### Beep Beep Beep

**by** [Izupie](http://archiveofourown.org/users/izupie)

#### Summary

"The guy living below me has a really loud alarm clock that always wakes me up at the crack of dawn."

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It's five in the morning and Ochako may be wearing her old, faded, kind of inappropriately short pajamas, but this time it's the last straw. She's going downstairs and she's giving this jerk a piece of her mind........ Except that he's actually really friendly and sweet and Oh No He's Hot.

#### Notes

This spiraled way out of control from the drabble it was meant to be oops. Actually finished this on my birthday, so I guess now this is my birthday present to me??

I love aged-up super awkward Izuocha, please check out my other works too for more of these dorks ~!

(Some gorgeous fanart! Thank you so much!

[Mikasarts](http://archiveofourown.org/users/mikasarts) on tumblr: [xXx]

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Ochako groaned loudly and yanked her bed quilt over her head.

*BEEP BEEP BEEP.*

It was that alarm. *Again.* She squeezed her eyes shut tightly, in a futile attempt to desperately to cling onto the last hazy wisps of sleep that were rapidly clearing from her mind, while the alarm from the floor below persisted.

*BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP.*

Ochako reached out of the cocoon of duvet she’d made to snatch her pillow and slam that over her ears too. As if it wasn’t bad enough that whoever lived in the room directly below hers had an obnoxiously loud alarm clock (that she swore must be set to maximum volume), but they would also leave it to beep for just long enough that she would be fully awake and unable to fall asleep again by the time they’d turned it off.

The beeping finally ceased and Ochako let out a relieved sigh that ended in a groan. Great, she was *once again* fully awake at- (she peeked out of the duvet at the tiny red numbers on her own alarm clock glowing in the pre-dawn darkness) -five o’clock in the morning.

Far, far too early considering she’d got caught up chatting on Discord until two a.m. again. Which gave her a horrifying grand total of three hours sleep.

Ochako lay on her back and glared at the ceiling of her apartment, cursing being such a light sleeper. She’d always been jealous of her friends at college who'd had naps between lectures or before they went on a night out, while she'd just struggled through the inevitable sleep deprivation. She smiled at the memory of Momo falling asleep at a house party once, remembering how everyone piled their coats on top of her and put a pillow under her head.

With a sigh Ochako flung back the bed quilt and swung her legs over the side of the bed, took a gulp of water from the glass on her bedside table, and rubbed her tired stinging eyes. She didn’t even know who lived in the apartment below hers. She kind of wished she was friendly with any of her neighbors, because then she could have asked them about it, but she’d only very recently moved in, so she hadn’t really had chance to get to know anyone yet. She could only imagine that the other residents in the vicinity were just very used to it? Or that they were all heavy sleepers and it didn’t wake up anyone else but her - (most likely) - but maybe it bothered them, but no one could bring themselves to tackle the alarm owner about it...

She considered this last option carefully.

So really.... She could be doing everyone else a favor by getting the early morning wake up call to stop, right?

Ochako glanced over at her own alarm clock again. Only about fifteen minutes had passed. Nobody could get ready to leave in just fifteen minutes from waking up, right? If she was quick, she might be able to go down a floor and knock on their door, just to explain that if they must get up that early (afterall, she reasoned, she didn’t know what they did for a job) that if they could just turn the volume down, or not leave it to beep for so long, that would be fine.

*Totally reasonable.*
Ochako drew her eyebrows together and took in a quick sharp breath, gripping her hands in front of her like she was ready for a fight. Let’s do it.

Not really considering her state of dress; still in her pink sleeping shorts and a grey tank top that had the words ‘Shine Like The Stars’ printed in glittery pink lettering on it, Ochako grabbed her keys, slipped on her comfy old sandals, and swept out of her apartment. As she was trotting down the staircase she realised she hadn’t even brushed any of the tangles out of her bed-head hair, as her short bob style tended to get into a mess while she slept, so she quickly ran a hand through the front longer bangs and shook her head, to try and get it looking at least a little bit presentable and bouncy. (She didn’t think she’d made much of a difference.)

Ochako made her way into the correct corridor and gripped her chin in thought, trying to imagine her own corridor above and how many rooms down she was. "One, two, three..." she muttered as she walked and passed each door. She hadn't been anywhere in the building but the entrance and her own corridor so it was eerie to see the same layout but different room numbers. Ochako rubbed her exposed arms absentmindedly as she was sure she'd made it to the correct door, wishing she'd put a jacket on.

She hesitated as the boldness that had sent her there began to fade. She was still in her pyjamas. She'd probably got epic bed-head. She was wearing sandals! Anyone could live there... This was a bad idea. Ochako continued to hesitate and looked up at the ceiling, knowing she could leave now and go back to her own room and nobody would ever know. But that wouldn't solve anything. She set her expression into a mask of determination and raised a fist to knock. But the door suddenly flung open and Ochako yelped in surprise, instinctively leaping backwards. Her sandal caught on the carpet, while her foot continued to move and it slipped off, making her other foot pitch in the opposite direction to correct her balance, and ended with her lurching forwards. Instead of the face plant to the floor that she was expecting, Ochako opened her tightly clenched eyes to see white fabric, and realised she was being held by a strong grip, pressed tightly to the solid chest of a male.

She looked up in a surprised daze and she distantly wondered how eyes that green could even be real, and that they matched his messy, wavy green hair.

"Ah-!

"Uh-!"

He had a scattering of freckles across his cheeks and nose. (It was kind of cute.)

After a brief pause Ochako realised they had both frozen, faces only inches apart, mouths open in silence to let the other speak, with her chest still pressed securely against his and- oh Gods! She wasn’t even wearing a bra!

As if both coming to the same conclusion at the same time they sprang apart, Ochako blushing furiously and folding her arms over her chest, thanks to her thin pyjama tank top not leaving much to the imagination, and she winced and hissed with pain from her twisted ankle.

