell that when we first met, and you have done so much already. It would be a waste to wait until high school for the hero agencies to see what you can do.”

This time Izuku can’t reply, too choked up, but he does manage a watery smile and a strong nod. He had never asked for this opportunity, but Principal Nedzu was giving it to him anyway and he couldn’t be more grateful.

“Thank you for your help, Ectoplasm!” Izuku calls when he finds his voice again and begins to follow after his friends’ path.

The hero, surrounded by a few of his clones who are working on moving boxes of Izuku’s gear from the back of the truck, turns and “smiles” back at the green-haired boy. “I look forward to seeing everything you do, Midoriya-san,” he replies, nodding. “After all, ‘when you’re quirkless the possibilities are endless.’” Ectoplasm offers a wink with that then turns back to the task at hand.

Izuku’s brows furrow in confusion.

That saying sounded familiar, like déjà vu, but from a dream. A blur of a memory, perhaps, from long ago, distorted by time.

He shakes his head. He could take that apart at a later date. For now he had heroes to meet.

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Mashi and Katsuki are already talking excitedly to the group of pro heroes and businessmen by the
time Izuku makes his way over. Katsuki is trying to keep up a cool façade, focusing mostly on the heroes, but he can’t stop grinning. Mashi, surprisingly, has zeroed in on Present Mic instead of talking to everyone, the two yammering at each other animatedly.

“There you are.” The voice startles Izuku, focus moving from his friends to the man now standing by his side. Immediately Izuku is smiling brightly up at Aizawa, the man looking tired, his hands in his pockets, half-lidded eyes down on the green-haired boy. “You all look… dapper,” Aizawa notes, glancing over at Mashi and Katsuki as well.

“Thanks,” Izuku smiles proudly, straightening the collar of his jacket. He felt nice dressed up like this. He had never had the opportunity nor funds before.

The pro hero hums in response and looks over his shoulder. “Before you go meeting everyone else, someone asked me if they could speak to you first,” Aizawa says, looking back down at Izuku.

“Someone? Who?”

Aizawa tilts his head slightly, mouth hidden by his capture weapon, considering how to reply to that. “An acquaintance,” he decides to settle on.

“A friend!” comes a strong, joyful voice as a man in white armor bumps shoulders with the dark, tired man. Izuku’s gaze turns to him and for a split second he can’t identify him, shock filling up all the space in his head like a slap to the face. It hardly lasts a second, his eyes widening comically when he recognizes the hero outfit.

“I-I-I-Ingenium!” Izuku stutters, his breathing quickening and heart pounding in his chest. This… Was this for real?!

“Hey there, buddy,” Ingenium takes off his helmet and tucks it under an arm. The other then raises in a wave and his face lights up with a bright, familiar smile. A safe, heroic smile.

Aizawa glances between the two for a moment before looking at Ingenium with furrowed brows. “You know him?” he questions. Apparently he hadn’t been given the memo, which made sense… Neither Inko nor Izuku liked to talk much about The Incident, and he never pushed. He knew it was hard, knew it was traumatic. It was enough that he knew what Izuku had to live with everyday of his life, he didn’t need to know where it came from.

“Sure do! Midoriya here is the second bravest kid I know! Right after my little brother, anyway. Sorry, he’s just gotta come firs—oof!” Ingenium is cut off as Izuku rushes forward and collides with his chest, hugging his arms around his torso tightly and crying loudly into his armor. “Aw, kid…” Ingenium says quietly, dropping his helmet so he can wrap an arm around Izuku and squeeze him back, the other hand coming up to ruffle his green curls.

Izuku can’t believe it. Can’t believe this is actually happening. It had been so long ago, half his life ago, when Ingenium had rescued him from a crumbled, ruined building, giving him a second chance at life. It had been a dark, awful time, but Ingenium had been a brilliant light in the whole ordeal. Izuku had only met him once while in the hospital and had always looked back with guilt that he couldn’t have thanked the hero properly.

And now here he was.

“You saved my life,” Izuku wheezes against Ingenium, unable to pull away and show the mess his face most certainly would be. He didn’t care about keeping up appearances right now. He was a twelve-year-old kid meeting his own, personal hero again for the first time in six years. He was
allowed to cry. "You saved my life," he repeats with more emphasis, almost in disbelief, like this had all happened yesterday and was fresh in his mind again and he couldn’t believe he had survived. "Thank you!"

“You saved him?” questions Aizawa off to the side, his voice sounding a bit more surprised and thoughtful than his usual, bored tone, volume lowered.

Ingenium ruffles Izuku’s hair again and chuckles solemnly. “I did. A hero battle dropped a building on the poor kid. He did most the work, though.” Izuku snorts at that, the tears beginning to pull back and he can breathe again. “He was the one that held on. Bravest and scariest thing I’d ever seen,” Ingenium continues.

There’s a long pause that follows before Aizawa lets out a gust of air like a punch to the gut and says quietly, “He has a habit of doing that.”

When Izuku finally manages to pull away enough to look up he looks over towards Aizawa first, seeing the man staring back at him with an expression he can’t quite place. He looks thoughtful and… like he was honored, but not for himself. He was smiling just a tiny bit, too. It made Izuku feel overwhelmed but happy.

“Zuzu scares the crap outta us all the time!” Mashi’s voice is cutting in and Izuku looks backwards. The redhead and Katsuki are approaching, both giving Ingenium varying looks of curiosity and amazement.

“He’s certainly something else,” Ingenium laughs brightly, the arm that had been hugging Izuku moving to gently lift the genius’s right arm. “This is amazing, by the way! You replaced this?”

A blush creeps up Izuku’s cheeks as he looks away bashfully, smiling and flexing his robotic arm. “I did.”

“When he was nine!” Mashi adds excitedly, grinning from ear to ear.

“By himself…” Aizawa also comments, not sounding quite so happy. In fact, now he is frowning, displeased at the memory. While the Arm incident had hardly been as bad as the Eye and Spine attachments, it had still been a rather stressful time for a lot of people.

“I was there!” Mashi huffs, pouting over at Aizawa.

“That’s hardly better,” Katsuki sneers over at her, rolling his eyes when she pouts only deeper. He hadn’t been present for the whole thing, had been banned from the Midoriya household at the time, but had heard plenty about it later.

“You guys are a hoot,” Ingenium chuckles as finally Izuku steps back towards his friends, eyes stuck on the speed hero. His chest felt light and twisted all at once, his whole being buzzing.

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“Well… Principal Nedzu sent out a few messages to some pro heroes about this event. Said we could come and see a young genius showing off the tech of tomorrow, maybe offer internships or deals if we wanted. When he said WHO you were, well, how could I resist?” Ingenium explains, smiling brightly, before his eyes widen and his mouth forms a small “O” as he remembers something. “Right! How could I forget? I brought a surprise guest, too!”

Izuku’s head tilts in curiosity at that, brows furrowing. Katsuki mumbles a quiet, “I hate surprises,” behind him while Mashi begins bouncing excitedly.
Ingenium grins even brighter than before, looking eager over something, and then turns to yell back over his shoulder, “Okay Tenya-kun! You can come over now!”

The last thing Izuku expects is a mini version of Ingenium to come rushing over, his whole body moving robotically, at an unnatural speed that leaves a cloud of dirt in his wake. He is also wearing nice clothes, similar to the businessmen, but he has to be close to Izuku, Katsuki, and Mashi’s age. Instead of dress pants he has on nice shorts to give room for the exhaust pipes sticking out of his calves, he had on rectangular glasses, and… well… he just looks like a tiny man.

He’s taller than all three of the other kids and comes to a stop right in front of Izuku, between he and Ingenium. “Hello there, Midoriya Izuku-san!” the young man says firmly and clearly, leaving no room for misunderstanding. Izuku jumps in surprise at the volume, focused entirely on the newcomer, not noticing Ingenium’s big smile.

“Uh, hello…?” Izuku offers slowly, leaning away a little, concerned for his safety. He wasn’t worried this boy would try to hurt him, Ingenium had brought him, but he seemed very… passionate. Like maybe he’d get too excited and hit something by mistake.

“Hello!” the boy repeats and suddenly his arm is raised, moving from the shoulder, and a hand is presented to Izuku. “My name is Iida Tenya! I have heard about you from my big brother and if my big brother sees you so highly than so shall I!”

Izuku blinks at the hand held straight out at him, a little too high to shake comfortably. Slowly he raises his right hand to shake anyway and can’t help but think his actual, robotic parts move less robotically than this boy.

“Tenya-kun, relax,” Ingenium says but he sounds like he’s on the verge of laughter. Right… Ingenium had mentioned a younger brother six years ago. This must be him.

“No, no…” Mashi whispers, her voice breaking a little, “He’s perfect the way he is.” Izuku looks over to her, a brow arched, and sees she has her hands partially over her grinning mouth, trying very, very hard not to laugh.

“What is up with this guy…?” Katsuki whispers, his own brows furrowed and eyes wide in disbelief and irritation at the noise.

“It’s nice to meet you, Iida-kun,” Izuku says, turning back towards the newcomer. The little brother of Ingenium, probably had a similar if not identical quirk to his brother based on the engines in his legs, and had an incredibly… intense presence about him.

“Hi there! I’m Haganehato Mashi, but call me Mashi! It’s better. That’s Fire Cracker over there. Don’t mind him, he was dropped as a child,” Mashi greets, stepping directly up to Izuku’s right side, grinning more joyously than necessary at Iida.

“Bakugou Katsuki,” Katsuki snaps, glaring at Mashi as he too steps up to Izuku’s left side, his arms crossed and scowling. “Stop with the stupid nicknames.”

“Only when you do,” Mashi smiles sweetly back, cackling when Katsuki only growls and turns away from her.

The new boy immediately snaps his arms to his sides and bows deeply from the hip over and over again at speeds Izuku worries he’ll end up pulling something. Or give himself a headache…

“Hello Haganehato Mashi! Hello Bakugou Katsuki! It is very nice to make your acquaintance! I have heard you are integral to the demonstrations today?” Iida replies as he finally stands up straight.
“Hell yeah we are,” Katsuki straightens up his back a little, head held a little higher, sizing Iida up more closely. His red eyes scan the other boy’s form, trying to determine what possible threat he may pose in… whatever Katsuki has running through his mind.

Iida pauses, mouth twisting slightly at Katsuki’s language, but doesn’t deem it quite bad enough to comment. “I look forward to it, then!” he goes on, just as cheerful and loud as before.

“Oh my god,” Mashi whispers, “Can we keep him?” Izuku smacks lightly at her arm, trying not to smile too big at her obvious entertainment that seemed to be Iida Tenya.

“Speaking of…” Aizawa cuts in, drawing their attentions to where he stands beside Ingenium, looking just as tired and emotionally disconnected as usual. “We should head onto campus and get this started.”

Ingenium nods. “Right! Don’t want to keep anybody waiting. Come on, Tenya-kun. We can talk to them later,” the armored pro hero smiles brightly one last time before he slips his helmet back on and waits for his little brother.

“Of course, nii-san!” Iida nods, movements snappy. “I will see you all inside!” he says to Izuku and his friends. It is only when he smiles now that Izuku realizes he hadn’t been smiling this whole time, an intense, serious expression forced onto his young features. Though he seemed to have hit puberty a little early, he still had enough baby fat to make the adult expression comical.

“I love him,” Mashi says the second the brothers are out of earshot.

“I fucking don’t,” Katsuki growls, glaring after the pair. “What the hell was up with him, acting like that? Was he trying to impress somebody? He think he’s better than us?!”

“The way Ingenium says it, that’s how he always acts,” Aizawa says, pulling out some eye drops and applying some generously. “It’s tiring to watch,” he sighs.

“He’s like the human embodiment of when you haven’t slept so long you cycle back to hyper!” Mashi chirps and finally their little group begins walking as well, grabbing a few smaller boxes of Izuku’s gear as they go.

“He’s like a Bop It and a calculator fused into a person,” Katsuki huffs and despite his obvious, irritated tone Mashi laughs at it.

“A friend-shaped person!” the redhead chortles loudly, laughter bright and head thrown back. “Oh my god I love him so much! I want to be his friend so bad!

“I thought he was rectangle-shaped,” Katsuki snarks, smirking, while Izuku tries not to laugh too much. It was true, their new acquaintance was certainly a character that would be the subject of conversation for some time, and he did seem very friendly, but Izuku had hardly gotten to talk to him. He would love to do so later.

At least Katsuki and Mashi were getting along.

“He had the personality of a tiny dog greeting their human when they come home!” Mashi sighs dramatically.
“But the body of a robot…” Katsuki rolls his eyes. “Hey, Deku! Take him apart for us and tell us what’s up with him would’ya!”

“I am not autopsying a random, and altogether very nice, person,” Izuku deadpans, but can’t hide his small smile.

“You kids have weird conversations…” an Ectoplasm clone comments as he passes by, making Izuku squeak and blush. Well… he wasn’t wrong.

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“I-hello, everyone,” Izuku begins, voice higher than he would like it as he looks over the small gathering of heroes and business representatives. They’re all watching him. Staring into his soul.

They had moved to a field on the campus with plenty of room to set up his gear. It looked to originally be used for track and field activities, but most of the equipment had been moved out, replaced now with a few tables for Izuku to lay out his first group of inventions.

The first round of presentations would mostly be small and non-combative, meaning Katsuki and Mashi would be sitting out, and Izuku was beginning to regret that decision. Mostly because he wished they were up here with him to support him as he spoke, but also because they were standing in the crowd, to the side, with Mottai, Aizawa, Hizashi, and Nemuri. Mottai had her phone up to film, probably for Inko later, and Mashi and Hizashi are giving him two thumbs up with matching grins.

Not really helping at all.

“Yes, hello…” Izuku says a little quieter, swallowing. If he just got going maybe the momentum would help? “My name is Midoriya Izuku… But, you probably already knew that,” he whispers the last part, hands fidgeting. This was a nightmare.

“You got this Izuku!” Mottai calls, grinning behind her phone, and Izuku feels his face heat up. She sounded more like a soccer mom at a game than anything else.

“I most certainly agree! You are doing spectacularly, Midoriya-san!” Izuku’s face turns even redder as now Iida, the boy they had only just met, is also offering loud words of encouragement. Ingenium has taken his helmet off again and is grinning as he looks away, certain to start laughing if he looks down at his brother.

“Th-thank you very much…” Izuku mutters, just loud enough to be heard, but very obviously embarrassed. “Right, so… I-I am here to show you some of my intentions—“

“Inventions!” Mashi calls, only making this entire thing worse.

“Yes, inventions, sorry… tongue got a little twisted, there,” Izuku tries to smile, trying desperately to keep things lighthearted so he doesn’t entirely begin freaking out. It seems to work a little as a few of the adults chuckle warmly at his comment. It’s hardly boisterous laughter, but it certainly helps.

This was fine. He could do this. He just had to find the right flow.

“O-Okay!” he tries yet again, clapping his hands together, the noise it makes not sounding quite like a clap thanks to the material his right arm is made out of. “I wanted to show you all some of my smaller inventions now. Things that may be helpful on a day-to-day, or if integrated into other objects.” This was going better. Now that he was talking he felt more relaxed. He could never resist an opportunity to share his science knowledge, after all.
He glances at Principal Nedzu, front and center of the group, and when he receives a smile and nod, Izuku turns around towards the table of inventions.

He shows off little builds first. A snap bracelet that doubles as a bookmark, a cat toy that moves on its own and is fueled by impact force, a phone-shaped but clear device used to scan and identify plants, a thermos that immediately purifies water upon filling. He shows them the POMs in a variety of colors, though Aizawa would always have the original.

These smaller inventions are passed around so everyone can get a look and see how they work, a murmur emerging as they consider what could be done with some of these.

Next is the Racuum, immediately catching the businessmen’s attention at the adorable housekeeper, and Izuku makes a point that he built this with the assistance of Katsuki, who is turning a bright shade of pink. When asked by Cementoss if this idea could be integrated into a larger bot for city cleanup Izuku smiles brightly and pulls up a video on a nearby screen set up on the table.

The video playing shows off his Bendies, all iterations. He couldn’t bring the large, building bots – they were too large and bulky, even the newer models – and shows how they can both help clean as well as build. He warns they are very slow, however, and at the current moment it was still better to use human workers unless the situation was dire.

He shows off a robotic lemur called the Hanging Helper after that. Its arms and tail are longer than its real life counterpart and it could climb and hang around on most objects thanks to its lightweight. Its job? To easily move around and deliver tools or any other small object to people. Izuku used it constantly while at his workstations, needing that extra pair of hands when the others weren’t present or didn’t know which tool matched which name.

Izuku decides not to show off the EAARDs. The EAARDs technology he still feels uncomfortable sharing…

And finally he finishes up by showing them the samples of Hera he brought with him, showing how he uses the metal variations for his bots and how versatile the more rubber-like forms are for other applications. He looks over the men and women in suits in particular and lets them know he already has a sports company using Hera for their equipment, and another company, specifically for outdoor activities, still considering.

When they break for a moment, done with this round of presentations, Izuku nearly collapses, all the tension he was holding in his body suddenly being released.

An ache was beginning to form in his back and he knew the stress was beginning to get to him and he would need to rest this evening. Even with the help of his robotic parts sometimes things just needed to naturally take a breather.

“I’m so tired,” Izuku mumbles as he steps over towards the group of people he knows. Mashi pops up at his right, grinning at him, while Katsuki stands in front, arms crossed.

“You did a good job covering it up, then,” Nemuri comments, a hand on her hip, and she winks at him when Izuku looks up at her. “You’re doing very well so far,” she adds on with a smile.

“Take your time!” Hizashi suggests loudly, his face suddenly popping into Izuku’s vision, much too close for comfort. “No need to rush or anything, kiddo! You had everybody wrapped around your little finger!”

“Yeah?” Izuku questions, glancing over where some of the attendees talk amongst themselves or
speak in hushed tones over their phones. They seemed busy, trying to sort out what they wanted to do with what they have been presented.

“Certainly!” The three kids jump in unison as Principal Nedzu seems to appear out of thin air in the middle of them. Mashi grips at her chest and leans against Izuku while Katsuki looks up at the sky, taking deep breathes. The intellectual animal just smiles around at them, not looking very apologetic.

“I have asked them to refrain from making any offers with you until we are entirely done, but you have certainly piqued their interest,” Principal Nedzu assures while Izuku gets his own heart back down to a steady pace.

“And it only gets better from here!” Mashi adds brightly, throwing an arm around Izuku’s shoulders. “Next up we have the combative thingies!”

“They won’t know what hit ‘em!” Izuku arches a brow at Katsuki’s posture when he says that. He looks like he’s ready to fight someone, hands flexed and crackling with tiny explosions. He looked more like he was ready to fight their audience rather than impress them.

But that attitude was infectious and soon Izuku is grinning over at his explosive friend, near glowing himself. “No they will not!”

“Damn right!” Mashi laughs, throwing a fist into the air, also jumping on board the hype train. “Now let’s go get changed and give these guys a real show!”

Chapter End Notes

Part two will be coming soon! Along with new art! Also the final, substantial oc of mine will be appearing next chapter and I'm super excited to get her out there and I really hope you all will like her!

Chapter Song: Sara Bareilles - Soft Place To Land
Alright Part Two is done! I swear, if anyone is worried, I didn't rush this and I am taking care of myself! It is just that when I split the chapter in half I was already almost done sooooo yeah! It's all good!

Beta Read by the lovely gilltheanon!

“I’m sure you all came out here not really knowing what you were going to see,” Izuku begins. He no longer is wearing his suit and instead sports an athletic tank top in navy with light blue stripes along the sides. He’s also swapped out the dress pants for black shorts and is wearing his favorite, probably-too-large, red sneakers.

On his left stands Katsuki in a matching outfit save his top is orange with black stripes and his shoes are black and red workout shoes. On his right is Mashi, also in a matching outfit, but her top is dark green with yellow stripes and her shoes are white, heavy boots.

Having his friends there with him immediately makes Izuku feel more at ease, even when dressed unprofessionally. They had at least tried to match, and they had done a pretty decent job, yet still… When all the heroes were in their costumes and everyone else was in a suit, it was hard not to feel out of place.

“We will be going into the more combative side of my inventions now, true, but when you saw me I’m guessing that wasn’t exactly what you wanted to know about,” Izuku continues and then raises his right hand to move around the sleek, black limb, blue lights running along it. His hair is pulled back into a high ponytail now and his makes a show of flashing the lights in his robotic Eye.

It is nerve-racking having everything on display like this. The tank top offers hardly any cover to his scars, and if he were to turn around the top of his Spine would be easily visible. He had never felt more exposed in his life.

The remedy? Address the elephant in the room with both his best friends at his sides.

“I installed a neurological Base to the stump of my arm when I was nine so I could connect this Arm. I Installed an Orbital and a Bridge to my eye socket and my damaged spine respectively so I could then introduce a new Eye and Reinforcement when I was eleven,” Izuku swallows as a murmur spreads through crowd, obviously impressed. He tries to tell himself he is just teaching others about his builds, as he loves to do with his friends, but this feels so much more high stakes than that.

“They all can be changed, fixed, adjusted, and improved as I please. They are not perfect, I do still have issues and have to occasionally remove them to let my body rest, but they have made my standard of living exponentially better.”

Izu takes a deep breath, head lowering as he prepares himself for the part he hates to say. The part that will most certainly make someone disappointed in him. He doesn’t want to say it… but he knows he has to.
There’s a nudge against his human arm and he gives a quick, questionning look over at Katsuki, brows furrowed. The blond just stares back at him, eyes intense, but not angry. Rather than say anything Katsuki simply makes a point of standing up a little straighter, shoulders squared, and looking back at the audience with a strong, powerful expression.

Izuku very slowly looks forward as well. Right… be brave. He had to be brave. And he could be. He had done it before, he could do it again.

He squares his shoulders and looks over the group. His eyes land on one of the smallest observers, and certainly the oldest, and he tries to keep the little excited flutter in his chest from coming out into his voice. He fails.

“Recovery Girl,” he begins, pauses, and can’t help himself as he adds, “I love your work, by the way.” He ignores Mashi’s snort and Katsuki’s groan while Recovery Girl smiles gently back at him, nodding her thanks. “Right… So, Recovery Girl… And all representatives for any medical organizations,” Izuku takes a glance around the crowd, noting a few nods from some of the non-hero members. He takes a deep breath.

“As much as these inventions would help so many people out there right now, I’m afraid they are not currently ready for distribution.” When another murmur begins to pick up and a few people shoot confused looks his way Izuku begins to panic and his mouth starts moving too quickly. “These parts were designed specifically to match every single system in my own body. It took years to perfect and test only for a single individual, me, and I can’t promise these would be ready to go to anyone else. A single one would take an incredibly long time to design for a single person and it would only be for a handful of people and I want them to be affordable and they wouldn’t be at this time and—”

“It’s okay, dearie.” Izuku’s spluttering rant grinds to a halt at the kind words and he looks back to Recovery Girl, who is still smiling. “We understand,” she continues, “I would much prefer you take time to perfect such a device rather than rush it and cause someone harm.”

Izuku swallows and slowly nods back. He shouldn’t be so concerned. Even if someone was disappointed in him he was still doing the responsible thing, here. He needed to embrace that. “Right, thank you, Recovery Girl,” he says once he can settle his voice, and yet again he just has to add, “Seriously, big fan.”

“Deku…” Katsuki hisses and Recovery Girl laughs sweetly, obviously entertained. A few of the other pro heroes are also grinning at the whole thing.

“So, uh, now that that is out of the way, I will be showing you some of the functions my Arm, Eye, and Spine have to offer during this part of the presentations. Let’s get started!”

Once he’s able to calm down fully and get into it, these presentations prove to be much more entertaining than the previous, especially with his friends joining the fray.

Hera blocks are set up as targets, as well as a few wooden ones. A classic set up for them, really.

Izuku begins by showing off his Equalizer darts. They have been perfected over the years and look spectacular as they either explode into flames, bursts of electricity, or sheets of ice. The Sleep Equalizers he shows a video of, Mashi playing front and center as she is immediately put to sleep with a grin on her face.

Izuku also makes a point that Slumber, the component in the Sleep Equalizers, can be adjusted and used as an anesthesia, which definitely is ready for possible distribution.
He ALSO makes a point that the Slumber agent had gotten the chance to be perfected so quickly thanks to the pro hero Midnight’s assistance. When he says that Nemuri takes a step up, bows comically, and steps back, a few of her coworkers clapping at her antics.

Izuku shows off his Shoulder Speak as well, showing how it can be used as an alarm or to speak over large distances. Again, he gives a shout out, this time to Present Mic, for helping him perfect this. When Hizashi goes to start screaming something Aizawa snaps his hand right over his mouth and glares.

He also shows them the Taser in his palm, but doesn’t use it on anyone, even when Mottai offers to let him do it to her. Even Mashi was against that.

(“It’s okay, I’ve been tazed before!”

“Mama! We don’t talk about that!”)

Yep, Mottai was definitely Mashi’s mother…

His favorite thing to show off in his Arm, however, was a new addition he hadn’t shown anyone but Shinsou, and that was only because he came in and saw it by mistake.

“Sometimes you don’t need to be fancy,” Izuku begins. He mostly has the pro heroes’ attentions at the moment. This part of the presentations were more geared towards them anyway, showing how hero ready he and his friends were, as well as how they could offer some possible support objects in the future.

“Sometimes something simple is all you need.” Izuku raises his arm and clenches his hand into a fist, palm towards himself, and with a quick command a blade flies out of his wrist. The arm blade is the same length as his forearm and gleams brightly in the afternoon sunlight.

Mashi and Katsuki, who were standing side by side behind him, both seem to stumble on nothing, the redhead falling backwards onto her butt while Katsuki stays standing but wide-eyed. The crowd is looking on with interest as they have been, but Aizawa, standing with Hizashi, Nemuri, and Mottai, narrows his eyes. Oh… oops. Maybe Izuku should have at least told Aizawa? He didn’t look too happy.

“When’d you fucking build that, Deku?” Katsuki demands and Mashi springs back up and rushes over to look at this new addition. It’s the same black Hera metal as the rest of his arm and has a very simple design.

“Only last week,” Izuku admits, smiling sheepishly back at him.

“So fucking cool. So. Fucking. Cool! Zuzu, you are so awesome holy shit!” Mashi gushes, reaching out to poke the tip of the blade.

“Mashi, no,” Aizawa calls, seeing the problem from a mile away, and the redhead pouts but doesn’t touch the blade.

Izuku turns his sheepish smile to the confused crowd and chuckles anxiously. “Sorry about that. I wanted to give my friends a bit of a surprise, too,” he gives another command and the thin blade flicks right back into his wrist like it had never been there. “Let’s just go ahead and move on…” He really wanted Aizawa to stop glaring at him already…

He moves on to his Eye and, after connecting wirelessly with the screen, he shows them all the possible vision options he has by letting them see what he sees. Thermal Vision, limited Xray Vision,
Medical Scan, Movement Detection, and so on. He also shows the environmental scans he can do, identifying all kinds of things around him down to the scientific names and chemical components, and demonstrates how he can pull screens into his view to use at will.

Izuku finally disconnects from the screen and takes a beat to stretch his back and limbs. He was certainly getting stiff, and just in time, too. He hardly had anything to demonstrate on his Spine. Yes, he could connect machines to it that he could then control with his brain, and it could also assist in controlling certain chemicals in the body to a small degree, but it wasn’t worth actually showing in its current state. He does tell them about it, but he doesn’t take too much time.

Instead it was really about time Katsuki and Mashi showed off for the pro heroes.

While Izuku was here to show off to both the pro heroes and the businessmen, Katsuki and Mashi were mostly going to be showing off to the heroes alone. Yes, it was important for all the representatives to see the two’s importance to Izuku’s work, but that was only a minor detail at this point.

When Izuku motions to his friends to take over he steps out of the way and goes to stand to the side and out of the way. He slowly begins to stretch, trying not to take too much attention, as Katsuki steps up first.

While they had been planning out the basic outline for their presentations Mashi and Katsuki had argued for some time over who got to go first for their own show and tell. Mashi had claimed ladies first, Katsuki had claimed quirks first, Mashi had then punched Katsuki, Katsuki had then made an explosion against her arm, and ultimately Izuku just flipped a coin for them and Katsuki won.

“I am Bakugou Katsuki!” the explosive boy begins with a bang, grinning at the crowd and raising his hands slightly out to the side. “I plan to be the best, damn hero of all time and once you see me you’ll know why!” Katsuki’s palms then light up with a cacophony of colorful explosions. When had he slipped his Rainbow Rockets on? Eh, whatever, it worked in his favor.

Mashi glances over and catches Izuku’s eye, rolling her green eyes and they share a smile. This was to be expected, wasn’t it? If anything this was tamer than they could have hoped for.

“I will be Armageddon, the Explosion Hero, and I will always. Fucking. WIN!” Katsuki continues, grinning like a madman. Some of the audience members seem uncomfortable, but a few of the heroes seem intrigued. Even Ingenium has his head tilted thoughtfully as Iida’s lips pinch in mild displeasure at the dirty language.

Katsuki moves his arms forward, towards the crowd, explosions shrinking in size. “This shit isn’t everything I got, though,” he says in a slightly calmer voice, and then turns and walks with heavy footfalls back to the tables. He moves around the inventions, grumbling too himself when something doesn’t do exactly what he wants, and finally turns back around with a new ensemble of gear.

Most of them aren’t fully finished, and are hardly the final designs, but they are all able to work and be presented.

There is only one gauntlet at the moment, but it will suffice. A large, smooth plate of armor runs over the top of Katsuki’s right arm, connected to a thick, sturdy band of Hera around the wrist. The metal is still large and bulky, but doesn’t encircle the entire arm like the blonde’s original grenade gauntlet idea. A gun barrel sits at the end of the gauntlet, just above the his hand, and the top of the long, curved plate is covered in small holes.

As promised from a few months ago the majority of the prototype gauntlet has been painted pink,
because Izuku was a man of his word. Honestly, though… he will probably change that in later iterations, but for now that was what Katsuki was getting.

The gauntlets are lovingly called the Gauntlaroks, a combination of “Gauntlet” and “Ragnarok.” It had been Katsuki’s idea.

Katsuki also wears sleek, orange protective goggles, and ear covers that match the explosive designs of some of the explosive boy’s drawings. With a touch of a button on the ear covers, hidden plating clicks out and covers his mouth and nose with a specialized respirator. Katsuki’s explosion quirk was amazing, but nothing protected his eyes, ears, and lungs from it. He needed to be protecting his senses.

Tubes also ran from the tall gloves he wore, down to large, bulky boots plated with protective armor. There was a particularly large, sharp piece of armor on the knees. “For death,” Katsuki had said and Izuku had been too terrified to argue.

With another grin to the audience Katsuki gets started.

Mashi joins Izuku to stay out of the way and let him lean on her as he stretches. Both of them hoot and holler as their friend rockets around the field, showing off his maneuverability. He zigs and zags, jumps and dives, flips and spins. It almost looks like a dance. A very loud… deadly dance.

He eventually returns front and center and, with a very specific flex of his feet in his boots, explosions erupt from holes in the bottoms of his shoes. He uses it to lift him up into the air, less graceful but still impressive, and aims his gauntlet at a nearby slab of Hera.

He laughs a little too maniacally as he yells, “ULTIMATE EXPLOSION! WORLD ENDER!” and presses a button against the side of the gauntlet. Immediately a massive, blinding burst of flames and destructive force erupts out, engulfing not just the Hera but also the wooden targets beside it.

It’s spectacular and horrific. The sound has Izuku flinching viciously, the ground quaking.

“Why the hell would you build him that?!” Mashi asks, face lit up by the explosion, eyes wide and a bit panicked.

“Did he call that World Ender?” Izuku decides to say, ignoring the question as he focuses on something else.

“Don’t ignore me, Zuzu,” Mashi side-eyes him, frowning, but that is exactly what Izuku does.

“That’s a really cool name,” he nods as finally the smoke clears, Katsuki standing, heaving tired breathes, in front of what looks like a small crater. The wooden targets have been disintegrated, while the Hera is, technically, still standing, but the edges have been burnt away some. Izuku makes a few notes in his Eye, taking pictures discreetly. Hera wasn’t perfect, he had expected such a positively massive force to do it damage, but he had expected more…

Katsuki is grinning as he sweats and breathes, obviously tired, but not done yet. There is still one more function he needs to show off.

He raises his arm once more, aiming his fist at the Hera again, but this time he presses a different set of buttons and the plate of his gauntlet begins to rise off his arm, pivoting where it connects with the wrist guard, until the top, covered by those multiple holes, faces forward.

“DIE!!” is all Katsuki yells this time, presses a button beneath the raised plate, and a barrage of explosive blasts come rocketing out of the holes in rapid succession. It lasts only a few seconds, but
the barrage lights up the air much like the “World Ender” had, blasts colliding with the Hera with loud, concussive explosions.

The Gauntlarok lowers when it is done and when the smoke clears a tiny bit more of the Hera has been chipped away and the slab has fallen over. The only one left standing is Katsuki, heaving and sweaty, arm shaking from bracing against all the explosions.

Izuku isn’t sure who breaks the silence first. Himself, Mashi, or someone in the crowd, but it doesn’t take but a few seconds for everyone to begin clapping for the remarkable, albeit destructive, display.

Katsuki removes all the gear on his face more forcefully than he needs and turns to grin victoriously at the crowd. He deserved it all for that show.

When the clapping dies down Katsuki attempts to give a run down of all the gear he had used while Izuku offers more in depth explanations for how they functioned or had been built. This part is a bit more of a mess, the two accidentally interrupting each other a few times, but they get through it without too many glares.

They give the crowd a moment to murmur amongst themselves while Katsuki gets all his gear off and drops it unceremoniously on the table.

“You break any of that you can fix it,” Izuku grumbles as Katsuki and Mashi swap places.

The blond rolls his eyes and crosses his arms, watching the redhead with little interest. “You’ll fix them, don’t even pretend,” he says like it’s obvious and Izuku’s eyes thin. He wishes Katsuki was wrong, but he doesn’t intend to give up so easily.

“I have other stuff to do, you know. I’ll just focus on that,” he says, watching as Mashi tries to semi fix the loose strands of hair in her face, the rest of her hair back into a regular braid. “Shinsou-kun mentioned some kind of mask the other day, and I need to finish my AI coding. The Gauntlaroks can wait.”

Katsuki says nothing, because they both know Izuku is bluffing, but the way he glances over at his gear thoughtfully makes Izuku hope he won’t be so rough with them in the future.

“HELLOOOOO EVERYBODY!” Mashi doesn’t wait a second more as she begins, bright grins and high energy. Her hands are on her hips and her chest is puffed out as she smiles at the audience. “My name is Haganehato Mashi!” Mottai offers a momentary whoop, “But call me Mashi! It’s better, alright?”

The redhead doesn’t even wait to see how the crowd will respond to that and instead turns with a snap to march towards her own table. “I plan to be a fucking badass hero, too! APEX! THE WILD HERO!” she says as she prepares, her voice so loud it hardly matters she’s facing away. “The catch?”

Mashi is grinning big and excited as she turns back around, ready to go already, her gear less complicated than Katsuki’s. Her green goggles attach to her ear covers, lights flickering along the sides. A utility belt also wraps around her waist, thick, protective gloves have been slipped on, and a large gunstaff is held out to her side, the base resting on the ground. It’s long, almost as long as Mashi is tall, and the end has two, large, orangey-gold protective sheets of metal covering an impressive gun mechanism. They look dangerous.

“Like Zuzu over there I don’t got a quirk!” Mashi announces loudly, her voice booming, but she isn’t grinning anymore. Her eyes can’t be seen through the goggles, but she looks serious now,
scowl deep. “I’m quirkless and I’m gonna make a change. I’m not going to be looked down on anymore! And I’mma show everybody else out there that ain’t got no quirk that they don’t gotta be looked down on, either!”

With that announcement she turns, aims the gunstaff like a shotgun at another slab of Hera, and pulls the trigger.

A blast of fire shoots out from the end of the staff, leaving a trail of damage in its wake, and it erupts in a blast of fire upon impact against the Hera. It isn’t as concussive or as large as Katsuki’s explosions, but it is more fiery and still impressive.

Mashi turns to the crowd, finally grinning again, with the fiery aftermath behind her, lighting up her hair so it too looks aflame. She looked a little unstable…

“I’m tough! I’m strong! And I got teamwork so nobody gets left behind!” she announces, turns again, and charges at a wooden target with a warrior cry. She raises her gunstaff behind her, ready to swing it like a bat, but last minute she changes the firing mechanism in the barrel with a press of a button and pulls the trigger.

Instead of a fireball a familiar, red scatter blast from the very first gunstaff prototype erupts and propels her swing forward with greater force. The impact tears the target clean in half, splinters flying everywhere. “I’m strong already!” she cries, rising up the gunstaff victoriously, “and with this I’m unbeatable!” She then points to the goggles and ear protection she is wearing. “And with this shit I can hear and see all kinds of—AH!”

Izuku stiffens in alarm at the cry of pain. He had been enjoying Mashi’s hectic but exciting performance, resting his hip against a table, but then she was cutting herself off and dropping the gunstaff to cradle her hand.

Izuku rushes over first, not even realizing he’s moving until he is, and only a second later Recovery Girl and Mottai are there as well. Mashi tries to wave them off but Izuku can see where her glove – leather not Hera – had melted clean through and her palm was red and burnt.

What had happened?

Recovery Girl is giving Mashi a kiss before any more fake assurances can be offered while Mottai checks over her daughter frantically. A murmur has spread through the rest of the audience, all trying to get a good look at what is going on, and Izuku wants to snap at them. Wants them to stop. He looks back and…

Then he sees it. The gunstaff lies on the ground a few feet away where it had been dropped and rolled. The metal of the staff and the barrel of the gun glows a nasty, hot red, the energy inside overheating in drastic ways. Oh no…

Izuku waists no time in aiming an Ice Equalizer at the weapon, watching in irritation as the first round of ice melts away. He tries again, and again, and again. The fifth one finally seems to cool off the gunstaff to a safe temperature, but Izuku doesn’t plan to risk it and leaves it there, covered with ice.

“Smart.” Izuku doesn’t look up at first, still glaring at the gunstaff, but eventually does give Aizawa his attention. Hizashi and Nemuri have joined the group around Mashi, quietly murmuring to her. She looks… quiet.

“Just logical,” Izuku offers, but his heart isn’t in it. How can it be? Healed as she was Mashi couldn’t
fully finish her presentation anymore without her gunstaff. They could run over the auditory and visual functions of her headgear, plus the stuff in her belt, but the mood had been crushed.

Aizawa doesn’t say anything more, but he does set a single hand on Izuku’s shoulder and squeezes. It’s minute, but it seems to help at least a little.

“She shouldn’t have used one of her own.” That wasn’t Aizawa… No, someone else was talking and the white hot anger that spikes in Izuku’s gut at the flippant remark makes him sick. He doesn’t like that feeling, never has, but he can’t suppress it as he swings to glare at Katsuki only a few feet away. The blond is looking down at the gunstaff, hands in his pockets, body relaxed, but his expression… It gives Izuku pause.

His lips are tight, eyes glaring at the offending object. He looks upset.

It lasts only a moment before Katsuki seems to remember he isn’t supposed to care, is supposed to be above all this, and his expression turns nonchalant and bored to fit his tone. He glances over at Izuku, catching his eye, and for a moment they just stare at one another, uncertain where to go.

“Haganehato-san built this?” Iida appears at Katsuki’s side, looking down at the gunstaff with amazement. He adjusts his glasses then crouches down, keeping his hands back but still getting a closer look.

“Mashi. Just call me Mashi,” the girl in question speaks up, moving around the fretting crowd to also stand by the gunstaff. She still doesn’t look, or sound, quite right, but she appears to be trying to build up her energy again. Dig herself out of the pit she just fell into. “And yeah, I did… Fucked up, though. Like all the others…”

“Mashi…” Izuku begins, pausing when her green eyes meet his own. They are hardly as bright as they usually are. “Mashi, the first gunstaff you built blew up the second you pulled the trigger… The second one’s gun barrel melted. You’ve made so much progress with these!”

“I believe it’s a marvelous device!” All of the kids jump in surprise as Principal Nedzu appears on Ingenium’s shoulder, who had followed after his brother. How many times was he going to do that? How did he do it to begin with? It was terrifying! Izuku thought his quirk was super intelligence not scaring children for fun!

“To not be an inventor by trade, yet put together a weapon like that, that held up for so long and did so much damage, not to mention I requested you begin building your own gunstaff less than a year ago…” Nedzu steps forward to lay a paw on Mashi’s right hand, the one that had been burnt, smiling up at her as her lip begins to quiver. “I look forward to your perfected gunstaff when UA’s entrance exams come around.”

Mashi hiccups and ducks her head, nodding, and raises her arm to scrub at her face to quell the mounting tears. “Thank you, Mr. Noozu…”

Principal Nedzu smiles a bit bigger as Hizashi and Nemuri both snort from a few feet away. “Nedzu, my dear girl,” he corrects kindly.

“I’m sorry…”

“It’s quite alright. Now… Did you have more for us? Do you want to continue?”

Mashi is silent for a moment, gathering herself, before raising her head and grinning brightly at Nedzu, nodding. “Yeah I do!”
“ALL RIIIIIGHT!” Hizashi yells, sliding over and ruffling Mashi’s hair, freeing a few more strands, before excitedly ushering everyone back to the crowd, who are watching the whole ordeal curiously.

Izuku and Katsuki are all that are left behind with Mashi, both boys watching her. She grins at them, trying to reassure them, and after a few moments Izuku nods and moves to stand behind her. Katsuki, however, steps up in front of her and glares.

“Don’t fuck up again,” he grounds out and Mashi glares right back up at him.

“Is this you trying to reassure me?” she retorts and he snorts at her, looking away, and pauses before he moves. As he passes by he bumps his shoulder with hers, more rough than necessary… but not as rough as is normal for them. It feels… sweet, in their own way. Katsuki stands beside Izuku, both now behind the redhead, as she finishes up what is left of her presentation that she can give.

She explains the thermal vision in her goggles, letting Izuku give a few extra details, and shows how her protective ear guards also can be used to pick up sounds from a block or two away, as well as translate a few languages to Japanese.

She digs around and shows what all is on her utility belt, showing the necessary medical gear she will always have. She pulls out a handful of stick-on trackers the size of quarters and a classic grappling hook. She has a few balls, the size of the large marbles, that work like Izuku’s Equalizers, some filled with Blaze, some with Chillwater, and some that stick and electrocuted enemies.

It isn’t as long as it would have been, most of Mashi’s combative techniques coming from her gunstaff, but they manage to pick the energy right back up again, so when Mashi bows out and if falls to Izuku to finish everything up with his last round of presentations, everyone is buzzing and excited.

“The final set of inventions I have for today are all some of my favorites. I have been working on many of these for years, trying to perfect them for future hero work,” Izuku announces, smiling big, no longer fidgeting. Mashi hurries off to one of the only, large crates they brought with them and begins unlatching the opening on the front.

“Like Mashi said, teamwork is how we intend to get far in our hero work. Well… I also built some of our team members,” Izuku turns and with a flourish of his hand, motions to the crate. His Eye lights up green as he connects to what is inside, turning it on and giving it a command. A moment later the crate door bursts open, nearly knocking Mashi over, and a robotic horse comes running out.

It isn’t as big as a full-grown horse, but Izuku does come up to its shoulder, and it runs around the field at the a rate faster than a real horse. It has shiny black plating, to match Izuku’s arm, and thick, muscle-like cords and tendrils can be seen inside.

Years. Izuku had been working on his animal machines for years. The clubhouse was filled with his attempts and whenever he slipped into his big workshop he worked on them like his life depended on it.

And he had so many more he wanted to build. To make perfect.

“This is Trotter,” Izuku says, controlling the machine remotely from his Eye, ordering it to return to him and stand beside him. The horse machine’s “eyes” glow green, matching Izuku’s own Eye.

“Trotter is a transport machine built to help move civilians out of harms way, transport heroes such as myself faster than they may usually go, and even bring necessary goods or tools to people that may need them.”
For just a moment Izuku forgets where he is and he runs his flesh hand over the Hera plating, marveling proudly at what he had accomplished, but he wasn’t done yet. These machines were the grand finale and he needed to focus.

“Next we have the Observing Winged Liaison, or OWL,” Izuku continues

He hears Mashi grumble from not too far away, “Shoulda called it a Lieutenant,” but he ignores her and disconnects from Trotter to connect with a different machine. Until he had his AI completed there would be no connecting to multiple machines at once. It was too much an invitation for more seizures. But one machine at a time? That was fine.

This time an egg-shaped form on the table whirs to life and pieces begin clicking out of the shape. The also black plated form shifts, twists, and expands until a little robotic owl stands there, wings spread slightly, massive camera eyes glowing green as it looks around. Izuku give it an order and with a flap of its wings and the sound of tiny engines the creature takes off, flying breezily through the air. Its head spins 360 degrees, eyes taking in everything, before coming and landing on Trotter’s still head.

“The OWL is, basically, a security camera for the city. Never to be used for spying, it will look out for villain attacks that might be missed if a hero isn’t in the immediate area and send out an alarm to any nearby pros,” Izuku explains, still grinning.

He catches sight of Mashi giving the two machines dirty looks and tries not to laugh. She had had an unfortunate run in with both of these machines while they had still been in the works at the clubhouse. It had left her with a few bruises and aches. She was hardly a fan.

There were a few more machines Izuku would have liked to bring. Submarine Shell, a huge, aquatic turtle with a hollow shell people could climb into for safety when they were in aquatic disasters. Foxy Finder, a fox that was built to track lost items or even people. Block Beetle, beetles that either compressed metals or recyclable materials, depending on their function, into blocks for future use. The Leeches. The Neko Nurses. A little robotic hamster he’d built out of sheer boredom and Katsuki painted it green and named it Grenade…

None of them were quite ready, however. They would be one day, but today Izuku wanted to only show off the ultimately completed inventions. Except for Grenade the hamster. He was perfect but didn’t quite fit the situation.

“And lastly, my pride and joy,” Izuku begins, disconnecting from the OWL and connecting with a machine some distance away. Katsuki scoffs behind him and Izuku can almost hear the eye roll. What? This was his pride and joy… at the moment. Was it so wrong to be proud of his work?

“Currently my only animal machine built for specifically combat!” Izuku continues and the thrum of engines begins to fill the air, much bigger and more powerful than the OWL’s.

With an excited grin on his face Izuku throws both his arms upward and announces, the thrum in the air getting progressively louder, “The terror in the skies… The Thunderwing!”

Thanks to talking to Principal Nedzu already on his idea for the reveal, Izuku doesn’t have to worry about the UA defenses turning on as the metal bird comes rocketing overhead. The creature is double the size as Trotter, black Hera plating nearly glowing from the sunlight bouncing off of it, small but powerful engines under its wings loudly announcing its arrival.

The machine circles them, dives and rolls a few times, and when it finally lands the ground shakes, its bladed talons digging into the ground. It stands tall, wings spread to show off everything it has to
offer, and its “eyes” glow green on either side of a vicious-looking beak.

Gun turrets sit along the inside of the wings and upon closer inspection the ends of the wing plates are sharpened into blades. Armor covers the body of the Thunderwing and right in the center of its chest are three speakers in a triangular pattern with lights blinking along the sides.

“The Thunderwing is an avian inspired machine that can be fashioned with a variety of combat tools. I have no intention of ever using real bullets,” Izuku begins to explain, voice risen even as the sound of the engines dies down some. He moves over to run his hand over the gun barrels and looks to the awestruck crowd. “These guns will fire enhanced Equalizers,” he informs them, and then shows them the speakers, “and these can work to sound off alarms, give announcements over the city, or make loud, distracting noises in battle, similar to the Shoulder Speaker.”

He also planned to set up a harness and handlebars on the back of the Thunderwing for another form of transportation, but… maybe he shouldn’t say that when Aizawa, Hizashi, Nemuri, AND Mottai were present…

Izuku gives the order for the Thunderwing to flap its wings once more, showing itself off, and then to hop over and stand massive beside Trotter. When he disconnects Izuku is grinning and he turns back towards the crowd. They look amazed, staring at the Thunderwing in particular. It looked like the finale had certainly worked. The machines were a hit, and these were only his first batch. He had so many more he was already working on. So many that would help him in his hero work. So many that would help change the world!

Now…

How… was he supposed to end this?

Izuku froze, face still stuck in a smile but panic immediately setting in. Oh, he hadn’t thought about that. He had been so excited with planning everything else out he hadn’t even considered how he was supposed to end this whole thing. Did he bow? Did he just… say he was done? What tone should he take? What wording? Should he smile or look serious? Should he try to—?

“AND THAAAAAAAAAAAT’S ALL, FOLKS!” Mashi leaps forward to stand beside Izuku, posing with both her arms out wide, grinning brightly. It doesn’t end there, however, as Katsuki appears right behind them both and lets loose a barrage of colorful explosions, apparently still wearing his Rainbow Rockets. Izuku has to cover his ears from the onslaught of noises, startled and unable to deal with how loud it suddenly is.

His ears ring from the noise and he shoots his blond friend an unhappy look as he moves from behind to stand on his opposite side, smirking. It’s only as the ringing begins to die down does he notice the clapping.

Looking back out at their audience he finds each person applauding them, some smiling, some looking impressed, some carefully neutral. Izuku blinks in amazement, Mashi throwing an arm around his shoulder and laughing excitedly in his ear. A large mass nearly comes rocketing into the trio, making Izuku stumble, Katsuki curse, and Mashi laugh even harder as Hizashi and Mottai both hug them and offer their congratulations.

It doesn’t take long for Izuku to begin laughing too. So he didn’t have the best ending planned, but his friends had his back, and even with a few hiccups and mistakes here and there the entire presentation had gone great. Hizashi has moved to excitedly retelling moments from the show in fantastic detail, posing here and there, while Mashi is pulled into Mottai’s arms and hugged tight to her mother’s chest.
Katsuki gets the attention of Nemuri, who is acting too calm to really make him explode, and is instead petting his ego by asking how he came up with some of his moves. Izuku thinks she’s actually trying to tease the blond, moving in such a way it could be considered provocative, but Katsuki doesn’t react to it at all. Nemuri would have a much better time pulling that on Mashi.

For a while Izuku and Hizashi talk back and forth, both hands moving animatedly, but then Mashi is jumping in and Izuku can’t keep up, retreating for now.

He doesn’t flinch when a hand falls onto his shoulder and he looks up at Aizawa with a giddy look on his face. “I did it,” the genius boy whispers, almost disbelieving that it was all over now.

“You did,” Aizawa agrees, nodding once, then looks up as Ingenium and Iida approach. When they make eye contact Iida picks up his speed and hurries ahead, body still moving stiffly. Izuku tries not to flinch when the taller boy comes to a halt right in front of him and instead smiles brightly.

“Hello, Iida-kun,” he greets.

Iida raises his fists up to his chest, like someone that might begin bouncing in excitement, but instead just kind of… squirms there, leaning towards Izuku. “You did a great job, Midoriya-san! Those machines at the end were breathtaking!” the stiff boy says, sounding honestly excited for Izuku.

“Thank you very much,” the smaller boy says, smiling and bowing his head. Iida really was a kind, young man, even if he was a little bit awkward and silly.

“I’ve never seen anything like those,” Ingenium says, his helmet under an arm, looking back over at the machines that are still standing perfectly still. A few of the heroes and businessmen have ventured closer, but don’t dare touch.

“You can touch them!” Izuku calls, smiling and giving a pointed look at the three animal machines when the group hesitates. Ingenium certainly takes up that invitation to move over and run a hand over the smooth plating on Trotter.

“Such inventions will be incredible in the field,” Iida observes, sliding over beside his brother to also touch the machines. After a few moments of him just petting Trotter he looks back at Izuku, his oddly shaped eyebrows furrowing behind his glasses. “So it is true? You are really quirkless?”

Izuku stiffens at the question, defenses rising and brain turning to the worst. He only realizes Aizawa’s hand is still on his shoulder when he squeezes it. Just a small squeeze, but enough to keep the green-haired boy from panicking.

“Yes… I am,” Izuku replies slowly. If Iida noticed how tense things had just become he doesn’t comment on it.

“That’s remarkable,” the other boy says, quieter than he had been all day, and looks up at the OWL, his eyes wide in amazement.

“It is?” Izuku presses. A part of him wants to question why that’s remarkable, why a quirkless person couldn’t do things that impressed people, but that was an aggressive, argumentative part of him he didn’t want to entertain. He didn’t know what might be going through this boy’s head and he shouldn’t jump to conclusions.

“Of course!” Iida looks back at him and smiles. He seems much more at ease than their first meeting. “You have taken a negative in your life and not allowed it to hold you back. You have done what you love and done it with no hesitation! That is truly remarkable, Midoriya-san!”
Izuku stares in surprise for a moment. Why was he always surprised when people didn’t judge him? He had met so many spectacular people that didn’t look down on him due to his quirklessness, yet still these moments threw him for a loop. “That’s very nice, Iida-kun… I wouldn’t really say it’s entirely negative, though. People can make it negative, and a bad day can too, but for the most part being quirkless is… well, it’s a struggle, but it is what it is.”

Iida surprises Izuku again when he suddenly throws a single arm up, hand up like a karate chop, his glasses gleaming. “That is a great viewpoint! I apologize if I have offended you in anyway!”

Iida didn’t really… talk, did he? He seemed to be in a constant state of announcements. It was both endearing and a little exhausting.

Izuku immediately begins to fret when the words do sink in, waving his hands frantically in front of him as if to ward something off. “Oh no, you didn’t offend me! I thought what you said was really nice, actually!” Izuku attempts to reassure Iida and the other boy’s arm finally lowers.

“Ah! Very well, then,” the tall boy nods once and Ingenium, who is facing away, is very obviously trying not to laugh outright, his shoulders shaking.

“May I interject?”

Izuku turns around with a snap, eyes wide as Principal Nedzu addresses them. Okay, he hadn’t even done anything special this time; he was just standing there. How had he snuck up on Izuku?

“Yes, Principal Nedzu?” Aizawa answers for him while Izuku tries to get his heart rate down.

“The others will be deliberating for a short time,” Nedzu explains, smiling knowingly at Izuku. He knew what he was doing, scaring the poor boy so much. “So you will all have a break.”

A break sounded good. A break sounded really good. It also sounded really bad because Izuku knew himself. He knew he would begin fretting about what everyone thought and how things would turn out.

“In the meantime, however, Midoriya-san,” Nedzu zeroes in on Izuku specifically, his paws clasped behind his back. “There is someone I would very much like you to meet. She was unable to be present during your exhibition, but she would still like to have a talk.”

Izuku’s brows furrow. Someone wanted to meet him that wasn’t here? What was this about?

He glances up at Aizawa, hoping for answers, but the man only shrugs, hands in his pockets.

“Eraserhead is more than welcome to join you,” Nedzu adds when he sees Izuku’s expression. That actually does make him feel a little better, but still the anxiety and confusion bites at his insides. “She is up in the school. Shall we be going?”

Izuku hasn’t even said anything yet, but now Nedzu is turning and walking away, expecting Izuku and Aizawa to follow. Well… They didn’t really have a choice now, did they?

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The walk through UA’s halls is quiet and tense. Izuku can’t stop his shoulders from riding up into his ears with every step, wide eyes staring at every little detail around him but hardly taking in anything.

Despite everything looking like a regular school, if a bit larger than usual, Izuku couldn’t calm down. This was his dream school – this was where he wanted to end up for his high school career – and he
was currently being led around by the very principal to meet some mystery guest with a pro hero at
his side. It didn’t feel real.

A few times he tries to start a conversation with Aizawa, hoping to distract himself, but with the
man’s generally straightforward way of answering and Izuku’s own nerves nothing lasts long. Nedzu
seems content to walk in silence as well, save for occasionally humming some tune Izuku doesn’t
recognize, so by the time they make it to Nedzu’s office Izuku is a nervous mess.

They stop at the door and Principal Nedzu waits patiently for Izuku to take a few calming breathes.
The boy tries to shake out his body, get the chills out of his skin, but not much is helping. He didn’t
even know who this person was. For all he knew he was meeting just another businessman that had
come in late, someone he knew nothing about, but no matter what he couldn’t seem to calm down.