“S-S-Sorry about that! - I mean- not sorry that I caught you obviously, but- you know...” the mystery guy rushed out, a bright blush staining the skin under his freckles as he snapped his attention to the ceiling. He must have caught the sharp hiss she couldn’t contain as she winced, because he looked back down with a concerned expression. “Oh, a-are you okay? Are you hurt?” he asked softly.

He had a kind, expressive face, though there was something about his eyes that made her believe he was stronger than he seemed.

Ochako waved her hands in front of her frantically, his kindness making her blush even harder and
momentarily forget why she had her arms crossed. “No, no, don’t worry, just a little twisted ankle,” she explained, trying to sound positive instead of just intensely flustered.

She took a moment to notice that he was wearing a closely fitting white t-shirt, with the word ‘shirt’ printed across his broad chest, trendy black shorts, and striking, vivid red high-top sneakers that her eyes couldn’t help but be drawn to. While observing him she became intensely aware that he was doing the same to her, as she noticed his green eyes cast down at what she knew was her thin tank top, very short shorts and her favourite pair of old well-worn sandals that she wore in place of slippers.

At this point Ochako very much wanted the ground to open up beneath her.

“Th-Thanks for catching me!” she blurted out, remembering her manners. “Can’t believe I tripped over like that.” She tried for a casual laugh, something that didn’t say that she was crazy and had been about to knock on his door in her pyjamas at five o’clock in the morning, but she felt that it came out a little on the hysterical edge. She folded her arms tighter over her chest.

Izuku’s eyes deliberately flicked away from her again, sensing her embarrassment, his blush still staining the skin across his nose. “N-No problem - I shouldn’t have flung open my door like that, really.” He fidgeted, and she had to admire the way he hadn’t immediately dismissed her or dodged away as soon as possible. “So, um, did you need me for something?”

Now that her chance to talk to him had arrived she was unsure as to whether she could go through with it or not. All of her initial bad mood and irritation had faded with him catching her when she’d fallen and being such a genuine person - not to mention he was extremely cute. But after only three hours sleep her brain was completely blank on how she could explain her presence there in any other away. The truth would probably be for the best, she thought, trying to reach for the fire that had sent her there in the first place - he was right there, so she should just tell him about his dumb alarm clock, even if he seemed totally sweet and friendly...

While she battled with her inner thoughts, he bent down and picked up her sandal (of course she still only had one shoe on, she realised, horrified) and offered it to her. But when she stepped forward to take it back, stuttering another highly embarrassed thank you, she cringed again at the shooting pain from her ankle.

He frowned in concern. “It looks like that might be nasty. I’m so sorry I made you jump...”

He was so concerned and full of misplaced guilt that he didn’t seem to have considered that it was her fault for being right outside of his door at five in the morning in the first place.

“Here, let me help,” he continued, “I’m a paramedic, so I can have a look and make it feel better in no time, I promise.” He smiled shyly, then waved his hands in front of his face in a fluster. “O-Oh I should introduce myself before offering to take you into my apartment- not that I mean it like that- that sounds creepy. I know it’s a bit weird to ask you to come inside since we don’t know each other...” he rambled, rubbing the back of his neck, while the blush on his nose and cheeks darkened. He took a breath and tried again, “My name’s Izuku Midoriya, I work at the UA City Hospital.”

Ochako couldn’t help but smile back, amused by his earnest and awkward offer. She tried to ignore the odd fluttering feeling in her chest. “I’m Ochako Uraraka, nice to meet you. I’m... not usually such a mess,” she chuckled self-consciously, folding her arms tighter around her chest, “or, you know, loitering around corridors early in the morning. I actually live in the apartment above yours.”

She pointed to the ceiling and Izuku followed with his eyes.
“Really? Wow, so we're like the upstairs and downstairs version of next-door neighbors. Up-door neighbors? Down-door neighbours?” He gave a little laugh and smiled.

Something warm fluttered in Ochako's chest.

"I, well, I um..." She slammed down the impulse to hide her face and pretend this whole thing wasn’t happening - dying inside at her inability to think of a single explanation for her presence at his door at this time in the morning. “Anyway!” she finally chirped over-enthusiastically. “I should really get going before your neighbors come to see what all the noise is out here.” She laughed a little too loudly, waving the sandal he’d given her in the air. “And they see me wearing my pyjamas and one sandal.”

She was such a coward. He was too nice - she couldn’t tell him about the alarm now! Maybe she could write an anonymous letter and post it under his door while he was out...

Izuku frowned. “Please, just let me put a bit of ice on it at least, so it doesn’t swell. I can check you haven’t really damaged it.”

“No, no, don’t worry, I mean, you were obviously on your way out, and I don’t want to hold you up, and I’m sure I’ll be fine-” She put her sandal back on as she spoke and attempted to back away, but as soon as her twisted ankle bore her weight she gasped.

Izuku shot forward as if to catch her if she fell. His fingers ghosted over the arm she’d put out to steady herself.

Seeing she was standing steadily, he let his arms fall back to his sides. “As a medical professional I’m really advising you not to try and walk on that ankle for a while.” He spoke in a strong voice that left no room for argument, and his eyebrows were crinkled together in concern. His professionalism seemed to completely remove his stuttering and awkwardness. “I can’t make you, but please, I really think I should take a look at it.”

There was a beat of silence while Ochako bit her lip and thought about ways she could get out of putting a stranger to so much trouble, considering she had originally come to scold him, but after a moment Izuku turned around and crouched down slightly, motioning for her to get on his back. A shocked protest instantly formed on her lips as she realised he meant to give her a piggyback ride into his apartment, but it died unsaid as she considered the situation. There really was no way she could even hobble back to her apartment in this much pain. She sighed in defeat and hopped up, arms instantly winding around his neck, and cheeks burning as his hands gripped her bare thighs to stop her from falling.