It isn’t until a large hand is lying on his head, holding him still, that he realizes he had begun to
bounce on his toes, breathing getting frantic. Aizawa doesn’t take away his hand for a while,
listening to make sure Izuku is breathing steady again, and when all seems to have calmed down to a
reasonable level he gives the green curls a single ruffle and retracts his hand.

Izuku stares for a long while at the door, reminding himself he has Aizawa here and that Principal
Nedzu wouldn’t set him up for failure. It doesn’t stop the feeling that somehow he’ll still end up
messing up whatever this is.

He can’t know what this is if he doesn’t start, though.

The genius boy nods to Principal Nedzu, who smiles at him, like he has so much today, and the door
is opened.

The office isn’t particularly big, it just feels pretty ordinary, with a normal sized desk at the far end
and two chairs in front of that. The chairs have been turned towards the door, however, with a table
pulled out and two more folding chairs have also been brought in. A tea set is also set up on the
table, along with a few bottles of water, and some small sweets.

Sitting in one of the nice chairs is a woman. A very, very pretty woman. A woman in full, purple
hero gear, short bluish-black hair styled into purposefully messy, sweeping spikes, dark make up
sharp and perfect, silver jewelry sparkling, and sultry, red eyes on Izuku. One of her long legs is
crossed over the other and a teacup sits in her perfectly manicured hands.

“My, my, aren’t you an adorable little thing,” the woman says, or purrs, setting down her cup and
standing respectfully. “I’ve heard a lot about you, young man. Why, with how much dear Principal
Nedzu spoke on your behalf… I just had to come and meet you.”

Izuku squeaks, actually squeaks, and freezes where he stands. He had been expecting a businessman
at best, some random pro hero at worst, but this… This was an entirely other level.

This was Majesty, the Mind Hero… and the No. 3 Pro Hero in Japan.

Majesty walks slowly around the table, each step calculated, high heels clicking, and approaches
Izuku. The green-haired boy can’t say anything, staring at the hero in shock, throat closed up and
unable to work. This was… this was…

“That’s very kind, my dear,” she says
sweetly, sounding honestly pleased, “but I am here because of how ‘amazing’ I hear you are.”

Izuku was dead. He was actually dead. He had died and he was in heaven. Or was this hell? Because he STILL couldn’t say anything he wanted.

“Her Majesty is not a UA alumni,” Principal Nedzu begins, appearing at Izuku’s left side, but this time the human is too shell-shocked to jump. “She graduated from Ketsubutsu Academy High School,” he continues. Izuku knew that. Of course he knew that. He knew in depth information about most pro heroes, but especially the ranked ones.

“I still hold this lovely establishment in high regard, though,” Majesty hums and with a single move she kneels down in front of Izuku. Oh, great, she was kneeling. Izuku was hardly that young anymore, but he hadn’t really hit his growth spurt yet.

His anger at his height is cut short as one of Majesty’s hands rises towards him and he looks fully up at her. She’s smiling at him.

Majesty’s image is one of elegant, sexy power, and she was almost always smirking at people. This wasn’t like that, however. It wasn’t condescending, pitying, or like an adult looking down at a little child. Majesty looked respectful and kind, something Izuku rarely saw on the television screen when she appeared.

He raises his right hand up to hers, too amazed to be concerned that it’s his robotic limb, and she smiles a little bigger when they shake hands.

“Let’s start over, shall we?” Majesty says, voice softer now that she’s closer, “I am Majesty, but you may call me Eve outside of my hero work, if you like.”

Wait... Did Majesty, one of the highest-ranking pro heroes, just under Endeavor and All Might... give Izuku her real name? Was... was that allowed?

“M-my name is Midoriya Izuku. Uh... Are y-you supposed to tell me your, uh... well, your real name?” he asks the last part a little quieter than usual, brows pinching in concern. Should he know this? Wasn’t this a secret?

Instead of growing concerned or realizing her mistake, Majesty begins to laugh, raising her hand towards her mouth and shaking her head. “Darling, I ask you, who is going to stop me?” It’s true, the pro hero Majesty was known for running most of her own campaigns and never allowing media or companies to control how she acted or portrayed herself. She loved flaunting her stuff, but she always did it under her own terms.

“Why are you here?” Aizawa cuts in, and both Izuku and Majesty look up at him. He has his hands in his pockets, and for the most part he still looks tired and detached, but his eyes are a little thinner than usual as he eyes the other pro hero suspiciously.

“To meet this handsome man, of course,” Majesty turns a smile back at Izuku, looking more like her television presence, but also a bit more lighthearted, giving him a wink. When Aizawa grunts, not pleased with the answer, the woman sighs, still smiling, and stands fully. She juts out a hip and looks to the dark man, smirking and fluttering her lashes. “Don’t trust me, do you?”

“Heroes like you tend to care more about the spotlight than they should,” Aizawa replies and Izuku is helpless to watch the two talk. That’s right... Aizawa had little love for the flashier, higher ranked heroes. He had mentioned on multiple occasions that, while he could respect some of their results, he didn’t usually agree with the way they got there.
They were just too much of everything. Aizawa even admitted that if he didn’t personally know Hizashi and Nemuri he probably wouldn’t like their hero personas either. Hell, sometimes he still didn’t.

For a while Majesty just stares at Aizawa, and Aizawa stares back. She tilts her head, he stays completely still. She hums, he stays silent. Finally Majesty smiles just a touch bigger and she raises a hand to point at the underground hero, wiggling her finger slightly.

“I like you,” she decides, and then looks down at Izuku, “He’s a clever one.”

“We are very happy to have him on our staff,” Principal Nedzu nods when Izuku doesn’t know what to say.

“I’m sure,” Majesty giggles, leaning from her hips towards Nedzu as she says it, hands still on her hips, then she straightens and looks at all three of them. “Why don’t we take a seat, and then we’ll get into the details?”

It sounded like as good a plan as any.

Majesty sits back down in the chair she had originated in, and Nedzu hops up onto the other, nice chair. Izuku and Aizawa take the fold out chairs that had been pulled in with no protest. The shuffle for seats gives Izuku a few seconds for his brain to think.

This was actually happening. He was sitting down with the current No. 3 Hero in Japan, for who knows what for, because she had wanted to meet him.

Why, though? Why on earth would she want to meet him?

The first thought was probably to build her support tools. Her quirk was Inanimate Telekinesis, able to lift nonliving objects with her mind. The more mass an object was the harder it would become to move. Izuku knew from studying her – and didn’t that sound creepy? – that she couldn’t lift herself, she was alive after all, but she had designed skin-tight and incredibly sturdy outfits she could lift as she wore them and give the illusion of flight.

She also could be limited on objects during battles and so she carried around an assortment of magnetically attached knives and swords.

She relied a lot on her support crew and tools. Could she want him for that?

That was the first, most exciting idea, but then came the darker thoughts.

All Might was a perfect balance of everything – absolutely perfect – but was a shining star in the rescue department. Endeavor was… scary, but also a pretty good balance when looking at his stats, but he was mostly known for his fighting. Majesty was a great fighter, made awesome appearances during battles, putting on a show, but her biggest contributor and what most thought got her the spot at No. 3 was her charity work.

Majesty had less battle numbers than even some of the pro heroes beneath her, but she worked with charities SO MUCH and had such great public opinion that she skyrocketed in the ranks.

She had multiple outfits, so when she retired one she auctioned it off and gave the proceeds to charity. She made speeches at rallies. She marched, and sometimes flew, for equal rights. She stood up for women, the LGBT, minorities, and…

The disabled.
Was Izuku a charity case?

“You look frightened, darling.” Majesty speaks up, back to sipping at her tea. Nedzu also had a cup now and he looks content where he sits and observes.

“I’m not.” He was.

Majesty hums, nodding, accepting the answer even though it is so obviously not true. She leans back in her seat, taking her time, and turns to look at Aizawa, not at all fazed by his stare.

“Such a sour look,” she coo’s, only smirking bigger when he frowns deeper. “I suppose I can understand. Big shot like me coming in unannounced, acting like she owns the place.”

“Why weren’t you down with everyone else?” Aizawa cuts to the chase, an accusation in his voice.

“Believe it or not, the attention does get exhausting after a while,” the woman sighs, her smile slipping for a moment so she can close her eyes and take a breath. “Mind you, I do still adore showing off, but everyone has a limit. And!” Majesty leans forward, an index finger up towards Aizawa to stop him from cutting her off quite yet, “Much more importantly I did not wish to take anything away from the star of today’s show.”

Izuku feels his cheeks flush when yet again Majesty’s sharp, red eyes turn towards him. Despite the dread building in his gut he can’t help but still feel flustered. This was still the No. 3 hero after all.

“I-I, um… I am a…” Izuku gulps and the pro hero across from him tilts her head, listening intently, her entire posture patient, and it is enough for him to go on. “I am a big, big, HUGE fan, Your Majesty – or Eve? – but… but if you came here because I’m… y’know…” he motions at all of himself, but makes a point of using his right arm and letting his eye glow a little, “I… I really don’t want any of that. I don’t want any pity or charity because of this…”

The room rolls into silence, all eyes on him, and he feels sick. This should be an exciting moment, meeting this pro hero, but instead all he feels is fear and resentment. At what or who he doesn’t know.

“Is that why you think I am here?” Majesty breaks the silence, watching Izuku closely, but her face and voice give nothing away. There’s no telling what she is thinking.

Izuku just shrugs and looks away, following the flowery patterns on the teakettle on the table.

“Darling… do you know what I am?”

Slowly the genius boy looks back up at her. She’s still sitting, but she’s set her cup down and has her hand folded in her lap, head tilted as she waits for an answer.

“A hero?” he says, not sure what she wants from him.

She smiles a bit bigger, obviously entertained by the answer, and she laughs some as she speaks next. “Well, yes, thank you. I am, and I am happy that is the first thing you think of, but it is not the first thing many others think of.”

Izuku’s brows furrow and he looks at her for a long moment, going over her history in his head, thinks about everything she stands for and might be alluding to. Like a punch to the face it hits him.

“A woman?” he ventures this time and now she is smiling proudly, closing her eyes and nodding.
"A woman," she repeats and sighs, but keeps smiling. "A woman who loves her body. A woman who enjoys showing off some skin. A woman who has fun dressing up and going out. And you…” she points a finger at Izuku and she doesn’t miss a beat, “are disabled and quirkless.”

Izuku flinches, he can’t help it. That hurt more than he wanted to admit. He knew he was handicapped, he knew he was busted up, and he knew he was born into an unfair world. To be told it so blatantly made his whole body ache. Usually it was questions, people testing the waters, like Iida had done. Majesty just… said it.

For a while Majesty says nothing, letting Izuku feel whatever he is feeling, but she doesn’t wait too long. “There is nothing wrong with it,” she says so normally it has the green-haired boy looking back up at her, startled and surprised. The look she is giving him makes him want to cry because she looks so kind in this moment. Izuku has been surround by so many good people his whole life, people who have said everything would be okay… Why did this hit so hard?

“I do not know your plights,” Majesty keeps going and Izuku feels like he’s going on an emotional rollercoaster at this point. “But I also think you might not know mine. What we both know, however, is that because we do not match the ‘norm,’ aka ‘Japanese, abled man with a quirk,’” Izuku gives a weak chuckle when Majesty does air quotes to that last bit, rolling her eyes, “people have particular, unfair expectations of us.”

Majesty glances down at herself for a moment, at her skin tight, purple suit with multiple cut outs showing her pale skin and even a flower tattoo on her left thigh. “I am expected to be a promiscuous individual. I am expected to be frail. I am expected to be soft spoken. I am meant to be a skinny little show for men. But my truth?” she leans forward and rests her folded arms on her knees, looking at Izuku meaningfully.

“My truth is I feel no attraction towards anyone. I am powerful. I will speak my mind,” suddenly she laughs and straightens enough to show the opening in her suit at her stomach. She pinches the flesh to show the give it has, despite being her being fit. “I have a few rolls and cellulite. I am a woman, aged a little, and it is an aspect of me that cannot be denied, and I am proud to represent, but it is not what defines me.”

“People…” Izuku takes a breath. He wasn’t going to cry, not right now. Not yet. “People told me I couldn’t be a hero,” he whispers, “and that I was useless.” He shakes his head when he feels a buzz in his ear. He can’t keep up with all the emotions that are going on and it feels like his entire body is trying to rebel in some way.

“Alright…” Majesty nods and for a second she is silent, giving Izuku a chance to just breath. “And what is your truth, darling?”

“My truth is…” the genius is at a loss for words. His truth. What was his truth? He felt like he knew it, but how was he supposed to word it? “My truth is… I am… I am an inventor,” Majesty hums in agreement, “I am not useless,” another hum, louder, and she nods. It urges Izuku on. “I am terrified but I am not going to stop chasing my dream. I… I will be a hero. I’ll…” Izuku trails off and his body seizes up.

He looks up at Nedzu, silently watching and listening. He looks to Aizawa, looking calm and intent, not going to interrupt whatever is going on. Aizawa looks… curious, but also proud. He was proud of Izuku.

Izuku looks to Majesty, a smile on her face as she speaks to Izuku about the biggest demons in his life. How had they gotten here? What had led to this so quickly?
“I’ll be a disabled hero…” Izuku finally croaks, tears welling in his only working tear duct, but not yet spilling. They nearly get startled away when Majesty hums in disagreement.

“You will be a hero that happens to also be disabled. Just as I am a hero that happens to be a woman. We should be proud of our differences, of course, but show that we are as much heroes as, say, Best Jeanist. Or Eraserhead,” Majesty smirks up at Aizawa when he grunts and looks away. “Or even All Might.”

That last one has Izuku sitting up straighter. A hero like All Might? That didn’t sound possible. No one could be a hero like All Might!

Majesty laughs brightly at his expression, sitting up straight and tilting her head prettily. “Don’t you be making that face, darling, it is true!”

Nope. Nope, Izuku refused to believe that. He was already an emotional mess from everything that had already been said; this was just too much.

“I may have not made an appearance down during your show,” Majesty goes on and reaches down into her cleavage as she speaks. Izuku doesn’t feel hot and bothered like he is certain someone like Mashi would be in this moment, but it does still leave him blushing brightly and looking respectfully away. “But I was able to watch from a camera our lovely Principal Nedzu set up for me. I am incredibly impressed.”

Oh gosh, now Izuku was getting flustered and emotional for an entirely different reason. He never was good with praise, especially from adults or those he looked up to. This was another level.

He takes a chance to look over. Majesty has pulled what looks like a business card from between her breasts, which really had to have just been for show, and she winks at him when she catches his eye. He was actually going to die…

“That being said, I would like you to have this.”

Izuku braces himself as he looks back at her again. Thankfully she is doing nothing particularly sexy, just holding out the business card to him. He carefully takes it and looks down at it…

And just about nearly passes out.

This was Majesty’s personal card. Printed in light lavender with shiny, purple, cursive lettering and her iconic flower tattoo from her thigh, it looked like a treasure in Izuku’s eyes. He had been expected her agency card, but this was, specifically, hers.

“What… Are you… Do you want me t-to build you… stuff?” He couldn’t think of anything better than “stuff?” Really?

Majesty smiles at him and giggles, fluttering her lashes and tilting her head. “You are certainly more than welcome to, but no, that is not what I am asking,” she says. “I propose an opportunity. When you do start your official hero training in the future – and you will – I am offering you the chance to intern at my agency.”

Izuku choke, head snapping back to the business card. She was offering him an internship? Seriously?! Even if it was an offer for the future, and neither of them knew where they would be in a
few years, she may not even be the No. 3 hero by then, an offer like this was HUGE.

“And if you ever have an emergency, just give me a call, darling,” Majesty purrs, reaching out to tap on the card in Izuku’s grip. She really trusted him with this? Oh god, he might throw up. What was he supposed to do? Thank her? But how? This was so, so big and he was entirely not ready to handle any of it.

He startles as Majesty stands up all of a sudden, her eyes on the analog clock hanging on the office wall. “Oh dear, I’m afraid that’s all the time I have. I should really get going,” she observes, sounding disappointed but not too affected. With a flick of her wrist a series of shining objects suddenly rise from behind Nedzu’s desk. Izuku’s eyes widen as he recognizes her many knives and swords, the same silver as her jewelry, with blue gemstones where they would magnetically hang from her outfit.

Majesty begins to walk and the blades follow after her, knives sticking into place around her metal belt and the four blades connecting to her back on seemingly decorative, metal pieces. They clink like wind chimes once they are freed from her control and she saunters to the door.

“I look forward to seeing your heroics, darling—oh! Pardon me,” Majesty pauses at the door and looks over her shoulder at all the men watching her. Her eyes zero in on Izuku and she smirks. “I got that wrong, didn’t I? I look forward to seeing your heroics… Titan.”

And with that she slips out the door.

“Ah, she always was one for dramatics,” Principal Nedzu sighs before taking a sip of his tea.

“Is that why you like her?” Aizawa asks tiredly. He’s leaning even further back in his chair, now, looking much too comfortable for a professional setting.

Nedzu says nothing, just sips at his tea and smiles.

Aizawa turns his head to look at Izuku, who is slouched forward, Majesty’s business card between both hands, staring down at it and memorizing every little detail. “Izuku…” the pro hero presses, reaching out his foot to nudge Izuku’s own. “You okay?”

Slowly, like a rusty machine, Izuku turns his head towards Aizawa. The man has a single brow arched, waiting for the star struck boy to say something, anything, or at least respond in some way.

“Aizawa-nii,” Izuku croaks and the man’s eyes immediately flick over towards Nedzu, looking almost worried, as the Principal immediately grins bigger at the suffix used. Izuku didn’t have enough processing power at the moment to care.

“Can you please hold this?” Izuku slowly holds out his hand and the business card in it. Aizawa shuffles to sit up again and reach to take the card, beginning to look like his version of concerned. “I’m going to cry now.”

And the floodgates open. All the emotions that just took place, all the nerves from this entire day, all of it comes rushing out. He sits in his chair and just cries, not wailing, but rather gasping for breath as he just lets it all it. It doesn’t feel sad or angry or happy, it just feels like a much needed release.

For a while he just sits and cries, rubbing at his eyes while the tears roll down only one side of his face, but eventually he can hear Aizawa sigh through the cotton in his head and say, “Alright, come here.”

Izuku doesn’t have to be told twice as he lurches out of his own chair and into his neighbor’s side.
He didn’t really pay attention to how he moved, but he knew the position wasn’t very comfortable. Aizawa didn’t seem to mind despite a few grumbles because he had one hand against Izuku’s back and another ruffling his hair, trying to calm him as he had seen Inko do before.

It doesn’t matter that it is new and stiff, Aizawa is safe and Izuku feels much better as he cries. And cries. And cries. Until he’s wet heaving for breathe and Aizawa is awkwardly patting his back.

“Have you ever noticed you cry a lot?” Aizawa mumbles, his voice sounding rough but oddly light at the same time. It makes Izuku make a weird noise between a laugh and a sob, and he nods against Aizawa’s shoulder.

Yeah, he did cry a lot, but that wasn’t a bad thing, because he had so many people to help him get through it.

Chapter End Notes

Ah, so we have the last relatively major OC, Majesty. Hopefully you guys liked her, and if you didn't, well... she won't actually make too many appearances, physically...

Also I'm fully aware of Hawks, but 1) I made Majesty before he was announced and 2) she actually doesn't interfere with that part at all, I promise.

Anyway here she is! I have had this ready to post for months now, y'all, I am so happy with her and her design!

Edit: I made a mistake with one of Majesty's lines where she sarcastically calls "white" the so called "norm." I was basing this off of where I live and momentarily forgot that they are still in Japan! Sorry y’all!

Chapter Song: Owl City - Verge ft. Aloe Blacc
Real quick, wanted to remind everyone of the gear redesigns for Midnight, Present Mic, and Eraserhead over [here](#).

Now...

**WARNING:**

**POSSIBLE TRIGGER WARNING DUE TO TRANSPHOBIA AND MENTIONS OF SUICIDE**

Everything eventually turns out alright, but, kinda in the middle/end things get dicey. PLEASE take care of yourself and read carefully. If you honestly can't read through it LET ME KNOW ON TUMBLR. I can give a break down of what happens.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#).

“Coming to you live from downtown Tokyo where Her Majesty has just taken down the rampaging villain! Luckily we have no casualties, but that looked like a pretty nasty fight. How do you feel about it?” The reporter on TV announces, the scene of an epic fight a backdrop to his current interview.

“*The only thing nasty about that fight was that villain’s stench,*” Majesty replies when the reporter’s microphone is tilted towards her, her signature smirk and sexy attitude at play.

“*Her Majesty doesn’t need a knight, is what you’re saying?*” the reporter smiles. Reporters loved interviewing Majesty, she was always a treat and knew how to keep the back and forth entertaining.

“My dear, I am my own knight,” Majesty purrs and the two laugh.

Izuku leans forward in the couch, eyes on the new television screen as the interview plays out. He would always be All Might’s number one fan, but after the UA presentation he had been on a pretty substantial Majesty kick. His notebook pages for her kept growing and growing the more he observed and the more ideas he developed.

“*Unless, of course, you might be offering to take the role?*” Majesty continues as the laughter ends, one of her hands rising so she can run the back of her fingers over the reporter’s cheek. It flusters the reporter and Majesty uses the moment to lean out of their reach, smirking as she plays.

And play was exactly what this always was. She knew how to weave her words so she was always in charge of the conversation. She knew how to have her fun, but also make sure she plugged some of the charity work she would be doing soon.
It was a subtle difference from who Izuku had met and who the public saw on TV, for Majesty in person still was a blatant flirt, but it was still shocking to him. She had to put on a persona to get her ratings and then use her position to do good in the world. It was impressive, but also kind of sad…

"Behave, Your Majesty!" the reporter gulps, flushed, and the No. 3 Hero just keeps a steady smile turned towards them. "I noticed you're debuting a new costume today?"

"Darling, were you staring? How uncouth," Majesty flutters her lashes, hardly looking put out. "It was time to retire the old design – sent it off to a lovely auction and got a few million yen for the Art of Autism – and now we are on to this lovely red tinted look."

Majesty makes stern eye contact with the camera when she mentions the charity she is currently helping, but then turns back to the reporter. As she speaks about the suit, though, she floats off the ground and twirls gracefully in the air, looking like a ballerina, her purple and red suit shown in full.

"Majesty…" Hizashi whistles, sitting beside Izuku on the couch, also looking at the screen. He’s in his full hero get up, right off a shift and had come right over with Nemuri and Aizawa when Izuku had texted them. A new speaker device sits around his neck, the new material a shiny silver with smooth curves and lights. He also had on fancy new headphones and a matching speaker that latched to his back. "She sure is something else!"

"She’s alright!" Nemuri calls from the bathroom, the door currently closed as she gets changed, sounding a little put off.

"She doesn’t disrupt your persona. Quit complaining," Aizawa replies to the R-Rated hero as he adjusts his own, new pair of goggles, clicking buttons on the sides and testing its features. They are as yellow as his old pair, but a second, purple pair sits on his lap as he reclines in the loveseat.

"Her persona is ‘sexy, powerful woman,’ just like me! She disrupts it a little bit,” Nemuri calls right back, louder this time, sounding even more annoyed.

"She was the major, sexy hero before you, Nemuri-san,” Izuku says, trying to keep the bickering to a minimum. “Now her main appeal is that she’s No. 3, sexy or not.” It was true that it was difficult to rise in popularity when there was already a hero that had a similar theme, but as a top ranked hero the theme changed slightly. It was ranked hero first, theme second. Nemuri had nothing to worry about from Majesty.

As he’s talking Nemuri steps out of the bathroom, adjusting the clasps of her newly designed costume, courtesy of Izuku. She runs her fingers over the scale armor on her sides, and then checks the detachable rubies. It looked great, and thanks to Nemuri’s constant patience and willingness to help they had managed to get her proper measurements to make it fit just right.

"I’d let her step on me," Hizashi shrugs. Aizawa and Nemuri don’t even acknowledge him, but Izuku does give him a sideways look. "What?" the sound hero questions, giving another shrug, “I would!"

“Besides, she looks like an unattainable sexy. Midnight looks easy,” Aizawa doesn’t hesitate even a little, still focused on his goggles. Izuku actually feels the temperature drop in the room as Nemuri’s gaze turns more dangerous and she snaps her new whip taut between her hands.

“What was that?” she questions lowly, voice like silk and finally Aizawa looks up at her. Izuku and Hizashi both fall silent as they watch the next few moment unfold.

“That’s what you wanted, isn’t it?” Aizawa sounds bored, but also like he might be enjoying himself
“Besides, you still look dangerous. Isn’t that what’s important?”

“I’d let you step on me, too!” Hizashi comments, smiling at his friend nervously and Izuku sets his face in his hands. He was mature for his age, but should he really be hearing this?

“Aw! Thank you, Hizashi-kun!” Nemuri’s smile turns from dangerous to sparkingly cheerful in a blink, facing the blond and setting her palm against her cheek. “Shouta-kun only likes Her Majesty because she was so nice to our little cutie over there anyway.”

Izuku blushes when Nemuri winks at him and he quickly looks away, embarrassed. Please don’t bring him into this mess. All he had wanted to do was finally give the three pro heroes their gear he had been working on for some time. Both Hizashi and Nemuri would need to test theirs at their agency’s facilities, but they were officially finished and delivered.

Then they had turned on the television to hero news and Majesty had popped up. Things had only devolved from there.

It had been only a week since the show at UA and Izuku still hadn’t come down from his high. He had gotten a few offers for deals with some agencies that he was still going back and forth on, multiple heroes had commented on their interest in his and his friends’ futures, and he had gotten an internship offer from Japan’s No. 3 hero! The unfortunate part was that Izuku couldn’t share his internship offer with his friends. He knew how they might get, knew it would cause some strife, so he had kept the information to the adults in his life.

It still felt like a dream. Like any moment he would wake up and he would have nothing. But he didn’t and this was very, very real.

“I can just tell you guys what new features your gear has, now?” Izuku asks, desperate to change the subject and move on. Hizashi laughs loudly in his ear and Nemuri giggles at his expense.

“All right, all right, go ahead,” the raven-haired woman keeps giggling, which doesn’t help too much, but at least she had given him the okay.


“BOO!” Hizashi and Nemuri both cut him off and he pouts. Seriously? Was he the child here or them?

“Alright, alright, go ahead,” the raven-haired woman keeps giggling, which doesn’t help too much, but at least she had given him the okay.


“BOO!” Hizashi and Nemuri both cut him off and he pouts. Seriously? Was he the child here or them?

“Ignore them,” Aizawa says simply, his head tilted towards Izuku, goggles pushed up onto his forehead.

Izuku smiles thankfully back at him and nods, ignoring the faces Hizashi makes at him to try and mess with him. “The goggles function as protection against damaging effects to your eyes such as wind, dirt, poison, or anything else a villain may throw at you. Your old ones did not do that,” Izuku actually shoots a glare over at the old pair of goggles sitting on the coffee table. Stupid things…

“I have also installed a few visions that will help you. Thermal vision is exactly what it sounds like, but also motion vision, which will highlight detected motion, brighter the more exaggerated it is. You know how some creatures can only see through motion? It’s like that.” As he speaks Aizawa lowers the goggles back down over his eyes and cycles through the visions with a dial on the right side of the device. “There is also an ‘echolocation’ vision, helpful for detecting stuff behind you or if thermal vision doesn’t help.

“The goggles can scan vitals, both for you and other people. If something is in a danger level it can let you know and it can contact an ambulance if you want.” Izuku doesn’t mention that if the vitals
for Aizawa get ESPECIALLY bad it will ping Izuku’s Eye. He’s a worrier, he can’t help it, and if he mentioned it the pro hero might want him to remove it.

“And you have variety, Shouta-kun!” Hizashi cuts in, making big arm motions at the purple variation of the goggles. He’s grinning big at his friend, but no one can see where Aizawa is looking through the goggles.

“What’s this for?” the sleepy man ignores Hizashi, instead clicking a light on the side of his goggles.

“Well, the first is a small flashlight, the second is a more powerful light, and the third is… a light pointer,” Izuku explains while Aizawa clicks through the lights. On the third, the light pointer, a trio of red beams shoots out of the goggles and makes a triangle on the far wall. “It’s mostly for psyching someone out from a distance…”

“Or playing with kitties!” Nemuri says, leaning heavily on the back of Aizawa’s chair, her hand tickling the top of the man’s head.