Ochako had always considered herself to be a little on the chubby side for her height, but he straightened up effortlessly like she weighed nothing at all, and she could feel the solid muscles in his back and the strength in his arms. He was a lot stronger than he looked.

Her thoughts whirled, telling her that this should be really inappropriate, but knowing that he was a paramedic made it slightly more okay - because he was just doing his job, right? Of course, they were still total strangers... that alone made this situation odd. But there was something so earnest and honest about him that she trusted instantly, and she could see how he would make an excellent paramedic. Not that it lessened the racing of her heart or the fire burning in her cheeks. This was the closest she’d ever been to anyone of the opposite sex, and she was unused to the proximity of someone she was clearly attracted to. His broad back was so warm that she had to resist the temptation to lay her head down and close her eyes.

She just really, really wished she’d at least stuck a bra on before leaving her room, she lamented,
pressed tight against his back.

Izuku took a few steps towards his apartment and his professional image was offset slightly the deep crimson blush on the tips of his ears, and there was a wobble in his voice that managed to break through his calm exterior as he stammered, “H-Hold on.”

Then he took her inside.

Ochako wasn’t sure what she’d been expecting, because she should have realised before that the apartment would be an exact replica of her own in terms of physical layout, but she was thrown aback to see the same space as hers look so drastically different. Whilst hers was very utilitarian, and contained very few personal touches, his entire apartment was a mass of super heroes; most of the walls were taken up with colourful super hero posters and prints, there were a couple of bookcases stuffed full of comic books, and a huge display cabinet stood off to one side that was filled with rows and rows of figures and collectables.

“You... really like super heroes.” Ochako observed out loud.

“O-Oh- uh- yeah...”

Izuku crouched down as he reached his kitchen, so that she could climb off and sit on a wooden kitchen chair.

“No that that’s a bad thing!” she clarified, unwrapping her arms from around his neck, a little reluctantly, and taking a seat. “Super heroes are great!”

Izuku smiled gently, not meeting her eyes, while he brought over another chair to face her.

She pouted.

“You don’t think girls like super heroes?” she accused.

“It’s not that! It's just... I've been teased a lot about it over the years.” His smile turned sad.

“No way!” Ochako fumed. “Who would tease someone about something they’re obviously so passionate about? And I swear everyone is into super heroes these days. It’s hot news! Me and my friend Iida always go and see the new hero releases together at the movies.”

He looked at her in surprise. “Really?”

“Well, maybe not the newest few...” she admitted. “He still lives in my hometown and I’ve got less free time and less disposable cash since I finished college.”

“Relatable,” Izuku agreed with a soft smile, the skin crinkling at the corners of his bright green eyes.

Ochako looked away, her heart racing, and hoped her cheeks weren’t as red as they felt.

He fetched a bag of peas from his freezer, then disappeared out of the kitchen for a moment and returned with a cushion from his living room (it had a Captain America shield printed on it), and placed it on the kitchen chair facing her. Very gently he lifted her twisted ankle and lowered it onto the cushion. He was careful not to jolt her injury, so his fingers were feather light on her skin, but Ochako could feel callouses on his fingers and rough ridges on one of his palms. Once her foot was resting on the cushion she sucked in a sharp breath as the frozen peas were gently laid on top, but it almost instantly soothed the throbbing.
“Sorry,” he apologised.

Ochako shook her head.

“No, no! I’m sorry for all this trouble I’m causing you!”

“No trouble at all,” Izuku said cheerfully.

He crouched down and became so absorbed in examining her ankle that he didn’t notice her curious gaze on his hands; one of them was marked with thick stripes of puckered skin that she hadn’t noticed before, and he put that hand to his chin as he mumbled something too low for her to make out, focused entirely on her ankle. She wondered what the story was about his scars... they looked like they could be from a nasty injury...

“Does it still hurt?” he asked, making her jump a little as he finished mumbling and turned to address her suddenly.

“Oh, it’s a dull ache now, it’s not as bad. Thank you so much. Those are some magical peas!”

Ochako tried not to cringe. ‘Those are some magical peas’... Gods, she wished she knew how to flirt like a normal person.

But Izuku laughed and stood up. “Can you take paracetamol? I’ve got some if you want some.”

She cleared her throat a little. “That would be great, thank you.”

He made his way over to a kitchen cupboard and Ochako peered into it as he pulled open the door; there were baskets full of creams, ointments and medication in there, and there were even a couple of bright green first aid boxes. She considered that it wasn’t unusual for a paramedic to have all sorts of medical remedies in his apartment, but it looked like he’d got a whole pharmacy stuffed into the cupboard. Maybe he was prone to injuries? Or he was just very prepared. He pulled out a box of paracetamol and a roll of bandage and then poured her a glass of water from the sink.

She gulped down the paracetamol gratefully and Izuku crouched down by her ankle again, removed the bag of frozen peas, and gently began wrapping the bandage around it, his fingers were feather light on her legs while he wrapped. (She might not be wearing a bra, she thought, but at least she’d had her legs waxed recently.)

“This is just to keep the joint supported, but it looks like we stopped it from swelling too much and if your pain is gone already it will be fine, though it might be tender for a day or two.” His voice was firm and confident and Ochako melted into his reassurance as she leaned back in her chair. He really must make an excellent paramedic, and put everyone so at ease...

“I’m surprised you’re not a doctor - you’re really good at this.”

Izuku smiled while he worked.

“Actually, I always wanted to be a paramedic. When I was younger I was always getting into accidents, usually just getting scrapes and stuff, but I was hit in a nasty car accident one day, and it shattered most of my hand and arm.”

Ochako couldn’t help her eyes wondering to his scars.

“The paramedic that came to me that day was the coolest guy I’d ever met. He made it bearable. I was only being brave because I thought it might impress him.” His face softened. “He was my real
hero, and I knew I wanted to be that for someone else. Paramedics go to these scenes where the pain is raw, and the help they provide is immediate, for the patients’ health and their state of mind, you know? I wanted to be there for that... and be just like him.”

Ochako saw a fiery passion in his green eyes that almost shocked her in such a gentle face, and she really wanted to tell him how amazing and admirable he was, but she felt choked up, and instead her voice stuck in her throat.

“And done,” Izuku added proudly, standing up.

She tore her gaze away from him and looked down at her ankle, wiggling her toes experimentally. It really had stopped hurting so much now. And she had a good few hours before she had to go to work, so by then she should be almost back to normal. She sighed with relief.

“Ah! Work!” she yelped, bolting forward and making Izuku jump slightly. “I haven’t made you late have I? You must start early to be up at this time.”

“No, no, don’t worry.” He waved his hands. “I actually start my shift at seven, so I’ve got a little while yet, I just like to go for a morning jog and an early work-out.”

“A five in the morning jog to your work-out...” Ochako mused. “You mean at the gym? But... the nearest twenty-four-hour gym is ages away! You jog that far? And then go for a work-out on top of that?”

Izuku smiled, and something playful tugged at its corners. “And then I jog back too.”

“You’re crazy!” She laughed with a wild shake of her head, struggling to even comprehend doing that much before seven a.m.

He covered his face with an arm and groaned as if wounded. “I know! I’m one of those terrible morning people – I’ve always got so much energy when I get up, even though my alarm is set for five every day.”

“That’s my version of a nightmare,” she whined, knowing that she was also getting up at five every morning anyway thanks to him, then she added, “Don’t tell me you jog to work too?”

“Even I’m not that crazy,” he said with a grin.

Well, at least she knew why she was subjected to that alarm every morning, and how he was so toned and muscular, she thought, peeking up at him and feeling her cheeks heat up at his sweet, genuine smile.

The warm fluttery feeling came back with force.

Ochako squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head again a little to try and dispel it.

“I’m sorry for keeping you from your morning torture then,” she said cheekily. “You’ve got enough time to still get to the gym and come back, right? I should head back upstairs anyway.”

Ochako shifted herself on her chair and sat upright, moving her leg and placing her foot to the floor carefully, though she was pleasantly surprised to feel that it was much better. She stood up slowly, holding her arms out to steady herself like a gymnast, and beamed at Izuku who hovered beside her.

“See? Much better. Thank you so much.”
Izuku’s face bloomed a light red under his freckles and he cleared his throat loudly.

“Y-You’re welcome... but are you sure you don’t want some help back to your apartment? I’ve got time to do that much at least.”

Ochako swatted her hands in his direction playfully. “Don’t be silly! There’s an elevator down the end of the corridor, I’ll just use that instead of the stairs. It’s a short walk, I’ll be fine. You go get your work-out!” She punched the air.

He looked unconvinced but she tried hard to walk to his door without limping too much, to ease his concern.

When they were both in the corridor Ochako suddenly felt a little awkward about what to say. They were still relative strangers after all... Should she wish him a good day or something?

She was saved from having to say anything by Izuku nervously asking, “Um, s-so, would it be okay if I came and checked on you tomorrow? Just to check your ankle is healing well. You’re in number fifteen, right? The apartment above mine?”

Ochako’s blush deepened. “S-Sure. I’ve got a day off tomorrow, so I’m free all day, just knock any time..... Except at five in the morning,” she added with a laugh, knowing full well that she would be woken up by his alarm clock again then anyway.

"Great, I'll see you then, Ochako."

For some reason hearing her name in his voice made her shiver slightly.

"Yep," she squeaked, "have a- have a nice day, Izuku."

He smiled at her again as they turned in opposite directions. By the time she’d hobbled to the elevator and turned around he was still waiting by the stairs at the other end of the corridor. She waved enthusiastically with a smile that he returned shyly, before he disappeared through the doorway.

Maybe it had been worth getting up at five.
Stars / Dreams

Chapter Summary

Ochako reflects on her crazy morning while she's at work, but telling her friend Mina only brings it all vividly back and makes her want to die a little bit inside.

Chapter Notes

I'm a little bit in love with this AU, so I hope you enjoy the ride!

“Don’t laugh! It was traumatising! I didn’t even have a bra on. I think I’m going to need therapy for the rest of my life.” Ochako hung her head.

“I’m sorry Ocha, I really am,” Mina managed through raucous laughter, not sounding sorry at all.

Ochako pressed her hands to her face and groaned through her fingers. Maybe Mina wasn’t the best person to recount her embarrassing encounter to – but she’d gotten to work, and Mina’s first question was a lively ‘how was your morning?’ and it had all come tumbling out before she could stop herself.

Mina shook her head as her laughter resided and gave Ochako a conciliatory pat on the shoulder. It didn’t do much, but she appreciated the gesture.

“I’m going to clear some tables,” Ochako said morosely, trying to ignore the barely concealed snort of laughter her friend tried to pass off as a cough.

Reliving the experience by telling it as a story had been just as bad as being there; she got second-hand embarrassment from herself. That was so sad. It didn’t help that Mina found the whole thing incredibly entertaining and had only made it to the moment when she’d twisted her ankle before she couldn’t contain her laughter anymore (‘No way!’ she’d burst out, ‘That’s like something out of a cheesy romance novel Ocha’).

Some first impression she’d made on her cute down-door neighbour. But then… he did say he wanted to check up on her the next day, didn’t he? Could that have just been an excuse to see her again? Ochako slammed down on that thought hard, remembering her state of undress, her weird loitering and her partially smoothed down bed-head. He was obviously just being professional. At least she’d be able to tell him that he was right; her ankle was aching a little, but the stabbing pain had faded away just like he’d said.