He swats at her hand and asks, “Why three lights?”

“Because…” Izuku starts nervously but thankfully Hizashi interrupts.

“Because it looks like Predator!” the sound hero exclaims excitedly, springing off the couch and making motions with his hands on his face to mimic the Predator’s mandibles.

Aizawa stares long at his closest friend, eyes hidden but the rest of his face entirely blank. No one says anything but it doesn’t deter Hizashi. He keeps making clicking noises and attempting to mimic the yautja aliens. After a while Aizawa looks to Izuku. “Don’t let Mashi give him anymore movies.”

“I’ll try…”

“AW! NO FUN!” Hizashi says in English and then plops down back on the couch.

“Would you like me to tell you more about YOUR gear, Hizashi-san?” Izuku asks, sounding more like he’s dealing with a toddler than a grown man.

“OHHHHH YEAH!” Hizashi is up and ready to go almost immediately, the sulking from only a moment ago gone in a flash.

Unable to ignore the excited energy Izuku smiles back at the blond and starts listing off his new gear’s functions. “Well, all the old functions are still there, but have had performance improvements. I hope you don’t mind the aesthetic change?”

“The audio equalizers are a nice touch!” Hizashi comments, motioning to the lights on either side of his speaker that detect his voice and go up and down, through green, yellow, and red, depending on the volume. It was mostly just a fancy touch for fun.

“Glad you like them! I have some other light ideas if you want to hear them,” Izuku eagerly offers, leaning towards the pro hero beside him, eyes sparkling as Hizashi shows interest in his designs.

“Can I be my own personal rave?!” Hizashi questions, also leaning in and grinning, equally excited.

“Boys! Boys!” Nemuri cuts them off, arching her brow when they look to her, “Figure that out later. I want Izuku to get to mine already!”

“Oh, right. Sorry,” the green-haired boy clears his throat. “Well, you have your old features, but now
also a back speaker to direct screams behind you. Your speakers can now alter the pitch of your voice, too! Need it to be super high for sharp pain in enemies? Need it to be super low for deeper, drawn out pain? Need it to be a pitch only dogs can hear you? It can do that!”

“GROOVY!” Hizashi exclaims, immediately going to try and test the functions but Izuku slaps his hands away. Not in the apartment!

“Groovy?” Aizawa questions, the yellow goggles removed from his face as he tries on the purple ones. He doesn’t sound like he fully cares about what they’re doing.

“I’m trying out new stuff, let me live!” the blond cries back.

“What about his headphones?” Nemuri asks, trying to get them moving along.

“Well, Hizashi-san’s headphones have better protective qualities to them. I didn’t realize you had hearing aids until a while back,” Izuku pauses, looking to the man at his side for assurance, and Hizashi smiles and nods, “So the headphones also can assist in amplifying your hearing abilities. When using the speaker the soundproofing turns on. When not using it, it turns off. Or you can do it manually.”

“Can I play music in them?” Hizashi asks.

Izuku blinks slowly up at him. “I just told you they can wirelessly detect your speaker usage and either protect your ears or increase your hearing capabilities… and you want to know if it can play music?”

“Hey, I like my music, now!”

“It can detect police radio or sounds from blocks away!”

“But do it play music?”

Izuku groans, rolling his eyes back. “Yes! They’re Bluetooth!”

“YEEEEAAA HHHHHH!!”

Izuku covers his own ears as Hizashi’s volume immediately picks up and he leans away. Aizawa doesn’t even flinch and Nemuri is stepping over a moment later. “Please tell me it’s my turn now,” she says and Izuku nods. Yes, he was definitely done with Hizashi.

Nemuri had an entire outfit upgrade, still offering a rather sexy look while giving her more protective layers. “Nemuri-san, your gear is significantly more durable than your previous version. The black, leather parts are actually thinned Hera and the gold metal is also Hera.”

The woman steps back to look down at her outfit, pulling at the black leather and testing its durability. “The scaling is also protective but has ports underneath to allow your sleep mist to exit,” Izuku points at the scales along her waist, “but if you still need more skin to release more gas your sleeves and stockings CAN be torn.”

“There’s blades on her heels,” Hizashi mumbles, leaning in towards Izuku and pointing at Nemuri’s high heel boots. Indeed, on the back of her heels, are matching, gold blades on pivots. The raven-haired woman pauses to lift one of her feet and look back at the blade.

“Oh, now I like that,” Nemuri purrs, flexing her calf muscles a few times until she finds the right way to make the blade flick out. Izuku is impressed but not surprised she’s able to figure out how to work
the blade so easily on her own. She’s smart, smarter than her two friends, but the public focuses so much on her sex appeal they never notice. Izuku had been able to recognize her strategic ability before he met her, but now he truly knew how much everyone was missing out on.

“Never hurts to have a back up!” the boy smiles and Nemuri smiles right back at him. “Now, those rubies on your outfit.”

“Yes, I noticed there were quite a few more,” the woman says, raising her arms to look at all the diamond-shaped rubies all over her outfit.

“Yes! Well, whenever you release any kind of sleep mist they absorb a very tiny portion and fill up. You can then remove one and throw it. It will explode on impact and make a big cloud of sleeping mist. Your mask has a visor in it, actually, that will tell you when rubies are ready to be thrown or not. It keeps track of motion around you as well, in case the mist might obscure your vision, and it ALSO keeps track of your vitals since releasing gas saps your nutrients and vitamins.”

“Ohhh! My new toy. Tell me about that,” Nemuri wiggles her hips in excitement as she pulls her rolled up whip from her belt and holds it in front of her, smirking devilishly at it.

“I don’t like that you called it a toy,” Aizawa comments dryly, just leaning back in his chair now.

“I don’t like that you called me easy,” Nemuri comments right back, pulling the whip tight between her hands with a snap. She looks coldly back at the messy man and the messy man looks blankly at her.

“Fair enough,” Aizawa eventually admits and looks away. It’s enough for Nemuri.

“Well…” Izuku sighs. Was it bad he was so used to this? “The whip can be electrified and you can also transfer sleep gas through the grip and into the whip for extended sleeping reach. It has an auto uncoil function, too.”

“A what?” Nemuri asks in wonder, eager to know more about her “toy.”

“The whip can unwrap itself from something you’ve wrapped it on in a few seconds, object or person. You just press that green button there,” the genius specifies and then smiles apologetically. “Sorry, that’s about all I got for it. Not much, I know.”

“Cutie pie, are you kidding?” Nemuri cuts in, eyes moving from her whip to the boy, her brows furrowing in sympathy. “This is spectacular! Support teams always make the bare minimum, but you did so much!”

“You are one amazing kid, you know that?” Hizashi joins in, throwing an arm around Izuku’s shoulders and jiggling him gently. He grins down at the boy. “You sure you don’t have some kind of genius quirk like Nedzu?”

“I’m sure. Did an X-ray myself. I have the extra toe joint,” Izuku replies, lifting his feet and wiggling his toes. He had been to the doctor with his mother when he was four, but the doctor had always rubbed him the wrong way. So, of course, Izuku had eventually built his own X-ray machine a few years later and scanned his own foot to double check.

“You probably wouldn’t have made it this far with a quirk,” Aizawa says bluntly, standing up slowly from his chair and walking over to the genius boy. He stares down at Izuku for a moment, arms in his pockets, purple goggles partially hidden in his capture weapon. “You did good. Stop second-guessing yourself so much,” he says and raises his hand to plop it on Izuku’s head, the loose, long curls bouncing with the motion. “No more moping. Time to feed the cats.”
Izuku’s brows furrow as Aizawa turns towards the back doors, hands back in his pockets, and starts walking. It wasn’t time to feed the cats… They still had an hour… But as Aizawa shows no sign of stopping or slowing down Izuku finds himself scrambling to follow, smiling despite himself, Hizashi and Nemuri’s laughter behind him.

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“Inazumi, this looks amazing!” Izuku says in astonishment two weeks later, eyes wide as he stands in the doorframe to the clubhouse’s new recreation room, or lounge. It had no walls pointing out to the outside and thus had no windows, and it was nearly the size of Izuku’s large workshop.

It had smooth, polished wood flooring and the walls were painted an uneven layer of light blue. The paint was Mashi and Katsuki’s doing… They had both been going on a competitive streak of painting the walls of the clubhouse and failed to make it all perfectly even. At least some color was coming into the rooms…

There were a few relatively cheap tables scattered around, not one matching the other perfectly, with a variety of chairs circling each. Against the right wall were a few bookshelves, mostly empty, but already marked for books, video games, board games, and just about anything else they wanted to store. On the left wall there was a space for a television, but for now the Midoriya’s old one was set on a stand with game consoles sitting on the floor around it. In the back right corner of the room was an open space for a kitchenette with counters and an island. It didn’t have the majority of appliances a kitchen would have, but it had space, and they had managed to bring in a mini fridge and the sink worked.

Mostly the room just needed appliances to be brought in, which was entirely doable, but the one thing that they had finished entirely was a space in front of the television, taking up a good portion of the floor. A pit of sorts had been dug out, lined with the same wood as the flooring, and filled with blankets and pillows, resembling one of those pits in acrobatic training filled with foam cubes but much more colorful.

Shinsou is currently laying in the pool of cushions, more relaxed than Izuku has ever seen him, drowning in all the mismatched glory and wrapped like a half finished burrito in blankets despite the heat.

“Why thank you,” Inazumi smiles proudly, standing a few paces to the side of Izuku, currently in his more relaxed, private clothes, his hands in his hoodie pockets. “It was about time we had a proper lounge area.”

“This part was my idea,” Shinsou calls, voice blurry from napping, and he makes a motion with his hands at the pit.

“I like it,” Izuku laughs, walking over and looking down at the taller boy with a smile.

“T ook forever to get the Bendies to make it. They aren’t as good at digging…” Inazumi explains, also coming over to stand beside Izuku.

“All right, the genius boy nods and glances over at Inazumi. They both smile at each other, both happy and excited.

All summer things had been going well. Shinsou and Inazumi both kept getting more and more comfortable around the clubhouse and Izuku, Mashi, and Katsuki. They didn’t need to worry about school so they often would find themselves with plenty of time to get to know each other.
Shinsou had officially finished his room, though it did still feel a little bare, and would often be found roaming the clubhouse in some manner, or dropping by the Midoriya apartment whether Izuku was there or not. He had begun sketching, with grudging help from Katuski, his dream hero outfit and talking to Izuku about possible gear to help. It had been exciting, planning everything out with him!

Inazumi was also getting much, much more comfortable. Before he would only show up to the clubhouse after school, otherwise he was at home, but slowly they started seeing him on other days. Working with the Bendies or designing his room or sitting with his computer in a little, corner sitting room he’d prepped. It was all possible.

He was still a sassy grouch with an obsession with anime and manga who argued with Mashi constantly and never stood up for himself, but he was more at ease amongst their group and Izuku hoped he could help the other boy learn to defend himself in some manner.

“Now all we need is furniture that matches,” Inazumi continues, beginning to walk around the room, his cozy sneakers squeaking on the floor. He stops by the kitchenette’s island, turning around and leaning back against it to face Izuku. He didn’t look as graceful as he usually did when he was dressed to impress, which made Izuku feel almost honored. For the longest time no one saw Inazumi out of his uniform or his nice jeans, purposefully baggy shirts, and nice jackets. Now they were seeing him in baggy hoodies, big glasses, and hair free of gel.

For a long moment there is silence, Inazumi just staring at Izuku through his round glasses, and slowly realization dawns on the genius. “You want me to buy the new furniture,” he says, not asking a question.

“You ARE mister moneybags,” Shinsou mumbles, only just barely heard from how he’s pressing his face into one of the larger pillows near him. Izuku glances at him, realizes he won’t be able to argue with the half-asleep boy, and then turns back to Inazumi.

“I’m not going to splurge and lose all my money! My mom and I need to be careful, it’s too soon to make assumptions,” he replies, crossing his arms and giving a disapproving look.

“Okay, one: you look like Aizawa-san,” Inazumi begins, not looking affected at all, waving flippantly at the green-haired boy.

The comment is enough for Izuku’s look to slip and he splutters, eyes widening. “W-what?! No I don’t!” he begins.

“Yeah you do,” Shinsou adds oh-so-helpfully.

“Go to sleep, Shinsou-kun,” Izuku grumbles, looking away with a pout while his hands come up to begin pushing his hair back out of his face. It had gotten so long and he often wore it down when he was just relaxing.

The purple-haired boy mumbles something unintelligible and wiggles deeper into his nest of pillows while Inazumi just keeps looking at Izuku, a brow arched. “And two: You get an average of one million yen a month from your first license, plus your second license just went through and you’re getting… what was it? About five hundred thousand a month? I’m pretty sure you’ll be set for a while.”

Yes, his second license had finally gone through and he was now getting an average total of about 1,500,000 yen a month, but… he and his mother had no idea how to spend it and it was scary. They didn’t want to screw this up and the majority of the money had gone into savings. They liked their lives, and now they could be a bit more secure and comfortable, sure, but they didn’t feel a desire to
live lavishly.

Perhaps the clubhouse could be the lavish part, though? Maybe?

With a deep sigh Izuku runs his hands through his hair and looks to his friend. “Okay… You, my mom, and I can go furniture shopping eventually,” he begins, but when Inazumi begins to grin he holds up a finger. “But only after I have commissioned our interior doors from Hatsume Āto, and I can only do that after… well…”

“As after what?” Inazumi demands, looking mildly agitated when Izuku trails off. He was such an impatient guy…

“As the paperwork goes through,” Izuku says, avoiding eye contact with Inazumi’s bright blue eyes.

“Paperwork for what?” the white-haired boy continues to push, only sounding more agitated, his arms crossing in front of his chest, hoodie bagging up around his body.

Izuku keeps trying to look away, but he can’t ignore his friend’s icy glare for long and eventually just gives in, sighing in defeat. “I was going to wait until it was finished and Mashi was back in town to tell you guys…” he mumbles. Most summers Mashi would spend a week or two out of Japan either visiting her mother’s family in Egypt or visiting her half brother – and to a lesser degree their father – in America. This year she was in America and kept sending their group chat pictures of her and her brother, Vernon, doing crazy stuff all over Miami, Florida.

“Midoriya, what did you do?” Inazumi’s finger taps impatiently on his arm, waiting. Even Shinsou has opened one eye and is peering up at Izuku from the pit.

“I… might have filed for ownership of the clubhouse?”

Inazumi and Shinsou say nothing for the longest moment, both just staring at Izuku with gradually widening eyes. It had been in his plans for a little while now that the one thing Izuku did know he wanted to do with his newfound wealth was finally purchase and own the clubhouse building. It was taking time and required a lot of paperwork, plus his mother’s assistance since Izuku couldn’t actually own his own real estate until he was a bit older, and even then he’d need his mother to be his guarantor. Nonetheless everything was officially in the works.

“You’re… going to own this place?” Shinsou questions, no longer trying to fall asleep and instead hazardously sitting up.

“Well, I’m trying to,” Izuku shrugs, scratching lightly at his cheek and glancing down. “It’s looking good so far, but we’re mostly just waiting now.” It seemed like he was always waiting for something.

He looks up from the ground at the frantic approach of footsteps as Inazumi pushes away from the island and runs back towards him. He isn’t sure what to expect and certainly isn’t ready for the smaller boy to launch himself at him, hugging him tight around the neck. “Congratulations!” the boy exclaims in Izuku’s ear and it would have made the genius laugh in surprise if it weren’t for the fact he was suddenly very off balance.

There’s a moment where they’re still up and Izuku thinks he’ll be able to get both his feet back under him, but then they are tumbling and he only has just enough sense to push them towards the pillow pit. They fall with a “whomp” into the cushions and Izuku finally allows himself to laugh and Inazumi detaches from his neck.
“That was unexpected,” Izuku comments, marveling at how things have changed. Inazumi would have never done something like that only a few months prior. He really had grown so much more comfortable if he was willing to act so spontaneously around them.

The smaller boy sits up and crosses his legs, adjusting his glasses back into place and smiles down at Izuku.

“Maybe,” he shrugs, “but you’ve been in this building for years now, right?”

“Almost three,” Izuku nods, also trying to sit up. These pillows would be perfect when his back started to hurt. It was almost like he was floating.

“You’ve worked hard! I’m allowed to be happy for you,” Inazumi smiles a bit brighter.

“Are you still going to keep this place cloaked?” Shinsou questions, as he manages to crawl over and flop down at Izuku’s side.

“Probably. It would draw so much attention otherwise and isn’t it kind of nice having this secret place all to ourselves?” the green-haired boy replies, tilting his head towards Shinsou. The taller boy hums in agreement and lies back down, reaching out a hand and blindly patting at Izuku’s face.

“Congrats, Midoriya,” Shinsou says, a smirk in his voice as Izuku swats at the hand in his face.

“So, you get everything in to officially own this place, then you get us doors — freaking finally — and then we can go furniture shopping?” Inazumi questions, already done with the celebration and on to looking excited about the concept of interior decoration.

“Well, we’ll try—“

“Great! I’ll start researching good spots to go and upcoming sales!” Inazumi cuts Izuku off and then scrambles towards the edge of the pit. The corner of a blanket is kicked up and lands atop Izuku while a few pillows are shoved over as well, burying him slightly. He would complain, but it felt too nice.

“Don’t get your hopes up!” Shinsou calls, helping at least a little bit, but Inazumi isn’t listening and is already gone to fetch his computer. The pale boy certainly loved decorating.

They expect him to not return and instead do his research in his cluttered room, but a few minutes later Inazumi is scurrying back in, laptop in his arms, and hopping right back into the pillow pit with his friends. He’s still smiling big as he clicks open his rose gold laptop and opens up a bookmark he already has saved.

“I think this style table would be perfect for in here,” he begins and glances over at Izuku expectantly. With a sigh and a smile the genius boy connects his Eye to the laptop and leans back, a screen popping up in his view that matches Inazumi’s. This was happening, there was no point in arguing with Inazumi when he got this excited. Off to the side Izuku is pretty sure he hears Shinsou cackle at his expense.

“Those look expensive,” Izuku comments, ignoring the purple-haired boy, instead just jumping right in to Inazumi’s ideas.

“We could aim for something similar but cheaper, but keep it in mind,” the blue-eyed boy replies, his glasses glowing from his screen, and he opens up a new tab and clicks another, pre-existing bookmark, the whole thing mirrored in Izuku’s Eye. “Now look at it paired with these chairs.”
“Looks nice, Inazumi-kun,” the genius boy hums and Inazumi puffs up proudly.

“Of course it does. I picked it. But tell me, do you prefer these or these?” And so Izuku allows Inazumi to lead him through his prior ideas and research, clueless to what might look best, but trusting the other boy will make everything work out perfectly.

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Out of everyone Izuku was helping develop gear for, Shinsou had to have the least. His outfit was still a work in progress when it came to design, especially since Katsuki kept intervening and telling the other boy to try again because it looked terrible, but the actual gear he would be using wasn’t much in terms of numbers.

Shinsou liked it that way. He liked having the fewest number of tools. He might have a quirk that wasn’t offensive by default, but that was how he liked it. He didn’t need too many offensive tools.

The first was a mask that covered his mouth and nose. It would be able to alter his voice’s volume and pitch while also recording and playing back other noises. It could also filter air; making sure that even in the worst environments Shinsou would have clean air and a healthy voice.

The second were little, wireless speakers that Shinsou could put almost anywhere, similar to Mashi’s trackers. They would allow him to speak to enemies anywhere he set a speaker, thus allowing him to control them from a distance. They had determined, through multiple tests, that Shinsou had a reach of about half a mile in every direction when it came to his mind control.

These two inventions were simple compared to what Izuku had worked on before. Shinsou had seen him build giant birds and robot horses, yet it was still a little surprising just HOW quickly his requested gear was finished.

He had suggested it one morning at the Midoriya apartment after sleeping over, Izuku began sketching out blueprints after breakfast, and by the afternoon he was already beginning to piece things together in his bedroom. Shinsou sat and watched, like he enjoyed doing, while Izuku worked.

Shinsou didn’t have as much to do around the clubhouse compared to the rest of their little group, but he never felt bad about it or left out. He enjoyed watering and taking care of the plants they had growing around the building. He enjoyed sitting and listening to Izuku and Inazumi talk about and work on coding. He enjoyed watching Mashi and Izuku work on builds. He enjoyed working on some self-defense Aizawa had taught him. He enjoyed messing with Katsuki. He enjoyed napping in his room or in the lounge’s luxurious pillow pit.

It was just the way he was, and he had no qualms with any of it.

But as he silently watched Izuku work on his mask, Pumpkin in his lap, Shinsou realized things would be changing soon. Soon he would have something of his own to start practicing with. Soon he would be finding himself outside with Katsuki and Mashi more often, practicing his quirk and his gear. Soon things were about to get so much more real.

Not that things weren’t already real, but this was going to be a physical, personal thing that showed that yes, this was actually happening. He was on his way to becoming a hero. With more help than he ever though he would, or could, have.

He felt grateful. Unbelievably grateful. He had acquaintances in the past, but no one had ever wanted to be his friend when they found out what his quirk was. He had resigned himself to never having
any true friends and that he would have to figure his life out on his own, but then things changed.

Shinsou certainly couldn’t have ever predicted the group of friends he now had.

He had gone to school with Inazumi since they were little and knew about him. He remembered other kids teasing the other boy for being quirkless and then later for announcing he was a boy. Shinsou remembers one time trying to stand up for him when kids were calling him by – what had Inazumi called it? – his dead name and he had been crying. The bullies had left, but Inazumi wasn’t happy, telling Shinsou that now things were only going to get worse and he shouldn’t have intervened. Shinsou had given him space from then on, even though every fiber of his being told him he should be helping, not sitting back.

Mashi he’d heard of on the first day of middle school and even noticed her during PE before he realized who she was. She was hard to miss. She wasn’t the main piece of gossip, but people had definitely noticed the crazy, quirkless girl. Loud, vibrant, and with bright red hair like hers made her a beacon. She had one of the most exhausting personalities Shinsou had ever met, but she was strong and stubborn and viciously caring. She hadn’t liked Shinsou at first, he knew that, he wasn’t a fool, but she wasn’t one to give up on people and over time they had managed to find some peace of mind in each other’s presence.

Katsuki was just as exhausting as Mashi but for entirely different reasons. He was cocky and thought himself better than everyone else. He had a quirk, too, but he didn’t know what Shinsou had been through. His quirk was flashy and cool, perfect for hero work, and he didn’t let people forget what he thought of them. Rarely was it flattering. Shinsou wasn’t afraid to admit Katsuki was his least favorite person in their group, but he had seen those rare moments of… not-asshole behavior. How he was honestly excited to experiment, how he pushed all of them to work as hard as they possibly could, and how he interacted almost gently – gentle for Katsuki anyway – with Izuku. Shinsou doubted Izuku had even noticed.

And then there was Midoriya Izuku. Shinsou hadn’t thought much of him when he had first appeared at his desk that second week of school. He remembered the boy from their shared Home Economics course only because he was quirkless. He hadn’t seemed like much, quiet save for the occasional muttering, looking like a spooked animal, and presence usually drowned out by the redhead that was always with him. Now Shinsou knew him to be one of the kindest and bravest people he had ever known. Shinsou had never met someone like him before, someone broken down by the world in every way possible but still pushing himself forward with a vengeance, and even with this massive undertaking he still managed to help those around him. Shinsou supposes that was just who he was, unable to leave something be, constantly wanting to help and fix and support.

Shinsou could have never seen himself ever becoming friends with these kids, never in his life, but they were changing his life for the better. He had people he could lean on, people he could protect and who would protect him. He had not just one, but two places that felt more like home than his own apartment he shared with his parents. The clubhouse was comfortable and safe and the Midoriya apartment was warm and loving. He felt like he was meant to be here, with these people, surrounded by love and support.

These people felt like what a family was supposed to feel like. A chaotic, futuristic, loud, explosive family.

“You want to go ahead and practice with them?” Izuku questions as Shinsou silently turns his new mask around in his hands. It was a prototype and had a few open panels and visible wires that would eventually be fixed up once they got to the final versions. Sitting on a worktable were little disks, almost identical to Mashi’s trackers but with tiny speakers on one side. Shinsou truly was impressed.
Only yesterday had he been watching Izuku work on the first drafts of these and now they were in his hands.

“Yeah,” Shinsou nods and begins to fumble with the straps of the mask to get it on. Izuku helps after a few moments, smiling up at him once the thing is settled. It doesn’t cover up his nose yet, but Shinsou knows it eventually will.

“Hey, Inazumi, do you want to help Shinsou practice with me?” Izuku asks, looking over to the smaller boy currently sitting at one of the clubhouse’s worktables he and Izuku would often work together at. He has his laptop and is currently tapping at the keys as he works on some kind of code.

“No,” Inazumi immediately replies, not looking up. The boy was too engrossed in his work. While he had definitely warmed up to them he was still a grouch the majority of the time, mostly just wanting to program and read manga. He would have these moments of childlike glee but then seem to remember he was supposed to be this antisocial diva and revert right back.

“Oh,” Izuku says just as cheerfully as before, not put off at all. They were used to it by now. Still, sometimes Shinsou wished he could at least read the smaller boy a bit better. “You want to ask Kacchan?” Izuku looks to Shinsou. Shinsou looks back with a blank expression that spoke volumes. “Right, so just us, then,” Izuku determines and they head out of the room to head to the lounge.

Experiments aren’t as exciting to Shinsou as they are to Izuku, Katsuki, and Mashi. Some of them are exciting and fantastical, but most are like what follows: sitting around doing repetitive stuff and writing for the majority.

Still, there is a bit of a giddy feeling in his gut as they test. This is his own mask and speakers! The fact that it’s his makes it so much more personal and meaningful. He can see why the others can get so into it.

“What is your name?” Shinsou asks for the sixth time in an incredibly altered voice thanks to the mask.

“Midoriya Izuku,” the other boy replies and his real eye glazes over as he is brainwashed. Shinsou nods and makes a few marks on a chart Izuku prepared for him, mostly just saying that his quirk did work with the highly altered voices and how long it took.

“Pinch your cheek,” Shinsou orders and Izuku does, motions looking too lifeless to ever appear natural. The pinch wakes the green-haired boy up immediately and he pouts, rubbing his cheek.

“Why do you make me pinch weird places?” he whines and Shinsou smirks back at him behind his mask.

“Am I not aloud to have a little fun?”

“You made me pinch my butt two tries ago!” Izuku retorts and he gets no reply this time, instead watching irritably as the other boy keeps smirking in secret and cackles.

It was also odd to have people that trusted him so much with his quirk. They weren’t afraid to talk to him, and they knew that if he did control them they would never be in danger. Shinsou had never experienced such a thing before.

“So, your last gear might take a bit longer to finish,” Izuku says, already over the teasing and picking up their notes to go over the results. Everything was running smoothly, probably thanks to how familiar some of the systems already were.
“Yeah?” Shinsou questions, hands on the dials on either side of the mask, twisting and turning them to see what kinds of voices he can make. That one had been way too loud and he apologetically lowers the volume when Izuku flinches.

“Yeah,” the genius nods, taking a moment to glance at their charts before continuing, “You were looking for claws, right?” Shinsou nods.

His offensive weapon he had decided on was pretty simple at first. All he asked for were some Hera claws on his gloves, nothing crazy, but after some talk with Izuku at his apartment they had decided to add even more to the idea. Izuku had suggested the claws would only be the tips of hidden, extendable whips that could be used for long-distance attacks as well as to wrap up enemies. Even Aizawa, who sometimes listened in on them, confidently agreed it could work.

“Well, I’ve begun working on a new technology that I want to apply to multiple inventions, including your claws, so I’ll make some basic prototypes for you but the final product will take a while,” Izuku explains. Something new already? Did this kid ever sleep?

“That’s fine,” Shinsou nods again, his voice coming out really high pitched and quiet this time and it makes both boys giggle childishly for a moment. “What’s this new technology?”

“Oh, well…” Suddenly the other boy was bashful, which wasn’t uncommon, but when it came to this kind of subject matter and how much of a trouble magnet Izuku was, Shinsou had to worry a little. “It’s really complicated to explain because… this technology doesn’t actually exist… at all,” Izuku tries to say, fiddling with the edges of the report papers, eyes glancing around nervously.

“Midoriya…” Shinsou starts, eyes thinning, and he unclasps his mask, figuring the comical voices wouldn’t be very helpful right now.

“I’m being safe! I swear!” Izuku swiftly adds, lifting up all their notes to hide his face behind the papers as Shinsou keeps glaring suspiciously at him.

“What are you planning, Midoriya?” the taller boy questions, crossing his arms and not budging an inch. No one really said anything, but everyone seemed to be in agreement to look after Izuku and his self-destructive desire to seemingly push the laws of physics.

“Uhh… You know Star Wars?” Izuku asks. Shinsou’s immediate suspicion is that Izuku is trying to derail the conversation but then his past experiences with the boy kick in. It wasn’t uncommon for the genius to start a conversation with seemingly random subject matter that would, in fact, lead up to something. “You know… lightsabers?”

“No.”

“W-well a lightsaber is—“

“I mean no you aren’t making a lightsaber.”

“Now h-hold on a second here!”

Izuku quickly lowers the notes to look at Shinsou desperately, frantically trying to explain his insane plan. Because that’s what it was, right? Insane. “I’m not trying to make lightsabers!” Izuku insists but as the purple-haired boy stares a hole into him he shrinks away and mumbles, “Yet…”

“No.”

“I just want to research the possibility of similar technology! There are plenty of quirks out there to
examine for a similar effect, and some stuff that used to be considered science fiction DID become science fact, after all! It could be a monumental discovery!"

“You’ve made more monumental discoveries in a year than most people have in their entire lives,” Shinsou deadpans and tries not to smirk at Izuku’s responding pout that is too cute for this kind of serious conversation.

“That hardly matters. If I’m still able to work then I should,” the smaller boy argues and Shinsou finally sighs. There was no winning this argument. As different as every single one of his new friends was, one major similarity, which probably helped bond them together, was that once their minds were set there was no going back.

“So, you want to put tiny lightsabers on my fingers?” he questions and Izuku sits up straighter.

“Possibly?” Izuku shrugs, head tilting and his messy bun of green curls bounces with the movement. “Only if it works out. I’m guessing they’ll be some form of plasma claws, but who knows with all the quirk research just waiting out there.”

For a second the two boys just stare at each other, Izuku a bit more hopeful now and Shinsou considering. “If you do manage to make me these ‘plasma claws’…” the taller boy trails off and his genius friend leans in, expectant. “Can you make them orange?”

“I will make them rainbow, if you want.”

“Ah, that… that won’t be necessary…” Shinsou begins to raise his hands to hopefully placate the mounting energy he sees in Izuku’s eyes. Oh dear…

“I will make them glitter!”

“Really, Midoriya, I was kidding.”

“You will have the fanciest nails in the hero scene!”

“Please don’t…”

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Never in his life did Inazumi believe he could be as happy as he was now.

Growing up in foster care wasn’t the nightmare most people assumed it was because of movies, at least for most people, but for the Inazumi brothers it was pretty darn close.

Inazumi was taught young to keep his “deviations” close to his chest because no one would ever accept him or approve. Certainly not his foster parents. He was taught how to be “proper” in society and that his silence was his greatest gift. He was more appealing if he was silent, and he needed to be extra appealing because he was quirkless.

It wasn’t fair and he knew it wasn’t, but if he spoke up he’d be yelled at, berated, and sometimes spanked. It was terrifying for such a little kid, and it was only worse if his brother got involved. When Inazumi Vin stepped up for his little brother’s sake he was treated much, much worse.

Inazumi couldn’t remember exactly what would happen, anymore. He had been so young and it had been so frightening he would usually try to block it out, but what he did take away from it was that silence wasn’t just what made other people happy, it was what kept him safe.
When his elder brother turned twenty was when he finally was able to take both himself and Inazumi out of there, becoming his little brother’s legal guardian and finally freeing them from that hell. Inazumi felt safe with his brother, and with their newfound safety came newfound confidence.

When Inazumi came to school wearing boys clothes, what he always found so much more comfortable, and announced he was Inazumi Ken he was hoping for support. He and his brother had gotten their fairy tail ending, right? Things were supposed to be better now and the world wasn’t as evil as their foster parents had insisted it be.

But Inazumi was young and foolish and he was only taught yet again that silence kept him safe.

The announcement had been made, however, and while the bullying only became worse Inazumi still felt more comfortable in his skin now. Binders were hell when he finally had to get those as he grew, but it was a small price to pay to be at least honest about something.

So certain in his ways Inazumi had fought against Izuku and Mashi so stubbornly when they had first approached him, but that one, tiny sliver of childlike hope in his heart had struggled desperately to make him give them a chance. He wouldn’t admit it, but he was and is so happy he did.

He had friends – he hopes – who accepted who he was, attitude and all. He knows he had been hellish to deal with and most of the time he regretted his actions only a few seconds after he did them, but they had learned to deal with his moods and were patient with him.

Well, Izuku and Shinsou were, Mashi was persistent and annoying and Katsuki was just… Katsuki.

But things were better now. Things were finally looking better for Inazumi and he wasn’t sure what he had done to deserve this but he was finally happy.

And then he had to go back to school and the dream was over.

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It started like an itch Inazumi couldn’t quite reach. All summer things had been amazing, just hanging out with his friends – actual, real-life friends! – and then came the first day back to school.

He lived much closer to Mashi’s home than Izuku and Shinsou’s so usually he and the redhead would walk together until they met up with the other boys. Even as they argued Inazumi felt a kind of serenity, their bickering familiar and, in a way, fun. When they meet up with Izuku and Shinsou, who are always waiting for them thanks to the tallest boy’s bike, things calm down a bit more, morphing into a rhythm they have almost perfected. It isn’t QUITE perfect, no, but it is better than anything Inazumi has ever experienced.

Why had Inazumi fought against this so hard? Why had he been so terrible to them? Why did he still treat them pretty terribly…?

Things are fine as they get to school, still wrapped up in their own little world, and then they split, Izuku and Mashi going into their class and Inazumi and Shinsou going into theirs. That’s when things become… strained.

Kinasa, the boy made of gold that Inazumi and Shinsou have both gone to school with for years, looks up and glares at the two. Ever since Shinsou had put him in his place he doesn’t approach them anymore, not while they are together, but he has never let them forget his disdain. He always glares at them. Always.

So why does the sudden look make Inazumi startle and a weird feeling in his stomach form? This is
not the first time Kinasa has glared at him, so why is it so shocking?

Class starts and the feeling in his gut doesn’t go away, but it doesn’t get worse either. Not yet.

Class continues and it feels… slower than usual. Inazumi chalks it up to first day back from summer break and having to get used to the lessons again, but that is when his skin begins to prickle. Goosebumps begin to form and he looks around. It feels like people are looking at him. Glaring at him. He doesn’t see anyone looking…

In the past plenty of other kids in his classes have made a point of harassing him during class. That usually means glaring, throwing paper balls, or yanking his hair from behind. The latter two haven’t happened, but he is certain SOMEONE is glaring at him. Maybe it’s still Kinasa?

The pit in his gut is growing, him feel nauseous, and his muscles are twitching like he wants to run. What is happening? He has dealt with all of this before, entirely fine, why does everything suddenly feel so… suffocating.

Yes, suffocating. Everything is closing in and strangling him, turning everything blurry and muffled. Like he’s deep, deep underwater, the pressure crushing his bones. Although, he may prefer the underwater thing. At least then there is an obvious issue and an obvious solution. Here he isn’t sure what has suddenly brought this on.

It takes him a moment to realize when it is lunch. Shinsou is standing by his desk and for a moment all Inazumi sees is a larger classmate, looming over him, and he panics. What did he want? Why was this happening? Why was this happening?

But then Shinsou is asking if he is okay and he can breath, focusing on his friend and for a moment he feels better. Shinsou was his friend. He had friends… But here at school he had a whole lot more enemies that he had forgotten about.

Inazumi stands and excuses himself for a moment to go to the restroom. He still feels claustrophobic in here, the glares he can’t spot scratching at his skin. Shinsou says something else but Inazumi is already slipping out the door.

Being out of the classroom already helps. He had always found comfort in solitude, and while the hallways aren’t entirely empty there are a lot fewer people to glare at him.

It is as Inazumi reaches the restrooms that everything that had been building up comes crashing down.

One moment he is pushing open the door, the next he’s being shoved back and landing on his butt. It startles him enough to shake him out of his choking stupor for a moment, adrenaline shooting through his system, and he looks up, confused. A boy is standing in the doorway of the restroom, some kid Inazumi doesn’t know, a few others are watching from behind him and in the halls.

“What do you think you’re doing?” the boy demands, a disgusted sneer on his face Inazumi wishes he didn’t find familiar.

Wait… what WAS he doing? He had grown so accustomed to going to the clubhouse’s men’s bathroom without any issue… oh no. He saw what was happening now.

He had been spoiled. Spoiled by the fantasy CUT and all it entailed had offered him. All summer he had been away from this hell and he had forgotten what the real world thought of him.

The fairy tail was over.
“Hey! Answer me, you quirkless weirdo!” the boy is getting angry and Inazumi can’t handle it. He can’t handle any of this. It is too much. He should be familiar with this, able to ignore it like he always has, but he can’t. He can’t.

Before he realizes what he’s doing he is springing to his feet and shoving the boy right back, that adrenaline still in his system lurching him forward. He doesn’t have time to regret it. Doesn’t have time to think he had just made this so, so much worse. He’s panicking and his head is full of a vicious, terrified, furious static.

“Forget you!” he screams at the boy, tears streaking his face, and without a second thought he’s turning and shoving his way through the crowd of students that had begun forming in the hall. He refused to be their freak show. No, he had to get out of there. He had to get away from this harsh, awful reality.

He’s sprinting through the halls before he realizes it and he hears someone, he isn’t sure who, yell his name, but he ignores them and keeps running. He just keeps running. He can’t be here. He can’t be here. He can’t be here.

He doesn’t know where he’s going but he can’t be here.

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Izuku felt a tiny bit guilty for online chatting during classes but he already knew everything they were teaching and Tomura didn’t go to school anymore so this was a perfect time for them to talk. Plus, it was significantly easier to chat to the mysterious boy over chat than in person. He was still an enigma, but he was more put together when he was able to plan out exactly what he was saying ahead of time.

_TheTerrificTitan_: I’m really not a fan of that part of town, Tomura.

_Shazanka_: I live in “that part of town” you know

_TheTerrificTitan_: I didn’t mean it bad! It’s just really intimidating.

_Shazanka_: chill. I know the place you won’t have any issues

_TheTerrificTitan_: Aww! Are you going to be my personal hero?

_Shazanka_: I feel sick. Take that fucking back or I just might look the other way when some “intimidating” fuck grabs you

Izuku tries not to smile too large, especially because the teacher is pacing by his desk.

Tomura really didn’t like heroes. At first, when they were attempting to plan out how they were going to bring the Neko Nurse out to wherever Tomura wanted to bring it they had butted heads on a few occasions. Izuku tried to stay professional but the other boy was just so childish.

Eventually, however, they did reach a kind of understanding. Izuku would always be a hero fanboy, Tomura would always be a hero hater, but they both could be hero critics. It led to all kinds of interesting conversations.

_Shazanka_: hey nerd. I had an idea for that cat bot

_TheTerrificTitan_: Yeah? That is unexpected. What is it?
Shazanka: make it heal animals

TheTerrificTitan: Animals? I hadn’t really considered them.

TheTerrificTitan: And you think I should add on that feature?

Shazanka: yes.

TheTerrificTitan: I’m surprised, Tomura. I didn’t peg you as an animal lover!

Shazanka: why? I hate people. They always disappoint you. Animals never disappoint you

TheTerrificTitan: You and Mashi should talk more than! She loves animals.

Shazanka: no

Izuku flinches at the immediate answer. He couldn’t tell whether Tomura liked or disliked Mashi. He knew the other boy was not a fan of her loud behavior, but he had definitely been touched when she had brought him an ice cream. Izuku could tell.

“You and Sandy chattin’ again?” Izuku jumps in surprise as Mashi’s face tilts into his view, a big grin on her face. She has her lunch in her hand and when Izuku glances around he finds everyone has begun going around and eating. It was lunchtime.

“Uh… Y-yeah, I am,” he answers, looking back to his friend and smiling back at her. He didn’t actually chat with Tomura that often, but he was the only one he could be talking to during school hours.

“He’s a weirdo!” Mashi comments, shrugging and smiling brightly as Izuku gives her a disapproving look. “What? He is!”

“He’s… unique,” Izuku corrects her and she rolls her eyes then tucks in to begin eating her rice.

“He’s weeeeird,” she hisses and the green-haired boy groans. There was no winning this conversation. Whatever he said Mashi would either turn on him or outright ignore.

Izuku bends to get his own lunch, closing his chat, and looks up when he sees a familiar mess of purple hair appear at the doorway. There isn’t anything especially odd about this, they always join each other for lunch at some point, but Shinsou… He looks worried. More worried than Izuku thinks he has ever seen him before.

“Shinsou-kun? What’s wrong?” he questions, standing from he seat. Mashi looks back and her own expression turns serious when she sees the other boy.

“Did Inazumi-san come in here?” Shinsou asks, making a beeline for Izuku’s desk and leaning in close, his voice low.

“Nooooo? I don’t think so,” Mashi replies, glancing around the room quickly but there is no Inazumi to be found.

“Shit,” Shinsou hisses, standing up straight and looking backwards towards the door. He looks ruffled and anxious. It’s a bizarre look on him. “He was acting weird all day at his desk, but at lunch he rushed off… I think he may have mentioned the restroom?”

“But he never goes to the restroom here!” Izuku yelps, eyes widening in concern. What could possibly be going on?
It is with a silent, unanimous agreement that all three of them move towards the door, lunch forgotten, and hurry in the direction of the bathroom. Is that… Is that a crowd up ahead?

There’s a sound of a crash, someone falling, and a familiar voice yelling out, “Forget you!” Izuku has a moment of terror but it is drowned out a moment later by the need to shove through the crowd ahead and get to his friend.

It turns out he doesn’t need to though as a messy, white-haired boy shoves right through the crowd himself and goes sprinting off without seeing his friends there to help. “Inazumi!” Izuku calls, trying desperately to get his attention, but he’s already gone.

The three of them stand frozen, none of them certain what they needed to do. Something had gone wrong. Something had hurt Inazumi and sent him running. Someone had hurt Inazumi and sent him running.

“Are you guys buddies of that fucking perv’s?!” demands a voice and they turn around, the crowd rippling as some boy in Izuku and Mashi’s class pushes through. He looks furious and he’s rubbing his backside.

“We’re friends with Inazumi, yeah. I dunno who the fuck is a perv ‘round here,” Mashi snaps immediately, taking a dangerous step forward.

“That bitch tried to sneak into the boy’s bathroom. Tell her to fuck off or—“

“HE has every right to that bathroom,” Shinsou cuts in, crossing his arms and glaring cold, dead eyes down at the boy.

“HE could also hack your search history, assfuck, so back off!” Mashi, snarls.

Izuku wishes he knew what to say. He wishes he knew how to handle this situation but it feels so surreal. He had heard about incidents like this online, but this wasn’t online. This was real life and it was hurting their friend.

Izuku wishes he didn’t do what follows. He will look back on this day with some regret at his actions. He will say if he could rewind the clock he would… but actually… he wouldn’t. Because he may regret what he does, but damn is it satisfying too.

Izuku silently steps forward, palm crackling, and tazes the bully with a furious look in his eyes.

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Katsuki could admit, maybe, that one thing he wasn’t an expert on in life was comforting people. Apparently just saying “feel better” didn’t actually help and could, in fact, make it worse.

He also knew very little about the smallest member of Izuku’s lame club. The one with the white hair and the near obsessive desire to always look good, except for those few times he didn’t, and then he looked like an obnoxious weeaboo. He didn’t talk to the tiny one. He had no reason to. The small one was only interesting in coding, which meant he and Izuku would be great pals, but he couldn’t help Katsuki at all.

All this put together meant Katsuki froze the second he walked through the EAARD field and found the usually pristine boy sitting in the dirt, quietly prepping one of their untouched planters. Even when he wasn’t dressed up the boy avoided dirt and filth like the plague, only helping out with the flowers that one time at the beginning.
He was curled in towards the planter, working with tiny, pathetic movements, his hair slightly messed up, and his back to Katsuki.

What… the fuck?!

On school days Katsuki was usually the first one to make it to the clubhouse since the others would meet up after school to do their homework there. So… why? What? How?

The blond growls and yanks out his phone, still standing a distance away, and texts Izuku.

[THE FUCK IS UP WITH GHOST BOY???]

[HE’S BLAIRE WITCHING ME]

He doesn’t have to wait even a minute before Izuku is texting back and Katsuki can tell he’s frantic. He usually has great grammar while typing, but this is certainly not.

[oh thnk god! You found him! we werent sure where he went!]

[pls keep an eye on him Kacchan! Please! we’ll be there as soon as we’re out of detention]

Katsuki thinks that if one could hear his brain they would hear a very sudden record scratch.

Detention? Izuku was in DETENTION? What was happening? What the fuck was the world becoming and could he get off this ride?

[DEKU WHAT THE FUCK?? YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN TO DETENTION EVER! THE FUCK DID YOU DO???]

Again, he hardly has to wait for a reply. Izuku must be using his eye.

[Tased someone. Tell you when I get there.]

Katsuki actually just drops his phone because no. No he is not dealing with this. Nope. This was stupid and ridiculous and he was not going to be a part of whatever this was.

The blond picks up his phone and shoves it back in his pocket, glaring at whatever his eyes catch. This was stupid.

“Hey! Ghost extra! I need this space to train so move!” he snaps as he walks in the other boy’s general direction.

At first the tiny boy flinches and looks back over his shoulder. He obviously hadn’t noticed Katsuki’s presence. But after a moment of blank staring he turns and goes back to his work. “My name is Inazumi, not ghost extra,” he mumbles and Katsuki stops mid-step, turning his glare right back to the boy. Inazumi. Whatever.

“The fuck was that?” he says more casually than he looks. At this angle he can see the side of Inazumi’s face. He looks… blank, but there are definitely tear tracks on his face.

“You should wear your ear protection more. Your quirk is starting to mess with your hearing,” Inazumi replies, a nasty edge to his otherwise blank voice. It only manages to make Katsuki angrier.

“Quirkless brat has some nerve—“

“Quirkless brat DOES have some nerve, you jerk!” Inazumi turns his head up with a snap, blue eyes
thinning with such raw anger it makes even Katsuki pause for a moment. “What? Don’t like your inferiors standing up for themselves?! Don’t like your TARGET PRACTICE to call you out on your bull crap?! Am I not acting like the obedient little sheep you want?!” Inazumi’s voice progressively gets louder and louder until he’s shrieking, leaning towards Katsuki challengingly.

The blond won’t be defeated, however. Not by this wimp. “You think you’re real tough, don’t you? You aren’t going to win this fight, fucking—“

“I DON’T WANT TO WIN, I WANT YOU TO LEAVE ME ALONE!” Inazumi shrieks one final time and turns back towards the planter, tears following the previous tear tracks. “Why can’t you just leave me alone? Why can’t anyone? I’m not hurting anyone. I’m not… Why can’t I just live in peace as I am?”

The silence that follows is deafening. Katsuki doesn’t know what to do. He hates crying, both from himself or other people. He never knew how to deal with crybaby Izuku and he has known him his entire life. This guy? No clue.

Maybe… screaming at him hadn’t helped? But it was normal for him. He hadn’t even thought about it, it just came out...

“What the fuck do you mean you ‘don’t want to win’?!” Katsuki begins, stalking towards the other boy. He was trying REALLY HARD not to yell, his mouth twitching from the effort, but damn it he was not going to fucking fail. He was not a failure. He was the best, strongest hero that ever lived.

“Winning is momentary and it only makes things worse. It always makes things worse…” Inazumi whispers and Katsuki’s eyes narrow, getting angrier. Wasn’t the answer obvious to this kid? It was obvious to him!

“Seriously? Then beat the fucking worse shit, too! Why the fuck is that so hard?!” the explosive boy says, rolling his eyes and raising his hands in disbelief.

Suddenly the other boy isn’t sitting down anymore. Inazumi springs to his feet and while he still has to look up at Katsuki it doesn’t deter him from glaring his heart out at him. “Bakugou Katsuki you know nothing!”

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?!”

“It means you know nothing! You don’t know what it’s like to not know how someone will treat you after you tell them you’re quirkless! You don’t know if they’ll instead despise you or not! How they will only see what you are missing and not what you have!

“You will never know how Izuku feels having to adjust his whole life around all his injuries! You will never know how he feels when people look at him like he’s a sob story that needs to be taken care of or taken out!

“You will never know how Mashi feels as a girl being taught that anywhere she goes is dangerous! How, no matter, what she is a target and she can’t be certain who might have a freaking gun!

“You will never know how Shinsou feels like with a quirk he never chose dictating what kind of character others see him as! You have a quirk that can take you places, anywhere you want, but Shinsou is stuck! Stuck as a villain and no one trusts him purely off the fact he was BORN with a unique quirk!

“You will never know how I feel planning how long I’ll be out so my binder doesn’t end up crushing me, or if I’m talking with a low enough voice, or that I peed before going out because
otherwise I have to be sure a place has unisex bathrooms or I run the risk of getting killed! KILLED! No one should worry they’re going to get killed by just going to the bathroom! NO ONE!

“You will never know! You will never understand the hell we all live through! But you could at least show some sympathy! Try, for once in your spoiled, silver-spoon-filled life, to sympathize with people less fortunate than you!”

Inazumi’s whole face is soaked with tears and his voice is wobbly and hoarse by the end. Katsuki is standing completely straight, red eyes wide in baffled shock. He has been yelled at before, by his mother and Mashi mostly, but never like that. Never a full tirade. He feels… He isn’t sure exactly how he feels, can’t give it a name, but it doesn’t feel good.

When he doesn’t say a word – what are you supposed to say in a moment like this? – Inazumi’s head rolls forward and he slouches, falling back onto the ground with a thud. “You don’t know what it’s like to… to stand up for yourself and only make people angrier. I’m not a threat like you. When it gets worse for me… who knows what will happen. I’ll die? I dunno…

“Maybe that’s better…”

Katsuki suddenly feels like he’s going to throw up. He’s never felt the nausea that overtakes him, the adrenaline that fills him up even though he isn’t fighting. This is… not okay. Oh fuck, this is not okay! What is he supposed to do? He’s… he’s only thirteen damn it! He shouldn’t have to be dealing with someone… someone who wants to die…

At the last thought, making it clear in his head, Katsuki feels nauseous again. He can’t fathom the feeling, he only knows it’s WRONG.

“Fuck that!” the blond snaps, taking a few steps forward, and Inazumi turns blank eyes up to him. His tears have stopped but suddenly that’s more… more…

Terrifying. Katsuki is actually scared right now. No. Hell no! This is not going to continue! He’s a fucking hero, god damn it! He’s a hero who wins! Now… what was he supposed to do?

“You wanna off yourself? I’d love to see you try with all those other nerds looking out for you!”

Inazumi looks away, eye narrowing. “They’re part of the problem. They’re wonderful… but they made me forget what the real world was like. That can’t happen again.”

“Oh you stop acting like you’re some fucking one man team already! Idiot!” Inazumi is looking at him again and Katsuki momentarily splutters over his words. Did he even know what he was saying? Was it helping? Damn it… “Okay, you’re a wimp that couldn’t fight your own damn battles. Lame! So start using what you have now! You have a bunch of fucking psychos backing you! Fucking Deku apparently tased somebody earlier…”

“He did WHAT?!” Inazumi shrieks, sitting up straight, eyes widening in shock.

Katsuki shrugs and shakes his head. “Apparently he’s lost it. About time, too…” the blond pauses, looking at the smaller boy in front of him. He looks terrible, worse than he’s ever seen him. What had he said Katsuki needed to be doing? Sympathizing?

Awkwardly Katsuki sits down on the ground a few feet away, probably too far to actually be casual but he didn’t care anymore. “So… yeah… you really want to let those psychos down like that? Just… fucking END it – because that’s what it is! An END! No starting over! No restarts! No nothing! THE END! – and leave them to mourn you? Fuck, man! It’s just… it’s giving up!”
“So?” Inazumi mumbles, looking down and off to the side. It makes Katsuki’s blood boil. “Maybe I want to give up.”

“NO ONE ASSOCIATED WITH ME IS GIVING UP!” Katsuki roars, springing back to his feet and looking furious, a fire in his eyes.

“What? Are you one of ‘my psychos’ now?” Inazumi questions scathingly, glaring at the other boy through the corner of his eye. It doesn’t faze Katsuki a little as small explosions light up his palms.

“NOW I FUCKING AM!” he’s still roaring. He shifts his stance and points a finger right into Inazumi’s now shocked face. “You want people to leave you alone? MAKE THEM! WIN! If you’re still too much of a wimp when it ‘gets worse,’ or whatever, make the others fight them because fuck them! You want to do your geeky computer shit?! You want to read your weeaboo shit?! Well you sure as hell won’t be able to if you’re dead!”

Inazumi stares, wide-eyed, up at Katsuki, entirely thrown by his… pep talk? Katsuki believes it was a pep talk. It didn’t sound like other people’s pep talks, he was entirely not accustomed to the concept, but it was the closest he was getting.

For a while they say nothing, just staring at each other, trying to figure each other out. This was one of the most intense moments of Katsuki’s life and he wasn’t even battling someone!

“You know…” the quirkless boy finally begins, looking down at his planter, and for a second he is silent again. It grates at Katsuki’s nerves but before he can snap the other boy starts talking again. “I’m beginning to see this obsessive appeal you all have in heroes…”

“It’s not obsessive!” the blond snaps, hackles rising.

“It’s a little obsessive,” Inazumi replies, smirking up at him.

Katsuki growls and turns away, stomping over towards an empty space of land to begin working on combat movements. “Do whatever you want! I don’t fucking care!” he calls, ready to start practicing and acting like he’s ignoring the other boy when really he’s going to keep an eagle eye on him for a while. That death comment… it still was sending icicles up his spine.

“I thought you were one of my psychos now!” Inazumi calls back, smiling for the first time since Katsuki saw him, hands going back to moving dirt into the planter in front of him.

“Fuck off!” He was going to be regretting that psycho comment for a while, wasn’t he?

There is silence for a long, long moment and he feels Inazumi’s eyes on him after a while. He hasn’t moved an inch. Hasn’t begun exploding anything. He still feels terrible. He’s done his pep talk, he’s keeping his eye on the other boy, so why? Why does he feel like he hasn’t fully succeeded?

To his horror he feels his mind asking, “What would Deku do?” Izuku was better at emotional stuff, it totally makes sense he’d wonder that! He isn’t weak for asking that, damn it!

But what would Deku do?

Inazumi’s rant from a while ago gives him pause. Why couldn’t he sympathize? Why was that so hard? He mostly just tried to avoid emotions altogether, they were too burdensome, but on the incredibly rare occasion he did try to consider another’s feelings he just couldn’t do it.

Well… what did Katsuki want to hear when he was at his lowest? What did he wish more people said to him? There was hardly anything… except…
“Hey! Extr—uh Inazu-whatever!”

“Close. It’s Inazumi,” the other boy replies, smirking an annoying smirk that makes Katsuki grind his teeth. How infuriating.

God damn it. Just say it! Just rip off the band aid and be done with it! “You, uh… you know you’re…” Katsuki fumbles for a moment and stops to growl and angrily scrub both his hands through his hair. JUST SAY IT!

“You fucking know you’re enough, right?!?” he finally yells, not looking at the boy anymore, instead glaring ahead of him at nothing. There, he said it, the one thing he could think of that he could, maybe, “sympathize” with.

He still doesn’t feel good because now he’s tightened up, waiting for a response. Part of him, the part that tells him to keep his emotions in all the time, is sure he’ll be ridiculed and he’ll have to start blowing people up…

“Bakugou…” Inazumi begins, slowly, “That’s… thank you.”

Katsuki looks over through the corner of his eye, an angry pout on his face, and sees the white-haired boy smiling at him. Not smirking.