She tried to focus back on her job as she got to a table and stacked cups with the remnants of cold coffee at the bottom onto an empty tray and picked up a couple of plates that were covered in crumbs of her favourite strawberry tart. The crockery was successfully, if precariously, stacked into and on top of each other and Ochako picked it up with the ease of someone who had done this many, many times. Not even a cup wobbled.
Mina was at the counter serving a couple of customers who had just walked in, smiling and chatting as she made their hot drinks. Her short, spiky hair was a shade of bright bubble-gum pink, that suited her bright and outgoing personality perfectly, and bounced when she moved. A pair of plastic horns poked out of her hair, adding to the theme of the strange outfit she wore; bright leopard print and bold colours beneath a pink apron. She looked every inch the ‘alien’ she was supposed to be, and she loved it. Mina always said that part of the appeal of working in the space themed café was that she got to dress up.

Ochako put the dirty cups and plates into the dishwasher, moving effortlessly around her friend as they both did their intuitive dance to not get in each other’s way. They’d worked so many shifts together that just a subtle tilt of the head or step was enough to know what they were going to reach for; she would duck when Mina moved her arm to the shelf to get a teapot or stepped to the right when she opened the fridge for the milk. Ochako was just closing the dishwasher door, pushing it closed despite the resistance from the amount of dirty crockery she’d just about managed to squeeze inside, when Mina tapped her head playfully, her knuckles rapping on the plastic helmet she wore and vibrating through her skull. Ochako stuck her tongue out and Mina giggled.

It might be work, and she might have had a particularly odd morning, but they always found a way to have fun.

She pointedly readjusted her helmet with a pout, making sure the visor was still attached firmly and would stay up, since it had a nasty habit of falling over her eyes when she was bending down to carefully slice off pieces of cake. Her own outfit was a mixture of pink, black and white, complete with the helmet she had a love-hate relationship with, and puffy pink space boots. While Mina had always loved her ‘alien’ theme, Ochako enjoyed the slightly less outlandish ‘astronaut’ look. It was the closest she'd ever get to being a real astronaut anyway.

The entire café was themed around space; huge plastic planets dangled from the ceiling, softly glowing fairy lights strung between them, rocket shaped chairs were pushed under the tables and the menus were boldly printed with a list of cheesy space puns for the drinks and food they served. The café itself was a very small space – they only offered a limited number of basic hot drinks, some homemade cake and a few different kinds of fillings for toasties – but it was cosy and popular. Themed cafés usually were. (‘People love a gimmick’, she remembered being told on her first day.)

As the afternoon wore on Ochako tried to stay focused on her job, she really did, but every time she had a moment where she wasn’t busy, she could only think of Izuku’s bright smile, his kindness, and the way something bubbled and flapped about in her chest when she thought of seeing him again. She would make sure she was wearing something more appropriate, and brush her hair. She’d invite him in, though her apartment was a little drab and bare… Maybe she wouldn’t invite him in. But that would be rude of her wouldn’t it? Maybe she’d knock on his door first. But she didn’t know what times he worked… Ochako jumped when she realised she’d been wiping the same spot of counter for the last few minutes, then noticed Mina smiling at her with a strange expression.

“W-What?”

“Oh, nothing.” Mina replied in a sing-song voice.

They worked in silence with each other for a short time, keeping up with the steady stream of customers that came in, while Ochako became increasingly aware of the glances her friend kept on throwing her way, a grin on her face that would flit away the moment she stared back questioningly.

After the afternoon rush was dealt with successfully, they were both putting away the washing from earlier when Mina finally narrowed her eyes teasingly and smiled widely. “You like him.”

“Your neighbour of course,” Mina said with a glint in her eye.

“He’s not my neighbour,” Ochako nearly squeaked in reply, “he- he lives under me.”

Mina whistled.

“In the room, on the floor that is below mine,” Ochako clarified, blushing intensely.

“Okay, okay,” Mina laughed, always amused by how easily flustered Ochako could get. “Tell me more about him!” she begged suddenly, putting away some teapots.

They didn’t have any customers at the counter and all the people sitting down were generating a low buzz of conversation that would hide anything embarrassing she might say about him, so Ochako relented and thought about what she could say about Izuku for a moment before she replied.

“Hm… He’s got this air about him that makes you want to trust him – like, he’s just a good person, you know? He has this really cute smile,” she admitted sheepishly, “and his eyes are so green! He was so nice to me even though if it was me, I’d have thought I was a crazy person.” She leant back against the counter with a sigh.

“He sounds super sweet, Ocha. Kind of like you’d both make a cute couple.” Mina wiggled her eyebrows and Ochako swatted at her playfully.

“No-o,” she wailed, dragging the sound out and shaking her head, “don’t say stuff like that.”

Mina giggled. “But, he asked to see you again, didn’t he?”

Ochako put away another cup for something to do with her hands, hoping it would hide her red cheeks. “Well, yeah, but… he’s a paramedic so looking after people is kind of what he does.”

Her friend hummed, unconvinced, and put a comforting arm around her shoulders. “It doesn’t matter how crazy you think you looked, I know you’re a lovely person, and I think he must have seen that too. Oh! Hey! What did his apartment look like inside?” she asked excitedly.

“His apartment? Why?”

“Don’t you think it says a lot about a person to see what kind of space they live in?”

“I guess…” Ochako muttered, thinking about her very utilitarian apartment and what that said about her. Frugal. Practical. Boring… “It was full of superhero stuff,” she finally replied.

Mina gasped loudly, making Ochako jump. “You’re made for each other. Please invite me to your wedding!”

“Stop that!” Ochako yelped, fighting off the heat in her cheeks.

She was interrupted from any more awkward questioning when another customer walked into the café, their entrance announced by a delightful jingle from the bell above the door. At the sight of the red hair and toothy grin Ochako moved to one side slightly so that she wasn’t in the way of Mina’s path to launch herself at her boyfriend. Their manager knew Mina was a livewire, and she’d been told a number of times to tone down the public displays of affection when she was at work, but the customers loved her, and she was great at what she did, so she got away with it.
“How’s my favourite Alien Queen?” A gruff voice asked tenderly into Mina’s hair after she had squealed and jumped into his arms, as Ochako knew she would.

A tiny pang of jealousy shot through her gut as she watched them. (She wished there was someone who felt that strongly about her.)

“How’s she good!” Mina laughed. “Even better now you’re here.”

“You’ve only got twenty minutes until the end of your shift, right? I’ll have a coffee and wait for you, then I’ve got a bike and a helmet with your name on it,” Eijiro lifted his girlfriend slightly and spun her around, both totally oblivious to the stares of the customers who weren’t as used to their public displays.

He put her down again and waved at Ochako. ’"Hey Ocha. Hope she’s been working hard for you today. You tell me if she starts slacking and I’ll take her place okay? I think I can squeeze into this.” He poked and prodded at Mina’s costume with a grin while she made noises of protest.

"Yeah you wish you could pull this off babe.”

The twenty minutes working alongside her friend didn’t seem to last long, and then Mina was de-aliened and ready to go. She took the motorcycle helmet from Eijiro and ran back to where Ochako was wiping down the coffee machine, reached over and pulled her into a tight hug.

"Hey, one of us is still trying to work here,” Ochako giggled.

"Seriously though, Ocha, he sounds like a really nice guy. If you like him, go for ‘im! Just make sure you introduce me, so I can assess him first-hand, okay? I’ll see you tomorrow, love you!”

And with that she whirled out of the café with her boyfriend, he gave her a hearty wave as they left, followed by the muffled sound of a motorcycle starting up and speeding away. Ochako sighed as peace descended, though she was still smiling.

Mina started early in the morning as the café opened, Ochako usually joining her in the afternoon for the lunchtime rush, and then it would just be her from early evening until she could leave at seven. The café technically closed at six, but that gave her an hour to stack all the chairs, clean up, and mop, ready for the next day. The manager occasionally poked her head in, but she usually stuck to the administrative side of things, working in her office in the back until the early evening.

Ochako felt the weight of the key in her pocket, her hand automatically reaching in and holding it just to reassure herself it was still there. It was a big responsibility to lock up the building, she didn’t doubt the importance of it and the trust the manager had placed in her, but she still wasn’t sure that this was what she had envisioned herself to be doing with her life after university. The bright smile of Izuku flashed through her memory again, and she thought of how fulfilled he looked, how proud he had been to tell her that he was a paramedic. She hadn’t mentioned what she did as a job, but would she be as proud if she did?

She pushed away her melancholic thoughts as the bell chimed above the door again and she felt her usual smile light up her face as she welcomed the newest customer.

The smile didn’t quite reach her eyes.

When the final customer had left the building Ochako flicked the latch and felt a surge of relief at the sound of the bolt snapping into place. Closed at last. She leaned her back against the door and looked up at the ceiling, enjoying the sparkle of the fairy lights against the darkness that had seeped into the café from outside. The lighting was always kept quite low, to help with the space aesthetics, so when
it was dark outside and there was only her in the whole place, she loved to take just a moment to appreciate the ‘stars’. It had been what had drawn her to the job in the first place. Sort of. She’d always loved space (obsessed with space, she was always cheerfully reminded by her mother whenever it came up) so after university she’d been looking for a job just for a source of income before she could get something more permanent and then ended up there ever since.

She’d studied physics and loved it, but unless she’d wanted to be a teacher it hadn’t really opened many doors for her. She’d had these grand dreams of working for a space program, seeing people work towards space exploration, seeking out galaxies and the workings of their universe… but the reality was her gaudy astronaut uniform and the fake fairy-light stars glowing on the ceiling.

Ochako laughed once, the sound loud in the silence. It was almost funny in its weird irony.

It paid the bills, and that was what counted ultimately. Money made the world go around, and beggars couldn’t be choosers – if she earned enough money to keep herself comfortable then she was grateful. Ochako hummed in approval with herself as she hefted the last chair onto its pile and dusted her hands off on her apron.

Then why was she still hoping that Izuku wouldn’t ask her what she did as a job when he saw her tomorrow?

When she’d finally locked the front door behind herself, everything in order for Mina to open it up in the morning, Ochako shivered against the cool night air and pulled her coat tighter around herself. Every night she wished she’d bought a car, but whenever she thought about how much money she saved using the bus she just couldn’t justify it. Her apartment building wasn’t too far away, after all, so she could sometimes save even the cheap bus fare in the summer when it was still sunny and warm when she went home.

Ochako made her way to the bus stop, already thinking about what she was going to watch on Netflix when she got back. She’d probably just whip up some pasta and cheese again for dinner. Not exactly nutritious, but it tasted good and it was quick. She looked up at the sky when she reached the stop, but instead of stars all she could see was a murky yellowish colour and the slight hint of the odd silver sparkle that was bright enough to make it through the light pollution. She sighed.

Bright lights flashed by as the bus took her on the quick journey home. A man a few rows behind her coughed harshly, a baby in front of her babbled nonsense while a lady shushed it gently (to no effect) and a young couple near the front were sucking each other’s faces (Ochako blushed and looked away). An open window nearby let in a freezing draft that trickled down her neck and she pulled her coat collar up higher with a shiver.