“I think you’re enough, too.”

Chapter End Notes

If you need help tell someone. Call someone. Seek help and do not be alone. Sometimes you may need a hug or a talk or an animal or a presence, but do not hesitate to seek it out because you deserve it.

I went for many, many years without help until it all came crashing down. I know what it is like to want to die. I know what it feels like and I want you to know, after I got the help I NEEDED I have not wanted to do myself harm, no longer exist, or kill myself for an entire year now.

If you need someone to say they believe in you than I can be it, because I do. I believe in everyone that is struggling.

You are loved and you are enough.

Chapter Song: Logic - 1-800-273-8255
So... It's been a while, hasn't it?

I'm sorry for the long wait. To be honest I've been having some mental difficulties and school + work haven't been helping. In addition I tend to go in and out of fixations when it comes to fandoms. I'll go months obsessed with bnha, wanting to write a bunch, but then will fade into another fandom for a little while (dbh and star trek in this case) I still end up coming full circle, and will continue to write, but I can't predict these things and I am so sorry for that. I want you all to enjoy IIOHAH and enjoy reading it and getting new chapters, but I want to enjoy writing it too.

Got some new fan art for y'all though!

Art by pisceshi

Art by itsmyartfam

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mashi had to sit on her hands to keep from fidgeting. She loved watching Izuku work, she really did, but sitting still for so long was tough for her. She hardly ever knew what he was doing, but it was always interesting to watch and listen as he muttered to himself.

Usually by now she would have at least gotten up and walked around but she was worried. It had been a week since school had started back up again and Inazumi had had his bullying incident. It had been an exciting day, to say the least. Mashi was used to detention by now, but Izuku and Shinsou weren’t. It was kind of entertaining to watch the two fidget so much, despite the situation.

They were given two weeks of detention, which wasn’t too bad, for fighting instead of retrieving a teacher, while the bully yelling outdated slurs was suspended once the full situation had been explained.

All in all it was a pretty good situation. Afterwards they had hurried to the clubhouse to check on Inazumi, who was doing surprisingly better than they expected, though they weren’t sure why. He was distant, still was, but didn’t seem to be upset anymore, and Katsuki was equal parts more biting and more subdued. They didn’t know what happened, but it seemed to have worked out for the best.

When they’d all headed home they’d gotten lectures. Mashi’s mother had sat her down and talked to her for a few minutes, saying what was expected of her, then gave her daughter a high five for defending her friend. Mashi found out later on chat that Inko and Aizawa had torn Izuku and Shinsou apart, obviously disappointed, but also agreeing they had the right idea to stand up for what was right.

Mashi thought by now things would have blown over. She thought they could get back to normal – or whatever counted as normal to them – by now. But no...

Katsuki and Shinsou seemed like their usual selves, but Inazumi was still off in his own head half the
time and Izuku was much too quiet. Mashi wasn’t too worried about the former boy, he didn’t seem distressed, just thoughtful, but she was worried about Izuku. He was burying himself in his inventions again, obsessing over some of his more complex ideas, and according to Shinsou he was hardly sleeping.

Something was wrong, that was for sure, but Mashi didn’t know what and she didn’t know how to help. She had been trying to stay close and be there for her friend, waiting for him to make the first move and admit his issue, but that didn’t seem to be working. Or maybe it was and Mashi was just impatient? That was probably it…

Today Izuku was obsessing over his quirk research, his eyes glued to a microscope, examining a drop of blood. He technically didn’t need to write down his research anymore since he could just record his findings in his Eye, but he still liked pencil and paper, scratching absently at a notebook beside him.

“You… find anything interesting in there?” Mashi asks awkwardly. She wasn’t sure what else to say, but the silence was really getting to her.

Izuku’s note-taking pauses and his head tilts to glance over at Mashi like he had just realized she was there. Then he’s looking back into the microscope. “Trying to. Working on the Leeches again but I’ve hit a road block.”

“Right… road block…” Mashi nods, glancing to the side. She would never understand the complexity of Izuku’s mind, or how he conducted his research, but she did know that a “road block” for Izuku usually meant a “full stop” to other scientists. Similar how “difficult” for Izuku meant “impossible” to everybody else.

Izuku doesn’t say anymore, however, which is disconcerting. He always enjoyed rambling about what he was doing when given the invitation, even when whoever he was talking to was clueless to what was going on. Now, though, he says nothing.

“So… what else are you working on? Like, any new ideas? Badass updates?” Mashi presses, releasing one of her hands so she can absently pull at her hair, fidgeting with the loose strands.

“A few,” Izuku replies without looking up. He pauses to take a particularly long note before speaking again. “I set the Bendies to dig out a pool in the back to test aquatic equipment.”

“Oh cool!” the redhead perks up, grinning at the prospect of a pool. “I love swimming! I’m only good at the doggie paddle… but I love it!” Her excitement quickly dwindles when Izuku hums in distant agreement, obviously not fully invested in the conversation.

This was getting to be too much. The tense silence was suffocating and Mashi just had to do something. She may be clueless on how to approach this situation with tact and poise, but at this point she no longer cared. Izuku was going to get the blunt treatment.

“Alright, what the fuck is up with you?” she demands, both hands coming up to smack onto the table. She stares hard at her friend as he jumps in surprise and properly looks at her, his eyes wide. He obviously was thrown for a loop.

“What do you mean?” he splutters over his words, brows furrowing more and more by the second.

“You’re actin’ real fucking mopey is what I mean! All quiet and thousand yard stare-y and… and SAD! Ever since that jackass pulled that crap with Ghost Boy,” the redhead presses, her
frustrations finally escaping her in a burst.

Izuku’s eyes are quick to flick away, cheeks turning pink while his fingers drum against his knees. Izuku is always moving in some way, always fidgeting, and Mashi has learned what each motion means by now. Izuku is anxious, obviously, but he also seems… guilty? Why does he look guilty?

“It’s nothing, Mashi, I’m fine,” the genius boy says quietly, not looking at his friend. His eyes are instead glued on the table, his mechanical hand coming up to play with his pencil.

The redhead stares at him for a long moment, eyebrows lowered and expression unmoving.

“Bullshit,” she finally snaps and Izuku flinches, shrinking away.

“I will be fine…?” the genius says quietly and finally he looks up through his bangs at Mashi, expression vulnerable and hoping this is the response Mashi wants. It’s not. Not quite.

“Better. Try again.”

This time Izuku makes a noise of frustration and looks away again, glaring at his notes. As much as she likes to see her friend stand up for himself or be a general badass, she doesn’t like seeing him glare. Not like this. It feels wrong, doesn’t fit Izuku’s face right, and Mashi hates that she’s what put that there. She was the one pushing for information. Maybe she should stop…

Before she can tell Izuku to forget about it, however, he speaks quietly. “What do you want me to say, Mashi?”

Mashi blinks at him, drawing up short, before her brows furrow and she tilts her head. “The truth?” she says like it is the most obvious thing in the world. It seems obvious to her, anyway. “What’s going through your mind right now?” she decides to clarify after a few beats of silence.

“How basic theories of quantum physics might play into quirk manifestation and usage,” Izuku replies immediately, not hesitating a bit, and it startles Mashi long enough it takes her a moment to process exactly what he said. She stares at him for a moment, confused, then sees the very slight upturn of his lips. She plasters on a fake glare and snorts, reaching out and shoving Izuku’s shoulder, making a little chuckle escape him at the gesture.

“You’re fuckin’ ridiculous,” she groans, rolling her eyes and feeling a momentary sense of pride when Izuku finally turns back towards her without the dark look that has been haunting his eyes this last week. “But I’m serious.”

“So am I.”

“Zuuuuuuuuu,” Mashi gives her friend an exasperated glare. She wasn’t letting up until she knew what was wrong with her friend, god damn it.

The genius gives one more, weak chuckle before it tapers off into a sigh and his eyes lower, the dark look returning. He looks sad now, his face a rollercoaster of emotions, and for a while he is silent. Mashi waits, certain she will get an answer now, and soon her patience pays off, just not with a response she was expecting. “Am I a bad friend, Mashi?”

The absolute insanity of that question baffles the redhead for a moment, staring in slack jawed shock at her friend, who keeps glancing up at her through his hair. “I’m sorry, what?!” she exclaims and Izuku sighs.

“Am I a bad frie—“
“Oh no, no, I heard you!” Mashi holds up her hands, shaking her head then scowling. “The fuck you get an idea like that from, though? Zuzu, you’re, like, the most awesome friend in the universe! You’re cool and kind and fun and crazy smart. You’re always lookin’ out for all of us and helping me with homework or when I fuck up words. You somehow managed to tame that asshole Fire Cracker. You basically hung the damn moon in Purple-zawa’s eyes. And you never gave up on Ghost! He’s so fuckin’ grateful you stood up for him the way you did!”

“But I didn’t stand up for you!” Izuku suddenly yells. Mashi had been on such a roll, singing Izuku’s praise, she hadn’t noticed him progressively getting tenser and tenser. The redhead stills, tensing up herself at the devastated expression on her friend’s face. He wasn’t looking at her anymore.

“What?” she whispers when she gets no further explanation and Izuku bites his lip.

“When we were nine,” Izuku says quietly, like he doesn’t actually want to say anything but he knows he needs to. “In elementary school. The day after I attached my Arm…”

Mashi tries to think back. She remembers the near trauma and excitement of helping her friend finally attach his new arm. It was a day she would never forget, same as she would never forget the day he attached his Spine and Eye, but the day after that? What had happened? Obviously it was important enough for Izuku to remember, but she couldn’t.

At her continued silence Izuku seemed to realize his friend wasn’t going to connect the dots here and he cringes. “Kaito made Hayashi push you and you got knocked out…” he whispers and the memory comes washing over Mashi like a tidal wave. Oh. That. Yeah, she remembered that. “I didn’t… I didn’t do anything.”

“The fuck? Yes you did! You and King Kong got me to the infirmary!” Mashi argues. Why was this coming up now? This was years ago. It had been scary, and Mashi still hated that Kaito ass, but they had made a new friend in Hayashi and they had moved on. At least she had. Mashi was quick to anger, but she wasn’t one to let a grudge control her life. It wasn’t worth it. She had seen what that could do to someone with her mother towards her father. It wasn’t pretty.

“I didn’t do anything to Kaito,” Izuku reiterates, growing more distressed.

Slowly Mashi began to see the issue. She wasn’t usually that great at making educated connections, but this one screamed at her. No, Izuku hadn’t done anything to Kaito, but that had been for the best. He had ignored the boy and immediately gone to help his friend. He had taken what they saw as the higher ground.

But Izuku had tazed a boy a week ago for Inazumi. He had taken an active roll, and now he felt guilty.

“It’s been years, Zuzu…” Mashi tries for, brows furrowed, “You can’t be the same person you were yesterday, let alone who you were in elementary school.”

“So I’ve become a more violent person?” Izuku counters, sitting up straight and looking at Mashi, the distress still in his eyes. She doesn’t know what to do. She had wanted to know what was wrong, but now that she did she was lost. She wasn’t good at this. She was only good at hitting things, for the love of god! How was she supposed to help her friend when he was so messed up? He wasn’t crying, but somehow that made it all the worse. If he were crying it would be normal. This went beyond that.

“I… I don’t think so. Maybe this fucker just deserved it?” Mashi tries for but Izuku shakes his head and looks down at the palm of his robotic arm. For a moment he turns on the tazer, staring at the
buzz of electricity in the circle in his palm, then turns it off.

“If that’s true than so did Kaito. I didn’t… I didn’t defend you. How are you not upset about that?”

Mashi shrugs, pulling at her hair absently. “Because I’m not? I’m grateful you got me outta there so fast. If I wanted that asshole to get hurt I woulda’ done it myself when I was better.”

“Mashi…” Izuku says desperately. It wasn’t the response he wanted, that much was obvious.

“If you’re looking for someone to tear you down a few pegs I’m not the one to go to. I’ll tell you the truth, I ain’t gonna be cruel,” Mashi stares hard at the genius boy, making it very clear she had no intention of saying anything he didn’t deserve.

“The truth…” the boy repeats, glancing up at the redhead for a moment, then looking away again, shy and sad and Mashi wishes she could just fix this. “Mashi… Did I make a mistake…?” he whispers, staring at his hands again, fixed especially on the robotic one. “Did I make a mistake tazing that boy?”

Silence encompasses them for a long moment, Mashi staring at her friend in contemplation. She wanted to say no. She wanted to tell Izuku how perfect he was and that he had done no wrong, but that wasn’t what he needed. He needed the truth. And the truth was…

“Maybe you did…” she whispers back just as quietly.

Izuku flinches and curls in on himself, but Mashi isn’t done. “Maybe you did make a mistake, or maybe you didn’t, I dunno. I thought it was pretty great, but that’s probably not the best way to judge something’s morals…” That earns her a quiet snort from her friend and she smiles lightly to herself. “You aren’t perfect, Zuzu… Neither am I. Neither is anybody… Maybe you made a mistake, but nobody is holding it against you.”

Mashi hesitates then reaches out and lays a hand on Izuku’s shoulder, urging him to look up at her. His eyes are wet. “I don’t hold it against you. What’s in the past is in the past. And if you did make a mistake than you’re the one who has to decide what to do about it, but moping around ain’t gonna do jack shit.”

Izuku stares at Mashi for a long, quiet moment, but slowly, ever so slowly, he begins to smile. His eyes are still wet, a surprisingly reassuring sign, but he is smiling at his childhood friend. “Thank you… Apex,” he says to her and the name makes her suck in a breath.

“Y-yeah… no problem… Titan,” she says back. Whatever is going on in her friend’s head he will need to sort out, she can’t fix it all, but she hopes she helped set him in the right direction.

As the moment stretches on Mashi begins to feel awkward, the tenderness of the moment making her uncomfortable now that there is no impending issue. She clears her throat and leans back, crossing her arms and pouting. Izuku smiles at her, recognizing how uncomfortable she has gotten and being familiar with it, and says nothing.

“Right… well, whatever, yeah? Now that we have that cleared up,” the redhead scrambles to move on, scowling at herself when her voice breaks, then turns a glare with no heat on Izuku. “I know you haven’t been sleeping! And you’ve been obsessed with your hero gear and shit! So no more of that for a while!” she waves a finger at the boy, who scrubs at his eyes and pouts.

“What? Mashi, come on—“

“Nope! You’re taking a break from all that shit! If you really gotta make somethin’ you better make
something only for you. Something fun that you’ve wanted to do just for the hell of it! I know you have ideas.”

Izuku’s pout deepens and he gives Mashi an unimpressed look, but there’s more life in his eyes now. That dark cloud has diminished. It’s still there, but it’s hidden away. “Fine! I will!” he retorts, getting up to go and grab another notebook from a nearby table.

“Fine! You should!” Mashi says back.

“Fine! I’m going to my personal workshop!”

“Fine! I’ll get you when I’m leaving!”

“Fine!”

“Fine!”

And Izuku marches out of the door, but he’s grinning by now, and Mashi is grinning too. She hears him laugh as he walks down the hall and she catalogues this whole incident as a success in her book.

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Izuku stays in his quiet, little workshop for hours after that. For a while he does nothing, just stares at his tools, unsure what to do. He had been in turmoil for the last week, trying to avoid everything by drowning in inventions, even avoiding sleep, but of course the others would notice. He hadn’t expected to be called out so blatantly on it, however.

Perhaps he should have, considering who his friends are.

Mashi’s words hadn’t been what he had wanted to hear, but they were probably what he needed. He had made a mistake, he was certain of this. He shouldn’t have done what he did, no matter how furious he had been. Nobody had been in immediate danger anymore, it was just a kid being a terrible human being. He had made a mistake.

So what was he going to do about it?

Well, first he was going to take Mashi’s advice and just begin building for the heck of it. Something simple, something for fun. Nothing that would exhaust him anymore than he already was. So he starts tinkering.

It doesn’t distract him, it isn’t complex enough to, so his thoughts continue to wander.

He didn’t want to apologize to the boy he had attacked. Perhaps he hadn’t deserved to be tazed, but he was still a disgusting example of an underdeveloped plankton turned homo sapien, in Izuku’s opinion. He had deserved SOMETHING, so no, Izuku wasn’t going to apologize to him, but he could apologize to his teachers. To his mom and Aizawa and Hizashi and Nemuri. To the people who expected more of him.

His tinkering begins to take shape, pieces falling into place like a satisfying puzzle.

He should talk to the pro heroes in his life as well, ask how they dealt with things like this. He had been avoiding talking about with everyone. It wasn’t healthy, and he knew it. Talking was how things got solved.

Izuku’s soldering iron slips and burns his flesh index finger. He hisses, carefully setting the tool
away, then pops his finger into his mouth. It only hurts for a moment, burns and cuts are pretty
standard, but it still makes him lean away for a few minutes.

He should also talk to his friends… He definitely had made Mashi worry, and if they knew he hadn’t
been sleeping then it was a safe bet he had made Shinsou worry. Katsuki would never admit he was
worried, but he had been… softer this last week, mostly towards Inazumi. Maybe Izuku should talk
to them as well.

Izuku flips through his notebook, eying some of his notes then rewriting a part of his blueprint before
continuing on with his build.

He had a lot of work to do when it came to righting his wrong, at least in his eyes, but for now… for
now perhaps he needed to just focus on himself.

Hours later Izuku finally found his invention finished. It had been… nice to do. He hadn’t built
something just for himself in a long while. The simple design had been calming and he lifts up the
long, segmented strip of metal in his hands, observing it with some pride.

Carefully he holds it behind him, holding one end as he lifts up his shirt and connects it to the base of
his Spine. It sends a buzz up his back, through the connections, and right to his head. It takes him a
few minutes to get used to the new addition but not too long.

“Alright, Zuzu! I’m ready to head out! What about y—” Mashi’s voice calls out, pushing past the
curtains to Izuku’s private workshop once she’s sure her presence is properly announced, then falls
silent when she sees her friend.

Izuku stands up straight, dropping his shirt, and turns to smile at the girl, chest puffed out. She just
stares at him. “What do you think?” he asks but she won’t take her eyes off his new invention.

“You… you… you built yourself… a tail?!” she finally manages. The long, metal tail, segmented all
along its shiny, silver length, twists back and forth at Izuku’s command. He grins a bit bigger.

“Yeah! I’ve been thinking about some additions to my replacement parts for a while. This doesn’t
have any functions,” he looks back at the tail, curling it forward to get a proper look at it, “other than
shrinking or lengthening. It’s just… for fun. That’s what you wanted, right?” Now Izuku’s smile
morphs into a smirk as he looks again at Mashi’s baffled expression.

For a while she says nothing, just watching as the tail sways leisurely back and forth. It resembled a
cat tail, but is much longer than most. Slowly she looks up at her friend’s face, brows furrowing.

“Are you a furry?”

Izuku splutters, eyes widening in shock at the question and tail stilling as he suddenly forgets about
it. “W-WHAT?! No! Mashi, what the heck!” he retorts, voice cracking when it goes too high, and
now the redhead is smirking.

“You’re a fuckin’ furry!”

“Oh come on! Everyone has wondered at some point or another what having a tail would be like!”
the genius retorts, face turning bright red as Mashi teases him.

“Well, yeah! But you actually did it!” Mashi cackles and Izuku pouts.

“You’re the one that wanted me to just make something fun and easy,” he whines and his friend
nods, but won’t stop grinning.
“Yes, and you did a good job but—wait… you think connecting a new appendage to your Spine is easy?” Now she looks baffled and a little impressed, making Izuku calm down a little bit.

“Well… yeah. I already have an understanding how my Spine works. The rest is pretty easy,” the genius boy gives a half shrug. Mashi shakes her head and looks up at the ceiling.

“Good god, Zuzu, you are somethin’ else! You’re a fuckin’ pottery,” the redhead pauses, brows furrowing then mumbles, “Wait, no, those are vases…”

“Prodigy?” Izuku suggests, tilting his head curiously and smiling at his friend.

“That’s what it is! Yeah, you’re a prodigy!” Mashi looks back down at him and grins. Izuku feels a warm feeling in his chest bubble up at that. A prodigy? He had never been called that before. It felt… nice.

“Hey, Midoriya-kun! Can I talk to you for a second?” comes a new voice from the hall and a pale head pokes in through the curtain. Izuku really needed to order those darn doors already… For now, though, he simply smiles at Inazumi’s unexpected entrance.

“Hey there, Inazumi-kun. How can I help?” Izuku replies and Mashi steps to the side to give the boy some room in the small space. Inazumi had been distant the last week, but not distraught. He kept to himself yet gravitated towards Katsuki on occasion. It was curious, and Izuku would be lying if he said he wasn’t also worried for the boy. Inazumi was a mystery…

“Right, well, actually, it isn’t that I needed you to help me, but rather I wanted to help yo—is that a tail?” Inazumi’s nervous, quiet words and expression immediately dissolve when he points at the metal tail behind Izuku’s back. The genius beams, raising it up to show it off.

“Why, yes it is! It’s not a permanent feature, but I thought I’d go ahead and have some fun with it,” he explains and Inazumi arches a brow, slowly looking up at Izuku’s face, thoughtful.

“Are you a furry?”

“Seriously?!” Izuku squeaks and Mashi throws her head back to laugh.

“That’s what I fuckin’ said!” the redhead booms, having too much fun in Izuku’s honest opinion, while Inazumi looks between the two of them.

“Okay, well…” the pale boy straightens his round glasses, obviously growing uncomfortable, “I don’t judge, or anything.”

“I’m not a furry,” Izuku whines, tail flopping in a manner that matches his mood.

“Sure, whatever,” Inazumi waves him off while Mashi grins over at the green-haired boy. Why was this happening to him? “Like I was saying, I wanted to talk to you about me helping you.”

Izuku tries to school his features, focusing on what his friend wants to talk about rather than Mashi’s continued faces. It wasn’t what he had expected to come out of the smaller boy’s mouth. Most of the time Inazumi kept to himself and groused that he wanted nothing to do with any of their hero planning. Was that what he was offering to help with? It seemed out of character…

“I’ve been thinking of ways I could help you,” Inazumi continues, taking Izuku’s silence as an indicator to keep going. He seemed nervous again, words coming out in a rush. “I know I’ve been helping you with your AI work on the side, but I wrote some more code for it I think you’ll like, and I want to be more active in helping you with coding, and I’ve been trying to think of ways you can
spread your name this past week and I think I have an idea and—“

“Whoa, whoa, slow down there, Ghosty!” Mashi cuts in, arching a brow at Inazumi when he shoots her an impatient glare. “Breathe for, like, two seconds, or something.”

“Mashi’s right. There’s no need to be in such a rush, Inazumi-kun. Why are you so nervous?” Izuku cuts in, seeing a bickering match coming and stopping it before it can begin.

Inazumi looks back at Izuku and his shoulders relax. He takes a deep breath, and then another, before he speaks again. “I’ve just… I’ve been thinking.”

“No way!”

Inazumi shoots Mashi a glare and the redhead just grins back at him. Oddly enough, however, the familiar teasing seems to ease a bit more of the stress from his shoulders. “Right, well, I’ve been thinking! I don’t want to be a hero… But I want to make a difference. I want to help you psychos, with what you’re doing. I just don’t want the stupid fame or spandex. Even if I would look pretty amazing.” Mashi snorts at that last comment but she’s ignored. No, Izuku’s full attention is on Inazumi, and Inazumi’s is on Izuku.

This wasn’t what Izuku had been expecting. What had happened to Inazumi? What had happened between Inazumi and Katsuki a week ago? That was when things began to change. Izuku desperately wanted to know, but… it felt personal, like if he asked he’d be stepping out of line.

“That’d be… pretty great, Inazumi-kun,” Izuku finally replies and that makes the other boy brighten a little. Why? Was he really that concerned with how Izuku perceived him? Or was he more concerned with being allowed to help?

“Great! Uh, like I said, I want to help you with more of your codes. It’ll hopefully help speed things along,” Inazumi says and he reaches into the pocket of his hoodie, pulling out his phone and tapping at the screen for a few moments. “I also had an idea of how you all can start making a name for yourselves.”

“We aren’t trying to make a name for ourselves, though?” Mashi cuts in, leaning back against the wall, her face confused, her teasing momentarily put aside. Inazumi glances over at her, seeming to appreciate that she wasn’t trying to get a rise out of him, but still gives her an unimpressed look.

“You should be. Look at all the good you are already doing and plan to do in the near future. Plus!” now Inazumi looks at Izuku, pointing a finger at him, “You all are always preaching about bettering the world, putting out a message, but what have you done? No one knows who you are or what you’re about!”

“Yeah, cool, that’s a great plan and all, but what about now? What if you could start doing something about it now?” The white-haired boy questions, eyes thinning before he looks back at his phone and continues to type.

“We’ll be able to make a difference when people see us at UA, doing hero work,” Izuku replies, but even he can hear the uncertainty in his voice. That had been his plan, to make a difference once he started training as a hero. Everything else, all his scientific discoveries and inventions he sold or published papers for would be anonymous… But if Inazumi had an idea…

“I’d…” Mashi begins but pauses when both boys look at her. “I’d really like that, actually.”

Inazumi hums, nodding mostly to himself, then finally stops tapping on his phone and turns the screen around. He shows it to Mashi first, who snatches it out of his hands to get a better look.
Inazumi doesn’t look pleased about that but doesn’t comment.

“A WorldTube account?” Mashi says aloud, handing the phone over to Izuku. On the screen is the WorldTube app open up on an unpublished account. The name of the account is CUT, with “The Club of Unrecognized Talent” in the description below. The account photo is empty, as is most everything else, but it was clear what Inazumi meant.

“Everybody has a WorldTube account, and everybody watches videos on it, it would be a great way to put out vlogs or all kinds of videos talking about what we stand for,” Inazumi explains. Izuku hands his phone back and watches as the smaller boy begins to fidget. “It isn’t perfect, or super professional, but it would get people’s attention if we did it right…”

“I like it!” Mashi exclaims, hardly missing a beat. Izuku looks to her and can’t help but smile when he sees her excited expression, grin in place and a fire in her eyes. “And we can post vids of us working and of experiments and we can do self care shit, too!” she bounces in place, energy building in her system, excited and ready to blow.

“I could send some of our friends invites to subscribe to the channel and get the ball rolling,” Izuku suggests, already pulling up his list of contacts in his Eye, scrolling through them and determining the ones he should shoot a message. He could tell the pro heroes that half-lived in his apartment about the account in person, but maybe Iida and his brother would like to subscribe. And Mei. He didn’t know how internet savvy he was, but Tomura could be a good option, too. And… would it be overstepping if he shot an email to Majesty? It couldn’t hurt to try, right?

“You guys… like this idea?” Inazumi asks, not seeming to believe that he was getting an affirmative so quickly. “I had a speech prepared and everything to convince you…”

“Well now I’m even more convinced!” Mashi grins and Inazumi arches a thin brow at her, confused. “Why? Because of a hypothetical speech?”

“No, because we don’t have to listen to it!” Inazumi’s expression morphs into a glare while Mashi continues to grin cheerfully. “Now! We gotta plan how we want all that shit to look!” the redhead continues, waving her finger towards Inazumi’s phone, “You can come sleepover at my place and we’ll figure it out.”

Izuku’s jaw nearly drops to the floor. Wait… Was Mashi… inviting Inazumi to a sleepover? Where had that come from?

Inazumi looks just as surprised, but also oddly pleased. He looks down at his phone and nods. “Yeah… okay. That’s a pretty good idea…”

Yep, today was officially the weirdest day of his life. Maybe it was the sleep deprivation…

Still full of energy Mashi springs forward and marches over to the doorframe. She sticks her head out into the hall and screams, “HEY! FIRE CRACKER!” It makes Izuku and Inazumi jump then glance at each other, confused. Mashi retreats back into the room, grinning and waiting as they distantly hear stomping down the hall. Then grumbling. Getting closer and closer. Oh dear…

“What?!” Katsuki roars, shoving past the curtains and storming into the tiny room. It was getting a little cramped in here.

Mashi doesn’t seem to mind and Inazumi moves to stand beside Izuku, watching whatever is about to unfold.
“You’re artsy and shit, right?” the redhead questions, making the explosive boy hesitate, not having expected that question. He probably had been expecting some kind of fight, not whatever this was turning into.