Finally, back in her apartment, Ochako pulled off her shoes gratefully and placed her keys in a glass bowl decorated with stars, that her parents had bought her for her birthday. She flopped down onto her couch, not even bothering to take off her coat, and unlocked her mobile phone. She’d got a few messages on Discord, a couple of Facebook notifications and a WhatsApp photo from her mom of her dad smiling. Her dad's face was scarlet, and there was a string of flame and sun emojis underneath. She snorted with laughter. They deserved a holiday, she was just sad she hadn’t been able to go with them. Her parents were always so generous with her - they would give her every penny they had if they thought it would make her happy, so they absolutely refused for her to come on holiday with them and pay her own way. If she’d have gone with them they'd have paid for her, and that was that. But she knew how expensive it was, and how little they had, and instead she had made up a white lie about not being able to get the time off work.

Ochako sent back some crying with laughter faces and some kisses.
But if she’d have gone on holiday with them, she wouldn’t have finally gotten the nerve to try and sort out the alarm. *Not that I got it to stop,* she thought ruefully with a huff. But that meant she wouldn’t have met Izuku, and been given the best (only) piggyback of her life, made a total fool of herself, and understood what it was like to have a crush… *Oh, what am I thinking? He’s way out of my league.*

If nothing else, she thought with a sigh, if she saw him again she would try and get his number, and maybe they could be friends? (She ignored her inner voice protesting she wanted more than that).

Even though she’d promised herself more early nights, especially if she was now resigned to be woken up early every morning, Ochako still ended up finally turning off her lamp at two a.m. – which she promptly regretted when a sound slammed into her eardrums and dragged her out of sleep at five.

*BEEP BEEP BEEP.*

Ochako groaned.
Photograph

Chapter Summary

Izuku is most definitely a morning person

Chapter Notes

A little later than planned, but here's chapter 3! Massive thank you to everyone that commented on the previous chapter, and has been throwing kudos my way! I'm so so happy this story is being well received (It's nearly 1am and I was so determined to get this chapter out as soon as I could, so my editing might not be as polished as usual - hopefully there's no typos(!))

The prompt for day 2 was Photograph.

BEEP BEEP BEEP

Izuku stretched his arms above his head with a groan as his joints popped and cracked. He yawned once and then flipped onto his side to turn the alarm off.

BEEP BEEP BEEP

Time for a new day.

With decisive speed Izuku flung back the covers and bounced to his feet, rubbing his face and ruffling his hair as he stifled a yawn and threw on his gym clothes. The cup of water next to his bed was a little stale from sitting there all night, but he downed it anyway and put the glass in his dishwasher for later. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, grabbed his phone and was about to pick up his keys when he paused. Yesterday had started just like this too... until he'd nearly knocked a girl out with his front door.

It still prickled at his curiosity that she'd never given a reason as to why she was outside his door in the first place. Or if she did, it was one he couldn't remember. He'd been kind of distracted by her strange appearance: pyjamas, slight bed-head and... sandals. It kind of looked like she'd just gotten out of bed, which was enough to strike him as odd, but she'd also seemed so friendly and funny and nice... and she had cute pink cheeks and such a pretty smile...

She'd been so grateful for his help, even though all he'd done was invade her personal space with a piggy-back, that he probably shouldn't have offered to a total stranger anyway, and put frozen peas on the ankle that she wouldn't have twisted in the first place if he hadn't nearly taken her out with his front door. He groaned aloud as he thought about it again, placing a weary hand over his eyes, as if he could hide away from his own embarrassment. A bag of peas. He was supposed to be a professional - he should at least have had an ice pack somewhere he could have offered her. Some paramedic she probably thought he was, with his fanboy-superhero living room and bag of frozen vegetables...
Izuku rubbed his eyes, fighting a deep sigh. He’d never considered himself ‘cool’ and it’s not like that sort of thing had ever been a priority, but there were times when he would swear he could hear Kacchan’s voice yelling ‘nerd’ loudly in his head - and he’d remember all too clearly just how uncool he was. Yesterday was one of those times. But he wasn’t even sure why he found it to be such a big deal what she thought of him...

He stood motionless for a moment, deep in thought, then suddenly burst into action. He swept back into his bedroom, grabbed a pen and his notebook and scribbled furiously, his brows furrowing in determination, until he stood back and looked at the words he’d written with satisfaction:

‘Get Ochako’s number’.

Izuku tore the page out with a dramatic motion and pinned it onto a board that hung above his desk. The message was clear amongst the other little notes he’d left for himself – (‘Buy more coffee’, ‘Call mom’, ‘Check savings account’, ‘Buy new alarm clock’) - and he felt the tension of his impulsive decision relax out of his shoulders as he looked at it there. If it was on the board, that meant he had to do it.

Writing notes to himself had become a way of tackling obstacles one at a time, even if they were as small as reminding himself what he needed to buy the next time he managed to go grocery shopping. He’d gotten through many, many notebooks. Also sprinkled amongst the notes were some scattered photos from across the years; a mixture of himself and his mom during his happy childhood, and group shots of the few friends he made at university. The board was a great source of comfort and motivation and had been invaluable when he’d moved out of his family home into student dorms; when he first found out that adulting was hard. It was probably one of the most well used presents his mom had ever gotten him, other than his alarm clock.

Izuku glanced over to his poor alarm clock with a twinge of sadness; its plastic casing was chipped, the digital screen was cracked and the volume slider was jammed at ‘max’. He knew it had been a difficult gift for her to give him, since up until then she’d always woken him for school, and he thought it was the moment she knew he’d really developed his own independence, especially since she’d tearfully sniffled that he didn’t need her anymore the moment he’d opened it... I’ll ring her later, he promised himself, suddenly very aware and full of guilt that he hadn’t spoken to her in a couple of weeks. The alarm clock really needed throwing away and replacing entirely, but it had such sentimental value that he was reluctant to let it go.

Finally Izuku snatched up his keys and locked the door behind him as he entered the corridor. He scoffed aloud at the odd sense of disappointment he felt when Ochako wasn’t there. Of course she wasn’t there.

Izuku glanced at the ceiling without thinking, as if his thoughts had driven them in the direction he knew she’d be, then he shook his head and walked away.