“I’m the best fucking artist you’ll ever meet,” Katsuki says after a beat, glaring at Mashi.

The girl hums in thought, tilting her head, and then says, “Well, best we’ve got.” Katsuki immediately rears up, ready to begin yelling at Mashi for the comment, but then she barrels right along. “We’re gonna make a WorldTube account! Wanna stay the night at my place with Ghost and me and help design the logos and shit?”

Yet again Katsuki is left confused, and so are Izuku and Inazumi. The genius eyes his two childhood friends in amazement. Somehow, someway, the day had actually just gotten weirder. Now to complete the cycle Katsuki just needed to accept the offer, but that wasn’t going to—

“Okay.”

Izuku stood corrected.

Katsuki was looking at Inazumi oddly, further giving Izuku reason to believe something private had happened between the two, but then the blond turns away and looks back at Mashi again. “You’d be lost without me, anyway, fucking nerds. Not an artistic bone in your bodies,” Katsuki comments, sneering, obviously trying to keep up some kind of tough guy look. It wasn’t really working.

“Can’t argue with that,” Inazumi shrugs.

“You want me to come along, too?” Izuku asks, having been silent for some time now. He had been so baffled by everything that had been going on he hadn’t had time to feel left out. Now, however, he realized they hadn’t included him in the sleepover plan. Perhaps they just assumed he would come?

“No,” Mashi says firmly, turning stern eyes on Izuku, and the boy stiffens in surprise, brows rising. No? What had happened now? “You, sir, are going home and sleeping. No arguing!”

Katsuki’s own eyes thin as Mashi speaks, glaring suspiciously at Izuku, before looking to Mashi. “What? Deku hasn’t been sleeping?” he questions, sounding frustrated, and Mashi nods.

“I like it,” Izuku mumbles despite himself.

“Thanks! So Cheshire told me so, since he basically lives with him now!”

“I really should get some sleep, then, Midoriya-kun,” Inazumi says softly, expression turning mildly concerned as he looks to the green-haired boy. “Don’t worry about the account tonight. We can handle it.”

Izuku glances at Inazumi, then looks up at Mashi, who is giving him a hard stare, and Katsuki, who is glaring at him like he’s frustrated. And Shinsou had been the one to rat his sleeping habits out. Izuku felt very much ganged up on… but as frustrated as that made him, he also felt pleasantly warm inside. They might be ganging up on him, but they were doing it because they cared about him. It felt nice.

“Yeah, okay, I’ll get some sleep,” he finally agrees, ducking his head to hide the little smile that betrayed his exasperated tone.
“I’m texting Cheshire to keep an eye on you! He’s probably still in that damn pillow pit,” Mashi says, yanking out her phone. It had a cracked screen. Dang it, Izuku had just replaced that, how had she already cracked it again?

“You guys are ridiculous,” Izuku comments, this time smirking up at them, and his metal tail flicks pointedly. It catches Katsuki’s eye.

For a long moment the blond just stares at the tail, expression unreadable, and Izuku stills, wondering what could be going through his friend’s head. But then Katsuki closes his eyes, shakes his head, and turns towards the doorframe.

“Fucking furry,” he grumbles as he leaves and Izuku squawks, face turning red, while Inazumi and Mashi begin to laugh.

“I’m not a furry!”

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Despite promising to get some sleep tonight Izuku found it more difficult than planned. Finally he had laid down in his bed, fully intent to try and catch some shuteye, Shinsou flopping onto the futon on the other side of the room, when thunder began to rumble outside. Immediately Izuku’s eyes had snapped open and all color drained from his face.

No. No he wanted to sleep. He finally wanted to sleep and this was happening? What kind of cruel joke was this?

Maybe it wouldn’t last too long? Maybe he could wait it out. He could just lie there and stare at the ceiling in the dark and wait for the thunder to end. But then another rolling rumble has Izuku flinching, hands tightening in his sheets, and for a split, horrifying second he thinks the ceiling to falling towards him.

He quickly turns onto his side, facing the wall, and squeezes his eyes shut, hands shaking as they pull his covers further over him.

Why?

Why did this still scare him? He was thirteen, a teenager, and thunder still terrified him.

He could scream logic all he wanted in his head, describe in great detail what a thunderstorm actually was, could remind himself that trauma wasn’t something easily forgotten, but he still felt pathetic.

He felt pathetic as another rumble made him stiffen up even more and tears burned at his eyes. He felt pathetic as he desperately felt the need to seek out his mother, or Aizawa, or anyone, but he couldn’t. He couldn’t move, and even if he could he felt like if he did go to someone he would be losing somehow. The logical part of his brain, the part that usually helps him reason through so much of his issues, tells him otherwise but it is squashed. His logic has no voice in these moments.

When one particular crash of thunder shakes the building Izuku whimpers and his hands fly to his head, guarding himself from falling debris that won’t come down. He’s shaking. He can feel it coursing through his body. He can’t move. He’s trapped under rubble all over again and he can’t, he can’t, he can’t.

Can’t what? Logic asks in the far reaches of his brain.

He just can’t! The day had been getting so much better, why was this happening? Why—
“Izuku?” a quiet voice asks behind him and a hand lies on the shaking boy’s exposed shoulder. It is gentle and hesitant, but it still makes Izuku jump away in shock, lurching towards the wall and pressing his back to it. It takes him a long moment getting his breathing back into any kind of order before he recognizes Shinsou crouched by his bed.

The purple-haired boy looks surprised at Izuku’s response, but mostly concerned. He had been staying most nights either at the clubhouse or the Midoriya household, but had he really never seen Izuku handle a thunderstorm?

Apparently not.

Izuku tries to catalogue everything around him, take notes of the reality of his room, hoping to banish the memories of crushing loud pain help. Pumpkin is curled up on Shinsou’s futon, seeming unfazed by the events happening around him, and Izuku’s desk is its usual mess of tools and blueprints and half built machines. In the far corner from the desk, by the sliding doors, is a pile of Shinsou’s belongings, a feature slowly growing more familiar to Izuku despite how often he trips over it, and the curtains are drawn over the back doors. They do little to hide the flashes of lightning that precede the horrors of the thunder.

Shinsou hasn’t moved, just watching as Izuku’s eyes flick around, taking everything in, before finally landing back on the taller boy. For a second his expression remains frightened, before his shoulders ease and he breathes out a sigh. “Sorry,” he whispers, because he really hadn’t meant to disturb his friend.

“Don’t be,” Shinsou replies immediately, head tilting like he’s trying to sort out a puzzle, and his lips thin. Izuku looks away, not wanting to see the look on his friend’s face. What had he done to deserve this?

Another crack of thunder makes Izuku flinch, the easing of his shoulders quickly vanishing as he tense once more, eyes squeezing shut and angry tears rolling out.

“You’re scared of thunder,” Shinsou observes and Izuku still won’t look at him. What if when he does he isn’t there? Or what if Shinsou is crushed under debris too?

That is illogical, his brain supplies, but it means nothing to him now.

“Can…” Shinsou’s words fade off as he hesitates. “Can I help?”

Yes.

No.

Izuku doesn’t know. He wants help. He wants to go wake his mother who has long since gotten used to sleeping through the loud noises of Izuku’s late night tinkering. He wants to go find Aizawa wherever he is on his nightly patrol and force him to tell him the cold, hard facts. He wants to text Katsuki and have him yell how stupid he’s being. He wants to drag Mashi over so she can distract him with some ridiculous idea.

But he doesn’t at the same time.

Because he’s pathetic.

“No you aren’t,” Shinsou says more firmly than expected and Izuku’s eyes snap open. Oh no. Had he been speaking out loud?
He looks to the other boy in horror, a question in his eyes, but Shinsou offers no immediate answer. Instead he pushes himself off the floor and crawls into Izuku’s bed, his long limbs awkwardly readjusting as he sits beside Izuku against the wall. “You aren’t pathetic, Izuku,” he says, giving Izuku an intense stare. The genius idly wonders when Shinsou started calling him “Izuku.”

But Izuku isn’t in the mood to have this kind of talk. He’s not in the mood to have any kind of talk. He just wants the storm to pass already. He just wanted to feel safe again.

Shinsou, thankfully, seems to pick up on Izuku’s state and puts the conversation on hold. They’ll probably talk about it later. Shinsou wasn’t a talkative boy, he was much too awkward and socially inexperienced, but he was a naturally good person. He looked out for his friends, protective of the first place he called home, and was the type to do anything he reasonably could to help someone. It was hard to see when first meeting him, Izuku certainly hadn’t seen just how deep his hero capabilities went, but now they knew better. They all knew Shinsou was one of the best.

Which was why he would have a conversation with Izuku later despite not being great at conversations.

“Do you want me to brainwash you into sleeping?” Shinsou asks quietly. He sounded hesitant, still occasionally nervous with his quirk, and when Izuku shakes his head the taller boy releases a quiet breath. No, Izuku didn’t want to be tricked into sleeping. He wanted to be able to do this on his own. He wanted to be strong. He wanted the storm to just go away already. He had braved storms before, but usually it was to help out someone else or one of the cats outside. Now it was just him. Just him and Shinsou.

A slow rumble of thunder, not as vicious this time, has Izuku curling in towards himself, feeling nauseous as he whimpers. There’s a few beats where nothing happens. No one moves. No one says anything. The only sound is that of rain outside.

But then Shinsou is sliding off of the bed and Izuku feels a stab of loss. Had he realized how lost Izuku was? How there was nothing that could be done? It was probably for the best, but it still hurt.

Izuku doesn’t have much time to wallow, however, when a big mound of orange fur is dropped onto his bed and Shinsou is clambering back in. Pumpkin seems mildly agitated to have been moved but it hardly lasts, the cat ungracefully flopping around as Shinsou tries to lie down under the covers.

“Come here,” the purple-haired boy says when he sees Izuku just staring. He pats the bed beside him where he’s left plenty of room and Izuku stares at the space nervously before slowly shifting and lying on his side. His back is still pressed against the wall, leaving about a foot of space between he and the other boy, but now they are facing each other and Pumpkin is curling up into a tight ball against Izuku’s stomach. Shinsou stares over at him, expression carefully blank while he watches and waits for something to happen. Izuku isn’t sure what he wants. He isn’t sure what anyone wants of him.

A flash of lightning streaks interesting shadows over Shinsou’s face, momentarily intriguing the green-haired boy, but the following thunder has him flinching violently. Shinsou still doesn’t say anything, just watches, but his brows curve in worry.

Izuku’s eyes flick down when there is the quietest of “thumps” on the bed between them and sees Shinsou’s hand laying there, not touching, but close enough with his palm up. The genius looks up again, a question on his face, but Shinsou just continues to watch, patient, but not expecting anything.

Slowly, like he isn’t sure this is real, Izuku reaches out as well and lays his robotic palm in Shinsou’s,
not quite holding hands but rather hooking them together. He can’t feel through his prosthetic the way he can through his natural nerves, but he can register warmth and pressure and a comfort settling in his chest.

Still, Shinsou is silent, and Izuku takes a few deep breaths. Each thrum of thunder sends an equally deep thrum of anxiety through his veins, but he can feel his focus shifting, just enough his throat no longer feels constricted and he can whisper, “Thank you.”

The edges of Shinsou’s mouth twitch upward. He still looks worried, but more relaxed, now. Izuku isn’t sure what it is about the other boy but he sets him at ease, unlike how his other friends do.

“Happy to help,” Shinsou whispers back. It is such a simple comment with so much more emotion and meaning backing the words. Izuku feels a meek smile pull at his lips and his friend smiles back, silence falling between them once more. Izuku still flinches with each clap of thunder, but slowly a fog begins falling over his mind, exhaustion leaking into his bones.

He watches as Shinsou shuts his own eyes, his breathing evening out a few moments later. Izuku wishes to follow behind, and the lethargy in his body tells him he will soon, but for now he is left alone again. There is a momentary spike of nerves, fog breaking, and he squeezes Shinsou’s hand to remind himself that no, he actually isn’t alone, but he needs to try to find something to calm him down and help him with the last few steps in falling asleep.

He soon finds he has unread messages waiting for him in his Eye. They are all from this evening, but since the storm began. No wonder he missed them.

He opens the messages up and begins to read, the fog of sleep beginning to return with the mundane actions.

From: Aizawa-nii

[bad storm. u ok ?]

Izuku smiles despite himself, his eyelids shut as he writes back.

[Better. Shinsou-kun and Pumpkin are helping. Go back to work.]

He doesn’t get a response but he isn’t surprised. Aizawa is awful at texting in any manner. He just needed to know Izuku was okay.

Next is a series of three photos from Mashi, no text at all, in a group text with her, Izuku, and Katsuki.

First appears to be a selfie of her grinning with Katsuki sleeping on the floor behind her, and behind the blond is a grinning Inazumi. Red and blue drawings cover Katsuki’s face, mostly just silly doodles, but there isn’t an empty space left on his pale skin. Dangling from Inazumi’s hand appears to be a blue marker, and behind Mashi’s ear is a red one.

The second image is a similar selfie, probably taken only moments later, but Mashi is frowning and wide-eyed, Inazumi a blur as he moves off-screen, and Katsuki’s red eyes are cracked open and looking straight into the camera.

The final photo is also a selfie but Mashi’s face is a blur in the foreground as she evidently runs away, her mouth a huge grin in what is sure to be loud laughter. Behind her, a bit away, Katsuki is up, explosions in his palms, in better focus as he sprints after her but limbs still slightly blurry.
[You're all ridiculous.] he messages them, the haze of his mind falling heavier and heavier still, so much so he only jumps a little with the next roll of thunder.

[go 2 slep !!!]

[GO TO SLEEP, IDIOT DEKU!]

He gets the two messages at the exact same time and has to stop himself from giggling like a fool. De doesn’t want to disturb Shinsou’s sleep after all. It isn’t that hard, however, with how he is flickering in and out of consciousness already.

There is one last message that looks like it has been waiting for him for some time now, which he feels momentarily guilty about missing, but it doesn’t last. Not with how everything finally starts to fade to black.

It is with a final crack of thunder that Izuku has no energy to jump at that he reads his last message, but falls into the land of sleep before he can reply.

Shazanka: hey kid genius. I know where we can test out your cat robots. Tell me when you can go

Chapter End Notes

Again I wanted to say sorry for the wait, and sorry for any future waits that are bound to happen... You guys mean the world to me and have gotten me through some really rough patches. I don't want you to think I don't appreciate or think about you.

I hope y'all liked the chapter!

Chapter Song: Coldplay - Fix You
Happy New Year everybody! I hope your coming year turns out just the way to like it, but don’t forget about your past self either, for your past self is the one strong enough to survive this last year.

Anyway art!

**Neko Nurse** by albatross-the-pen-chewer

**A hypothetical book cover** by brodoroki

And also there’s a [vtropes page](#) for this story???? I had no idea until last chapter! Y’all are so awesome!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Am I holding this right?” Mashi asks, green eyes wide as she turns a camera over in her hands, trying to determine the best way to hold it.

“Probably not,” Inazumi says absently, sitting on the front steps of the clubhouse, laptop in his lap, typing. He doesn’t look up when he says it but Mashi still shoots him a dirty look.

“I could just have a bot hold it,” Izuku offers, standing a few paces in front of Mashi. “Or an OWL could just film everything,” he adds, like an afterthought. He has changed out of his school uniform into a t-shirt covered in stars and brown cargo shorts. At Inazumi’s prompting he had also thrown on a lab coat, making him look equal parts more professional and more dorky.

“No! I wanna do it!” Mashi quickly replies, adjusting the camera a bit more and holding it so the strap bends her fingers in weird ways. She scowls at that development and readjusts again.

They were preparing to film their first video for the CUT WorldTube channel. It had taken only two days to finish their designs. Then all they had to do was get filming equipment, half of which Izuku went ahead and built in an afternoon, and start posting videos.

They had gone and bought three, professional video cameras using Izuku’s mounting finances. One had already broken – Katsuki and Mashi blaming each other over it – the second had been given to Shinsou, and the third was currently in their possession for filming. Izuku already had ideas on how he could improve them…

When it came to decide what they actually wanted to post to the account all five had been in surprisingly quick agreement that variety and personality were their best options. They would be posting whatever the heck they wanted. Each had the password for the account so they all could film whatever they liked and upload anything, so long as it wasn’t inappropriate.

It was a broad idea, but that was what they liked. They were a broad group of people and it was important to show off their vibrant and varying personalities in the midst of important, educational content.
They had also decided that the first video to be posted, their introduction, needed to be Izuku talking about exactly what they stood for.

Which was why he now stood outside with Mashi and Inazumi, dressed to look professional but approachable, hair tied back, and nerves making him twitch. Katsuki and Shinsou were not currently present, Katsuki having returned home early and Shinsou inside the clubhouse somewhere. It had been Shinsou’s idea to leave this process to the three, quirkless members of their group. Despite CUT meaning a lot of things for all of them, in the end it had originated as a safe place for the quirkless.

Izuku had been exceedingly touched by the sentiment, thanking and praising the taller boy and making him splutter in embarrassment.

Now, however, they were actually getting ready to DO this and he felt like he was back in front of all those pro heroes at UA, ready to present, and he kind of wanted to curl up and cease to exist. At least for a little while.

“Relax,” Inazumi calls, evidently reading Izuku’s mind. He still doesn’t even look up from his laptop. “We can do multiple takes. You’ll get into the swing of things after a bit.”

Izuku tears his gaze away from watching Mashi continue to fail to hold a camera to look at Inazumi sheepishly. “Yeah… I know. Just never done this before. Makes me anxious…”

“Unless you’re aiming to do a live or reaction video, most things will take multiple takes. It’s all just a matter of practice,” Inazumi assures, if a bit absently. He’s trying to set up an editing program, going over functions and capabilities, but now he finally looks up and a thin brow pops up over the rim of his glasses. “For instance: contrary to general belief I was not born with the innate ability to take such spectacular selfies.”

“Funny. You say that like you’re insulating—“

“Insinuating.”

“—Insinuating you can take decent ones now,” Mashi gripes, finally appearing to get a proper grip on the camera and smirking over at Inazumi. The small boy turns a hot glare on her, lips thinning in obvious displeasure.

“Oh, you’re a piece o’ somethin’…” Mashi growls then looks back at the camera, now trying to familiarize herself with the buttons.

“What more do we have to set up before we can begin?” Izuku cuts in with a frustrated sigh, raising his hands to rubs his eyes with the heels of his palms. Was he ever going to get used to these two? He doubted it.

Inazumi looks at him with a much nicer expression and then jabs his head towards the redhead. “Whenever she’s ready than so am I. Most everything I haven’t learned in the program are things I can work with later.”

“Well, I’m ready!” Mashi beams at Izuku, raising the camera towards her face, holding it steady. Despite her difficulties with just holding the device Izuku didn’t doubt Mashi wouldn’t put her all in being the best camerawoman she could be.
Still, he had to ask, “And you’re certain you don’t want an OWL to do this?”

“No, shut up! Rolling!” Mashi grins a little bigger when Izuku pales and stammers in surprise. Crap, they were rolling already?

“You have to press the record button first,” Inazumi says dryly, looking at his screen where he will be able to observe the video as they film. There’s a pause as Mashi looks down at the camera owlishly then hits the record button with a little noise of discovery.

“Oh, now rolling!”

Izuku glances over at Inazumi, brows furrowed in question, wanting to make sure they really are. The other boy looks up, nods, then looks back down at the screen.

Right. Great. So they were really doing this…

Taking a deep breath Izuku looks back at the camera in Mashi’s grip and opens his mouth to begin.

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“Hello. My name is Midoriya Izuku and I am quirkless,” the video begins, Izuku staring straight at the camera with a serious, if mildly nervous expression. “I was born quirkless. I have grown up quirkless. I live every day of my life quirkless. In fact, approximately 20% of the planet’s population is quirkless… yet I and many others have grown up being told to abandon dreams, to give up, to disappear, or that our existence is unwanted.”

Izuku pauses, allowing whoever is watching the video to take in the information before continuing. “One in five. 20% is one in five people. On a planet of seven billion people that is one point two billion individuals without a quirk. There are less people that are born with natural red hair than there are quirkless people. Yet still we are seen as garbage by the greater part of society.”

Another pause before Izuku’s left eye glows blue and he raises up his right arm and pulls up his sleeve to show the mechanical limb. “I also happen to be handicapped,” he says conversationally, “And when I was six I spent many of my days within the children’s ward. 20% of the population is quirkless, yet 70% of the children there were quirkless.

“Quirkless individuals are not just mistreated on a day to day basis, but also mistreated by the system around us. There is no protection for those who are quirkless. There are no companies or services to help quirkless individuals better themselves or put them on a more equal playing field as those with quirks.

“Superiority – earned or not – within the human race often times leads to destruction and disaster. This is not a threat, nor even a warning, but rather a plea. A plea that we work to build equality amongst everyone. We are all human – whether we have quirks or not, whether we are handicapped or not, whether we are men, women, or other, whether we are Asian, black, white, indigenous, European, or with any other level of melanin in our skins – we are human.

“CUT, the Club of Unrecognized Talent, is here to attempt to take a step in that direction of equality, to offer a safe place for those who need it. While we began our club to help those who are quirkless, we also wish to offer assistance, support, and make a difference for all those broken down or mistreated. We—“

The video is paused.

The rest of the video was mostly just a plug for the channel. Shigaraki knew. He had watched it a
total of six times now.

That green-haired, quirkless, genius boy had sent him a link to it once it was posted, asking him to watch it and consider subscribing. It was hardly what Shigaraki had been expecting as he sat on his bed, his tiny bedroom dark save for the television screen in front of him, game paused when he had gotten Izuku’s message.

He didn’t know how to feel about it; about Izuku messaging him like they were friends or about the video itself. Or just about Izuku himself.

He wanted to say he was annoying, too obsessed with heroes for Shigaraki to ever like him, but after so much consideration and brooding over it he had to admit that the idea didn’t hold up. Usually, yes, he would despise someone like Izuku, such a huge fan of that disgusting number one hero – and Shigaraki did hate that aspect of him – but even the younger boy had admitted the hero system was screwed up.

Hell, he and that red-haired bitch had gone on a near tangent during their first meeting, and on multiple times after exchanging contact info Izuku and Shigaraki had debated the future of hero work in their chats. Izuku firmly believed that heroes needed to change and the way media and government dealt with them had to evolve or the world was screwed. Shigaraki believed that heroes and their society needed to be torn down, removed, and then rebuilt. Much like what his Sensei believed.

In the end, however, they both agreed that there was a problem and SOMETHING needed to be done. And Shigaraki…

Shigaraki could respect that.

He still wasn’t entirely sure how he saw Izuku, what he thought of the small genius, but he couldn’t really say he despised him. They both believed a new world had to develop soon. Izuku just believed it could evolve out of what they already had while Shigaraki thought destruction followed by rebirth was the only option. And it was a damn good option, if you asked him.

Lost and hurt Shigaraki was always mad at something, always lashing out but never knowing why. Sensei had given him a reason. Helped him understand that his anger was powerful, but had to be given a focus, that focus being what had caused all of Shigaraki’s anguish.

Heroes.

Heroes, and this world that worshiped them, were what caused all the problems. This society is what created the villains they so vehemently despised. This society hurt and abused people that weren’t perfect, that weren’t hero material, and All Might was the face of this society. All Might represented all of it, the figurehead of the entire thing, his good televised while all the damage he weaved was hidden away.

No one who saw heroes as true heroes or saviors was ever on Shigaraki’s good side.

Which was why Izuku baffled him so much, especially when the hero-crazed boy actually agreed with him.

Those events surprised Shigaraki so much, shook him to his very core, that he would take screenshots of those conversations when they happened, amazed he actually had someone other than Sensei who agreed with him, despite also disagreeing on so much more.

He remembered having a very indepth conversation about how the name “villain” was entirely
inappropriate, especially in legal terms, since everything had to do with perception, the situation at hand, and philosophy.

Or the time Izuku had said while Shigaraki was sitting at Kurogiri’s bar, ”While I agree there are some things that are completely disgusting and no one will ever have any excuse for doing them, the actual concept of ‘good and evil’ doesn’t actually exist. Everything stems back to how we are raised, what morals we perceive to be correct, and who has been victorious in past conflicts and wars.”

Or the time they had been arguing on the best way to better the world and Izuku had actually conceded, ”While I don’t agree with what you are suggesting, I can see where you are coming from. In many philosophies everything in existence is a circle and when the world ends it actually begins again.” He had then proceeded to explain his own reasoning and how he believed destruction wouldn’t be necessary, not on such grandiose levels, and Shigaraki couldn’t get mad. Where he would usually throw a tantrum he instead listened and… DEBATED.

”You know, a common trope in comic books I have noticed,” Izuku had randomly begun a chat one day while Shigaraki had been going to speak with his Sensei, ”is that a hero’s worst enemy is often crafted by their own, unknowing hands. I wonder if such a fact has also developed within real life, pro hero work.” It was a surprisingly dark and emotional comment coming from the genius, but it had led to a remarkably in depth conversation that continued long after Shigaraki’s visit.

He didn’t agree with Izuku most of the time, and Izuku didn’t agree with him, but Izuku… respected him. They were two people damaged mercilessly by a system that had never been in their favor and were now trying to do something about it, and Izuku understood that. He didn’t wave Shigaraki off but rather listened and strived to understand. In turn… Shigaraki tried to do the same, even if he usually failed.

Were they friends? No. Shigaraki knew that much. But they weren’t enemies either.

Did Shigaraki like Izuku? Now that was a more complicated question, because he could admit he liked some of their conversations, but not necessarily the boy. It didn’t help things that his Sensei was so interested in the little genius, what with his inventions and how he saw the world. He had tasked Shigaraki early on to get a read of the situation and this mystery boy asking for volunteers for science projects, and ever since it had been the white-haired boy’s responsibility to keep his Sensei up to date.

It made Shigaraki more than a little pleased. He was being trusted to do this mission, one of his firsts, and he was going to do it well.

So why did he sometimes get the weirdest feeling in his gut while talking to Izuku? Or when recounting something to his Sensei? Like he was nauseous but his stomach was twisting too tightly to ever allow him to throw up. He didn’t like the feeling, but he didn’t know how to identify it either. Mostly he just tried to ignore it, but some days it made him more irritable than others.

Shazanka: saw video. You’re still a nerd

Shigaraki isn’t really sure what else to say, because in the end he also doesn’t know how he feels about the video. It is simple and hopeful, but open ended since it is an introduction to the account, yet…

Shigaraki has always understood once he began speaking with Izuku that the other boy had been through hell much like him. They were both screwed over by the system, both screwed over by heroes – one making Izuku handicapped for the rest of his life and none ever coming to rescue Shigaraki as a child – both hurt and feeling they needed to do something about it…
And here Izuku was. Doing something about it while Shigaraki kept sitting around and waiting. It made him remarkably mad, made him want to break something, throw things, disintegrate someone. Only Sensei’s tolerant words to be patient kept him from doing something he would truly regret.

But at the same time Shigaraki felt some kind of respect bubble up inside him, like when they debated, because yes, Izuku was acting while Shigaraki waited, but he was aiming for a similar goal as the older boy. Perhaps it could be an advantage to them both. Perhaps Shigaraki could use the message Izuku would inevitably spread to encourage others to see Shigaraki’s way.

Ah, there was that weird feeling in his gut again…

TheTerrificTitan: Gee, thanks.

Shigaraki looks to his phone and can nearly feel the sarcasm leaking through his screen.

TheTerrificTitan: Be honest, though. Did it feel forced? Did you feel annoyed by my voice or my message?

Shazanka: your voice is always annoying

TheTerrificTitan: You sound like Kacchan…

Shazanka: who?

TheTerrificTitan: Nevermind that. Seriously… Did you like it?

Shigaraki hesitates, staring at his screen for a long, silent moment. Again he tried to think about how he felt for the video. Envious that the other boy was already out there, doing what he felt was needed. Respectful for the end goal and the initiative. Sympathetic to the general cause. Scheming on how he could use all of this for his own benefit.

In the end he opens up the CUT WorldTube page again, stares at it for a long while, then hits subscribe.

Shazanka: I subscribed. You probably did something right

TheTerrificTitan: Tomura-kun! Thank you!

TheTerrificTitan: We do not have many subscribers at the moment, so each one helps.

Shigaraki sets down his phone on his bed, screen down, and scowls at it, his chest tightening when reading a simple “thank you.” He flounders for a moment to grab his Father on the bedside table, holding the hand to his chest tightly as the feeling swells to uncomfortable levels.

This always happens. Shigaraki only spoke to Izuku online – except for that one time that red-haired bitch stole the boy’s phone and messaged him a bunch of memes about the sandman – and every time the genius boy said something that one might consider nice Shigaraki began to feel uncomfortable. It happened often, too.

At first he had brushed it off as fake, because that was what it always was with everyone else, but it kept happening, and after that meeting where he, Izuku, and the redhead had gotten ice cream – a food he had only heard stories about – he found he couldn’t brush it off anymore. Izuku was just that much of an honest person. It made the genius boy easier to manipulate, but it also made comments like these feel so much more alien to Shigaraki because they actually meant something.
The phone buzzes again after a few minutes and Shigaraki has gotten himself into order, breath evening out where it had begun to elevate and grip on his Father relaxing. He still held the dismembered hand close to his chest as he lifted up his phone again.

_TheTerrificTitan_: On another note: I will be done with detention by the end of the week and can thus join you this weekend on our Neko Nurse environmental test.

Right. The “experiment.” It had been Sensei’s idea to manipulate the situation to play out like this. They needed Izuku to get away from familiar territory, and they needed to get him alone, since he was bound to bring along one of his friends. The first part was already in progress while the second they could easily manage once they were actually in the designated area.

_Shazanka_: good. You bringing anyone?

_TheTerrificTitan_: I would hate to bring along someone you are unfamiliar with since I am aware it would make you uncomfortable. As for Mashi…

_TheTerrificTitan_: I haven’t told her about it, yet, but I am certain she would be excited to join us.

Shigaraki arches his brow at the screen, confused momentarily. He appreciated both for himself and for the plan that Izuku wasn’t going to drag along someone he had never met before, but he didn’t understand the reasoning behind not telling the redhead. Weren’t the two close? And by the genius’s logic than Shigaraki already knew her so there shouldn’t be any issue.

Before he can come up with a question that doesn’t sound too suspicious he gets a ping that Izuku has replied.

_TheTerrificTitan_: I know you don’t like her – it would be hard to miss, if I am being honest – so I wanted to talk to you about it first.

Shigaraki lowers his phone and his brows pinch together, the tight, dry wrinkles on his face stretching in slight discomfort.

Izuku was holding off on talking to the redhead for Shigaraki’s benefit? Once again the tight feeling returns to his chest and his grip tightens on Father, searching for comfort he was familiar with.

Did he actually hate the red-haired bitch? Perhaps not, not after she had gotten him ice cream, that heavenly food… but he sure as hell didn’t like her. She was loud and rude to him, making fun of him at every turn. She was a bully, he had decided, and she probably didn’t like Shigaraki either. The whole ice cream event was probably all for Izuku’s benefit once they found out he was malnourished.

He still didn’t HATE her, he realizes with a jolt. If he had to disintegrate either her or a stranger he would probably pick the stranger, for instance. It felt odd, having someone he disliked but didn’t hate, but he can’t say that to Izuku…

_Shazanka_: she’s loud

_TheTerrificTitan_: Can’t really argue with that. She is a good person, though, and if anything gets sketchy she can fight pretty well.

_Shazanka_: are you saying I can’t fight?

_TheTerrificTitan_: I don’t know. Can you?
Shazanka: yes

TheTerrificTitan: Well that’s good! You can play my hero while we’re out.

A scowl immediately settles on Shigaraki’s face and a dark feeling quickly encompasses him. No, he was not a hero and he never would be. He hated that Izuku continued to crack jokes like this and he couldn’t understand the other’s insistence to do so.

Shazanka: you need to stop calling me that

Even he can pick up the acid in his typed words, a shift in the almost pleasant tone of their conversation thus far, but he finds he doesn’t care. In fact, he’s glad he can manage it. He doesn’t want Izuku feeling comfortable about this. He isn’t a hero, he is a monster, a villain, a hero’s worst nightmare.

The following responses, however, are not what he expects.

TheTerrificTitan: I’m sorry.

TheTerrificTitan: If it makes you feel any better when I call you a hero I am not thinking about pro heroes. Rationally speaking you would make a terrible pro hero.

TheTerrificTitan: No offense.

TheTerrificTitan: But I think there is a difference between a pro hero and a True Hero. A pro hero is a job description, but a True Hero can be anyone. It has nothing to do with their work, but rather how they decide to live their life.

TheTerrificTitan: I think you could be a True Hero one day.

TheTerrificTitan: But only if you wanted to.

Shigaraki doesn’t respond to Izuku for nearly twenty minutes, instead curling up on his side and cradling Father close to his chest. What was he feeling? What was this? He should feel disgusted right now, being compared to any kind of hero, pro or true or whatever, but he just felt… something. Something foreign and strong it nearly makes him cry.

Nearly. But he doesn’t cry. Not anymore. Sensei made it clear crying was a weakness and he would not disappoint his Sensei like that.

Pro heroes were the bane of his and all of society’s existence, but Izuku referring to him as something greater than that, that he COULD be something like that… it was too much.

It takes another ten minutes after he reaches for his phone again to even determine what he is going to say.

Shazanka: please don’t bring Mashi

He isn’t sure if he has ever said please to anyone before except ironically or to Sensei… but he needs to try this.

TheTerrificTitan: Alright, Tomura-kun. I do hope you two can be friends one day, but I can respect your wishes.

TheTerrificTitan: It means so much that you are trying to help me with the Neko Nurses.
Shigaraki stares at his screen for a while before setting it face down on his bedside table, not replying but being done with the conversation. Despite the emotional rollercoaster that conversation had just been he had managed to solve his and Sensei’s second issue. Izuku would be joining Shigaraki by himself. Alone. This was a good thing.

So why was the awful feeling in Shigaraki’s gut returning?

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Izuku was going to own the clubhouse.

It wasn’t quite his yet, but the paperwork had officially gone through and now they only had to wait for the final documents to be signed and processed.

This announcement was met with excited cheers and plans for a celebration that quickly evolved into a video game night and slumber party at the Midoriya apartment. It was also why that Saturday Izuku decided it was high time to actually give his family – aka Inko, Aizawa, Hizashi, and Nemuri – a proper tour of the place rather than just letting them know the address.

So now Katsuki sat at one of the tables in the clubhouse’s lounge room, a sketchbook in front of him, just waiting for everyone else to arrive. Inazumi was already there, probably off in his room working on that AI code he and Izuku were so wrapped up in. Mashi was also here, but Katsuki knew better than to assume he knew where that unpredictable woman was. Shinsou would be arriving with Izuku and they would be bringing along Izuku’s mother and the three pro heroes.

It left Katsuki with some time to think, his sketches forgotten.

Things were developing quickly in ways he hadn’t expected they would. When they had first found the clubhouse Katsuki had suspected that it wouldn’t last. It was a fun idea at the time but they would eventually outgrow it. But then Izuku had to go and prove him wrong – again, his mind treacherously supplies – and spruce it up into a decent building once more. For a technological genius Izuku certainly had a talent for breathing life into anything he put his mind to.

And now the clubhouse was actually going to be theirs. It wasn’t just some building they were hanging out in like any other kids might be doing. No, Izuku was actually going to be paying for this building and owning it. Sure, it would have to be under his mother’s name for the first few years, but that hardly mattered. They were actually going to own the clubhouse.

And then there was the WorldTube account. It was only a few days old, with only three videos uploaded – Izuku’s introduction, a vlog from Inazumi, and a prank video from Shinsou – but they already had a small handful of followers. Most of those followers were “a friend told a friend” type people, but they were putting themselves out there.

It meant something.

Katsuki had no idea what it meant to him, though. He had no real drive to be part of this. He wasn’t quirkless and his quirk was far from useless. He had the most promise out of this whole group. He was going to become the best hero there ever was, and he didn’t need any extra help from them.

So then why was he still sticking around?

Because these were his friends… Right? He wasn’t sure if he would ever be able to admit it out loud, but these people, this misfit group of wannabes and extras, had somehow become his friends. Did he need any other reason to hang around?
Besides, these guys would be dead in the water if he wasn’t around. No, he didn’t need them, he refused to believe he did, but they definitely needed him. As much as they were doing they were still just extras with either no quirk or lame quirks. Katsuki was the strong one. He was the best hero-in-training and these guys needed as much help as they could get.

He didn’t need them; they needed him.

Maybe if he kept saying that he would eventually believe it, too…

“What’cha drawin’?”

The voice over his shoulder startles him and he swings around, palm out and letting out a defensive blast on instinct. A moment later Mashi is ducking under said arm, also by instinct, and moves further into his space to get a better look at the sketchbook on the table.

The second he realizes what has happened Katsuki growls, baring his teeth while Mashi pats absently at her singed, red hair. She was too used to Katsuki’s attacks. He needed to make some adjustments soon to keep her on her toes; otherwise she would become even more insufferable than before.

“None of your business,” he snaps, reaching to push Mashi away from him and the table. The girl goes willingly but bounces right back into his space a second later. “Get lost, wannabe!” Katsuki snaps but is ignored as the quirkless girl leans against him. At least she isn’t trying to sneak a peak at his sketchbook anymore, but that hardly changes the fact she has no respect for his personal space.

“You as excited as me?” Mashi questions, poking a finger against Katsuki’s cheek, which he quickly smacks away. He lets loose another explosion, this time aiming for the redhead’s stomach, but she manages to weave out of the way of that just in time. Seeming to take mercy on him she plops down in another chair at the table.

“Excited about what?” Katsuki finally questions, glaring at the redhead and making sure she doesn’t jump back into his space again. He couldn’t let his guard down with this one.

Mashi scoffs and rolls her eyes, leaning back so far in her chair she balanced on the back two legs. “Zuzu’s gonna own this place soon! Duh! We won’t be trespassin’ and shit no more,” she explains then looks around the room. “This’ll LEGIT be ours. Like… this is gonna be our headquarters or something!”

“It already was, idiot,” Katsuki says blandly before pulling his sketchbook back towards himself to busy himself. He had been enjoying the momentary peace and quiet, but it figured it wouldn’t last long.

“But like… now it’ll be official and shit!” Mashi continues, getting a starry look in her eyes. Katsuki looks down at his paper and forces himself to start doodling something. Anything. Slowly it begins to morph into a very loose depiction of the chess set in the corner of the room. “I wonder what else we’re gonna do with this place…” Mashi continues wistfully. Katsuki still doesn’t look up.

“Ask Deku. Stop talking to me.”

“Zuzu isn’t here right now, though! Come oooooon, Fire Cracker! What do you want added to this place?” Mashi leans forward against the table, Katsuki can see it out of his peripheral, and the question makes him pause in thought.

The first floor lobby and West Wing, where they were now, was officially finished when it came to foundation. The second floor was also now stable, Katsuki had been up there a few times now, but
not yet ready for any kind of rooms or designations. A pool was being dug out in the back for aquatic-based inventions and training and the front was blossoming with natural life they had all painstakingly helped plant.

A gym and training floor were also planned to be placed in the East Wing once they got to it, and a basement was to eventually be dug out for storage space. A workroom specifically for biological experimentation and observation was to be placed… somewhere, but that was about all of Katsuki’s knowledge when it came to the clubhouse plans.

It didn’t leave much for him to want. He looked forward to the training room, especially for rainy or cold days, and a pool could be useful since he wasn’t well equipped for working with water, but there was nothing he really wanted or needed.

“Why would I want anything?” he settles on snapping at the redhead, who thins her lips in displeasure and leans back again.

“Oh, come on! What about an art studio? I bet that’d be cool!” she pushes. An art studio? Well, it would certainly be cool, but Katsuki didn’t really need an art studio. When he drew he did it wherever he wanted and only needed a sketchbook and pencil. An art studio was overkill, even for him, and training facilities would be much more helpful.

He decides not to say any of this, however. He wants Mashi to go away already, so he keeps his focus on his doodle. He changes the chess pieces into little hero figures as he goes.

But Mashi doesn’t go away. In fact she just stares at Katsuki for a while before saying simply, “I’ll ask Zuzu for an art studio for ya.”

This time the blond does look up, glaring over at Mashi. “I don’t need a fucking art studio, red idiot.”

“Didn’t ask if ya needed it! There’s gonna be plenty of room in the second floor soon. Come on! Live a little!” Mashi grins at him like she’s won something, throwing her arms behind her head. “I’m already gonna ask for a gun course. Adding one more thing in there shouldn’t be a huge, fuckin’ deal.”

For a while Katsuki just glares at the grinning woman, his red eyes thinning more and more with each passing second. What was with this girl and her incessant desire to meddle? Katsuki did not need a damn art studio.

In a move of frustration he reaches out and lets out a loud, popping explosion from his fingers, different from the fiery ones he usually conducts. It’s enough to startle Mashi, who flinches, as if ready to dodge, then begins to tip. Her balancing act in her chair proves to be her downfall as she topples backwards with an undignified squawk and loud thud.

Katsuki leans sideways to look around the table at the sprawled mess that is the quirkless girl, her green eyes glaring up through her mess of hair at Katsuki. Good, he was glad she wasn’t giving that obnoxious grin anymore.

“How are you the worst person ever?” Mashi growls, flopping sideways to make it easier to get up and pick up the chair. Katsuki is mildly surprised she isn’t charging at him like she usually does.

“Worst ever? Guess I beat you at yet another thing,” the blond shrugs, looking back to his sketch.

“What?” Mashi glances over, the chair back up and her eyes wide in surprise. Then she’s glaring again and placing both hands on the table to lean towards the explosive boy. “No way! Fuck you, you didn’t win shit!”
“Alright, fine, you’re the worst,” Katsuki shrugs like it is no big deal, “Guess you can’t win them all.” The words are so obviously an act, but Mashi is too wrapped up in the moment to notice.

“Damn straight I am!”

“You are what, Mashi?” The two look over to the door just as Izuku walks in. Following closely behind are Aizawa and Hizashi, the latter of which is wide-eyed like a child as he looks at every little detail around them. Just after them comes Inko and Nemuri, both also in a state of amazement yet not to the degree of the sound hero.

“I’m the worst!” Mashi announces gleefully, bouncing away from the table but then pausing. Finally, realization dawns on her face and she slowly turns to look at Katsuki. The blond has his head back down towards his doodle, but now a wicked smirk plays at his lips. “Oh screw you,” she growls as Hizashi approaches her, grinning wide.

“Well, I think you’re pretty great!” Hizashi announces, ruffling her hair and getting her to start smiling again.

“What were you even talking about?” Izuku asks, also approaching, giving his two childhood friends curious looks.

“I forget,” Mashi shrugs, already over the teasing, then turns her full attention to the genius boy. “Hey! When there’s room can we have an art studio and a gun range?” she questions, seemingly out of the blue to the newcomers.

Silence falls and everyone turns to give the girl odd looks. Katsuki keeps his head down and fights the urge to groan.

“Like in the same room?” Nemuri questions eventually, her brows crinkled in equal parts confusion and concern.

Aizawa just sighs, however, and shakes his head while Inko says, “When did this begin to feel normal?”

“I’ll… think about it, Mashi,” Izuku says at length, rubbing a hand over his brow as if to ward off a headache. He’s taking the whole thing in stride, also accustomed to bizarre requests from the redhead, and then he turns towards his family to begin talking about the lounge room.

Katsuki ignores them all for the most part save for when Inko appears at his shoulder to ask what he’s drawing. At some point Shinsou and Inazumi also appear, the tiny, quirkless boy immediately sitting down at Katsuki’s table with his laptop and continuing to work while Shinsou gravitates towards Izuku’s side.

The tour continues on around Katsuki and he doesn’t care. He doesn’t expect to get any more moments to himself for the remainder of the day, anyway, so he isn’t surprised when he is dragged into a conversation about doors and door designs. He also isn’t surprised that when the tour and all pieces of business are concluded he still isn’t left alone.

Izuku and Shinsou speak in hushed tones over in the pillow pit where Aizawa has fallen asleep. Inazumi has moved to a different table in a corner, even farther from everyone else, and continues to type at his computer. Inko and Nemuri have gone out to get dinner and should be back any second while Hizashi and Mashi sit at the chessboard and play a very… creative game of chess.

Despite no longer being alone and having his privacy, Katsuki doesn’t feel particularly frustrated. He had been at first, especially with Mashi, but now he’s settled into it and continues to doodle in
silence, content to keep to himself while still being surrounded by his… friends.

He doesn’t need them, he repeats to himself, but they need him, and the warm, happy feeling filling his insides has nothing to do with them…

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Saturday comes and goes almost too quickly for Izuku. With so much to do and so much good news the day becomes a blur of activity.

Good activity, but it still leaves the green-haired boy exhausted. His family has gotten a proper look at the clubhouse, a clubhouse he will soon own, and that leaves him with a pleasant feeling in his chest. He had wanted to show them all of this for some time now and it felt like a weight coming off his shoulders.

Which meant there was plenty of free room for a new weight to take its place…

The exhaustion was enough of an excuse to have everyone else head out ahead of him. He told them there was a few last minute experiments he wanted to conduct on his own and if it got too late he would just spend the night here at the clubhouse. It wasn’t the first time he had spent the night there, they all had at some point, so that part wasn’t suspicious.

Altogether he hadn’t actually lied. He did plan to stay the night at the clubhouse, and he was staying behind to do experiments, he just… didn’t mention what kinds of experiments and where.

A part of himself tells him he is a fool and a jerk. If his mother found out she would be so disappointed and furious. He’d made promises, hadn’t he? But he had also made a promise to Tomura, and another part of Izuku tells him that he isn’t REALLY doing anything wrong… Technically…

With a sigh Izuku hefts a backpack onto his back, the Neko Nurse securely inside, and leaves the clubhouse. He leaves a note that reads “Stepped Out for Experiments –Izuku” to assuage some of his guilt, but he can still feel it clawing at his insides.

The sun is still in the sky as he leaves the clubhouse, but it is beginning to set. He adjusts the backpack as he passes through the EAARD field and goes over the directions in his Eye. He won’t need to grab a train, thankfully. It is still a bit of a walk, but a walk is all he needs.

It isn’t quite twilight by the time Izuku finally makes it to a little, rundown café. The sign outside is made of wood that has seen better days, the paint peeling and the name “Becky’s” just barely legible. The building itself is tucked away between two taller buildings, bricks stained from years and years of weathering and abuse. Up above in a second-story window a girl sits in the open pane, smoking casually and paying Izuku no mind.

The genius boy feels out of place here, despite nothing being particularly wrong with the location, and his grip on his backpack straps tightens. He eyes the café doors nervously, wondering if he should head in or not. Tomura said to meet him here, but he can’t see the older boy inside. The windows aren’t the cleanest, however, so perhaps he just can’t tell?

A hand lands on his shoulder and he shrieks in surprise, leaping away as he instinctively loads an Ice Equalizer in his arm. It turns out to be unnecessary, however, when he spins around to find Tomura grinning wickedly at him. A blush creeps over Izuku’s face as he immediately feels embarrassment wash over him.

“Th-that wasn’t funny!” Izuku says quickly, lowering his arms and gripping his backpack straps
again. He looks away and pouts when a breathy cackle escapes the other boy.

“Why so jumpy, Midoriya-kun?” Tomura questions, stepping forward. He’s still smirking and it makes Izuku pout even deeper.

“You know why,” he huffs, shoulders hunching as if to protect himself. “I’ve never been to a part of town like this before…”

“Oh? What do you mean ‘like this’?” Tomura questions, shoving his hands in his pockets and continuing to smirk. It was unnerving. It was so much easier to talk to this boy online where they could plan out what they wanted to say ahead of time. He also didn’t have to wonder about Tomura’s more… unique behavior. He didn’t want to call him weird, that was what Mashi called him, but he certainly acted in ways difficult for Izuku to predict.

“Oh… well, I meant… Uh…” And now Izuku was flustered, uncertain what to say. Had he offended Tomura with his comment? He hadn’t meant to…

The pale boy seems to be aware of this, however, as his grin only seems to widen, his chapped lips pulling tightly. “You’re so sensitive, did you know that?” he jabs and Izuku’s slouched form shifts so he can puff up his chest in indignation.

“Yes, thank you, I am quite proud of that,” he replies, looking up at Tomura’s red eyes. The orbs looked somehow both emotionless and mirthful at the same time. It was a bizarre observation that sent a chill down Izuku’s spine.

They stare at each other for a bit, Tomura’s smile fading and instead a curious expression pulling his features. His brow pinches and the wrinkles around his eyes that a young man like him shouldn’t have pull and twist with the movement. “You’re strange,” the pale boy finally comes to the conclusion and Izuku has to fight off the desire to laugh at the comment.

“Maybe we’re both strange?” Izuku offers instead, smiling up at the other boy as he pulls his hood over his white hair.

Tomura blinks a few times at that, adjusting his hood, before simply grunting in way of response. Izuku wasn’t sure what that meant, but he was going to chalk it up as a grudging affirmative.

“Come on, let’s go,” Tomura says as he rudely pushes past Izuku and begins walking down the sidewalk. The genius boy is startled for a moment before he straightens his navy NASA t-shirt then hurries to catch up. He walks beside the other boy, shorter legs having to move at a quicker pace to keep up.

“Where are we going?” Izuku questions. They had spoken a few times about what he was looking for for his experiments. They needed an area with a decent population and foot traffic. A location with a higher chance of minor injury or that would allow for the Neko Nurse to interact with pedestrians without disrupting the flow of surrounding people. The added bonus of this location should be an increase in individuals suffering from lack of medical assistance on the regular.

This location would have more people in desperate need of something like the Neko Nurse.

“Park,” Tomura replies simply, then motions with his chin down the road, “Around the corner over there.”

“Oh that would be a perfect start!” Izuku brightens. A park was his go-to for these kinds of experiments, so he hoped he would have as much luck here as he did with the ones in his own neighborhood. “We also should try to find some alley cats or any injured animals,” he continues and
doesn’t miss Tomura’s confused glance. “I took your suggestion to heart and added a few medical procedures for animals as well.”

“Oh…” there is a long moment of silence as Tomura looks away, face hidden by his hood, and his shoulders rise towards his ears. Izuku wonders what must be going through his mind, but the other boy doesn’t give him a chance to speak on it. “Good.”

“You really like animals, don’t you, Tomura-kun?” Izuku asks, trying to get a good look at the other’s face but he can’t quite get the right angle.

The other boy gives a short shrug and just for a second Izuku sees a small scowl. Was he irritating him? “I hate people. Animals are cool, though. Animals and video games.”

“You must love Nintendogs, then,” Izuku says flatly without thinking. It’s meant as a joke but he isn’t sure Tomura appreciates it when he turns his red eyes towards him. He can’t tell if the expression he is getting is thoughtful, frustrated, suspicious, or literally anything else. This boy was just so hard to read.

But then the moment seems to pass and Tomura snorts, seemingly out of good nature, and faces forward once more. Okay, that seemed to have gone well. Feeling a bit more confident Izuku pushes on. “What’s your favorite animal? I’m partial to foxes myself.”

There’s a pause, but less tense than before. The other boy appears to honestly be considering the question before saying, “Ferrets.”

“Yes?” Izuku questions, brightening up as they actually continue to have a proper conversation. Tomura hums a quiet affirmative and Izuku hurries his steps forward. He turns and, without losing speed, begins walking backwards in front of the taller boy. Mashi did this all the time, and sometimes so did Izuku when he was on a particularly good rant about heroes. This allowed him to get a proper look at Tomura’s face as they spoke.

“Did you know a group of ferrets is called a business?” he says and Tomura’s expression shifts to something resembling surprised confusion, either at the fact or at Izuku suddenly being in front of him. “Or that ferrets are dangerous to human babies? They’ll attack them.”

Tomura’s brows rise before a dark smirk plays on his lips and he glances away. “Smart animals,” he says and Izuku grins brightly. This was going well!

“Oh, they are! Some have jobs working in small pipes while others actually team up with falconers to help catch prey.”

Tomura is giving him an odd look again, brows furrowed and head tilting slightly to the side. “Why do you know all this? Crack.” The last word is said flatly with a slight nod towards the ground at the exact moment Izuku’s heel catches on a crack and he tumbles for a moment. He regains his footing without falling onto his butt, but when he looks up and pouts he sees Tomura smirking at him.

“I don’t know why I retain certain information,” he admits, deciding not to comment on his stumble and returning to Tomura’s side. He adjusts the backpack on his back just to give himself something to do. “I forget plenty of useless information all the time. If I want to retain it, I will, otherwise there’s no telling. I might forget it or I might not… usually not, though…”

“So you just have a bunch of useless garbage dancing around up there?” Tomura questions, removing a hand from his pocket just so he can reach out and poke none-too-gently at Izuku’s temple. The younger boy doesn’t flinch at the contact despite knowing fully what Tomura’s hands
are capable of doing. “Lame.”

“Natural,” Izuku counters, glaring at the other boy. It doesn’t have a very powerful affect since Tomura just shrugs at him. “I’m sure you have plenty of song lyrics and video game lore up in your own brain that will never come to good use.”

“My extensive knowledge of Mario lore will never be useless,” Tomura counters right back, his voice bland and no obvious emotion on his face. Ah, he was poking fun at Izuku, the genius realizes.

“Alright,” he begins, deciding he can play along, “Fine. You have no useless knowledge in your head. Perhaps I should share some!”

Tomura’s expression turns dubious now, not exactly happy with how this was developing. “I don’t want it,” he says, but it’s too late, Izuku has made up his mind.

“The color orange was actually named after the fruit,” he begins, looking forward as they round the corner and he can see a rusty chain-link fence up ahead surrounding a park. “Originally the color we recognize as orange was just considered another shade of red, but eventually the fruit called an ‘orange’ became more widely available and so the color began to be called ‘orange’ as well.”

“Serious… stop…”

“Oh! Also banana-flavored candies… Ever notice how they don’t taste like bananas? That’s because the flavor the candy uses comes from an extinct form of banana, not the ones we eat currently.”

“Very interesting. Shut up.”

“The Megapiranha, an extinct relative of today’s piranha, had a bite force more powerful than a Tyrannosaurus Rex and the Megalodon, at least pound for pound.”

“That’s… wait, what?” Tomura actually stops to give Izuku a disbelieving look. The other also comes to a stop and nods vehemently.

“Yeah! The Megapiranha had an approximate bite force thirty times that of its weight while, say, a T. Rex could only bite with about six times its own weight,” Izuku grins as he relays the information. He hadn’t exactly retained that last bit, but a quick search in his Eye and some math brought up the answer.

“What about a human?” Tomura questions, head tilting. For a second he didn’t seem as high strung as he usually did, almost like he was forgetting to keep up some kind of image. Instead, for what felt like the first time Izuku had ever seen, the other boy appeared fascinated.

“A human bite force varies depending on the teeth, actually, but an average molar can reach about 1100 to 1300 Newtons of force, approximately two to three times that of an average human’s weight. Obviously quirks can alter this, but on average… that’s the number,” Izuku replies, giddiness welling up inside him as they slowly begin to walk again. Was he getting through to Tomura? Were they bonding over this? Really? “Also, contrary to the myth, humans can’t actually bite off a finger with the same force used to bite a carrot. We can still bit of a finger, but a carrot is weaker and a human finger has rubbery skin, tendons, muscle, and bone that all get in the way.”

“Lame,” Tomura huffs, deflating partially at that final piece of information. He takes a deep breath and releases it in what sounds like a resigned sigh, shaking his head. “You’re definitely strange…”

“And we’re strange together,” Izuku replies, straightening his shoulders.
Tomura glances at him and some emotion passes over his face that Izuku can’t read. He isn’t sure why but it makes him feel sad, like he wants to comfort the other for some reason. “Yeah… sure…” Tomura finally agrees, actually voicing it this time, and rolls his eyes. “Just… give me another stupid fact.”

It makes Izuku grin brightly as they continue towards the park and he begins talking about the scientific likelihood of life elsewhere in the universe, sighting equations and probabilities as they go.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku you fool! Or is he...?

Chapter Song: **Ruth B - Lost Boy**

Also, here's my most favorite Christmas song ever because fuck it, my dudes, it's hilarious and this is how I abuse my platform: **O Holy Night**

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