He couldn’t get rid of the feeling that they had just... clicked.

He knew deep down that the reason he cared what she thought of him was because he wanted to get to know her better.

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His jog to the gym was always most enjoyable on crisply cold mornings like this one, when the sun was just a hint on the horizon – a splash of muted orange – and most of the world was still sleeping. He nodded in politeness to the usual commuters scraping off ice from their cars as they faced the cold early morning just as he was, and some of them nodded back as if they acknowledged his existence...
Izuku’s distracted mind caused his foot to catch on the body of an exercise bike he attempted to
dismount and he lurched forwards off balance, letting out a yelp. Quickly he shot his hand out and
managed to catch hold of the handlebar behind him before he could topple onto the floor, breathing a
sigh of relief as he righted himself and dismounted it more successfully. The last thing he needed was
to fall and break his bad arm again.

Concentrate, Izuku, he scolded himself.

The rest of his time at the gym passed in a blur as he threw himself more energetically into his
training, putting everything else out of his mind. There was nothing but the satisfying burn of muscle,
and the frantic pumping of his heart that seemed to remind him that he was alive with every beat.

Izuku let out a long exhale as he finished his last set of bicep curls with his bad arm, using a slightly
lower weight than he did with his other. He flexed the arm out and stretched the muscle carefully,
being careful not to overdo it, and although it ached a little from the training, the feeling wasn’t pain.
The bright puckered scars running in jagged stripes down his arm caught the artificial light of the
gym strangely, like the skin was shiny. His arm had been practically rebuilt, so between all the
surgeries and his injuries the scarring was intensive. That was something he’d learned to live with. It
had taken many years until he was comfortable enough with his scars to wear short sleeved shirts
again. They were his constant reminder that one moment could change your life, and that you had to
seize every opportunity so that you could live without regrets.

No regrets…

A fully showered and only slightly aching Izuku drove into the staff carpark at the hospital with
some minutes to spare until the start of his shift. He climbed out of his car and stretched his arms high
above his head. He was ready for the day now. With one last smoothing down of his dark green
paramedics uniform, until he looked smart again, he strode purposefully into the huge, modern
building.

Noise, lights and bustle assaulted his senses as he entered, but his step didn’t even falter, having
grown so used to it. The waiting room was already full and there was a queue also forming at the
front desk. Various telephones rang, a child was crying, a couple argued loudly, and a radio sang
softly to itself almost unnoticed in the corner. Izuku navigated the hospital corridors with ease,
making his way confidently through the maze-like interior and offering a cheerful good morning to
everyone he made eye contact with. He wished Ochako had seen this side of him, rather than the
stuttering mess he’d been the day before.

The only time the paramedics needed to be inside the building itself was when entering a patient and
handing them over to the doctors, but Izuku liked to get a feel for the place before his shifts – feel the
beat. He also couldn’t help but sneakily check up on the patients that he had helped admit into the
hospital’s care. He knew that some of the doctors thought he was bizarre for being concerned about
them even after he was no longer duty-bound to care, but he couldn’t help it.
Izuku flinched as he suddenly heard his name being called out by a low voice behind him.

“Deku!”

“Oh, hey, Kacchan,” Izuku replied, pushing a smile to his face as his childhood friend strode closer, expression as severe as always. “How are y-”

“The fuck do you keep coming on my ward for?” Katsuki practically growled as he narrowed his eyes. “These aren’t your patients anymore. Why don’t you get back to your van and try to do your own job for once, instead of looking over my shoulder at mine.”

“I’m not—” he started, but Katsuki made an irritated sound and walked away before he could finish. Izuku huffed. He wasn’t sure whether he was more annoyed at Katsuki’s coarse language in a hospital, the implication that he was only checking up on patients as a comment on Katsuki’s work (he was definitely not a people person, but he was an excellent doctor, no question), or that Katsuki continued to call the ambulance a ‘van’.

When Izuku finally made it out to the ambulance he’d be spending the rest of his shift in, he slid into the passenger seat with another huff. Denki was sat in the drivers seat and picked up on his mood instantly, humming a greeting through a mouthful of food.

His partner for most of his shifts was Denki Kaminari, someone so lively and charismatic that he was a natural at getting along with virtually any patient they came across. He shook his head and his blonde hair bounced. He’d added a streak of black into the bangs recently that looked like a black lightning bolt at certain angles – it looked cool.

“Come on man, you gotta stop letting Bakugou get under your skin like this,” Denki mumbled around another mouthful of breakfast burger. He tossed over a package to Izuku and he caught it with a satisfying crinkle of paper.

“Thanks.” He opened the burger and took a hearty bite, trying not to feel jealous that Denki had only known Katsuki about a year and he was already better at communicating with him than he was, even considering they’d been best friends when they were kids. He got away with calling him by his last name, like it was a nickname, and he’d never seemed to mind like the way he did whenever Izuku used their childhood nicknames. (He pushed down the stubborn streak that suggested he only used ‘Kacchan’ as a way of getting back at him for still using ‘Deku’.)

Izuku swallowed. It was a good burger. “How’d you know it was Kacchan anyway?”

“Because he’s the only person I’ve ever seen put you into a bad mood, dude.”

“Ah, yeah, I guess you’re right there,” Izuku sighed.

“Hm… Wait!” Denki narrowed his eyes and peered across the gearbox at him.

“What?”

“There’s something else… Wait, did you- have you met someone?”


“Fucking knew it,” Denki crowed, leaning back in his seat and crumpling up his empty burger wrapper, “I can always tell this sort of stuff. I’m like a relationship god or something I swear. I knew it wasn’t like you to get that bothered by Bakugou this early in the morning, there’s someone else on
your mind, right?”

Izuku picked at the bun on his burger. “I… I don’t know. Maybe?”

“Ah, dude, I am so pleased for you! You gotta-”

But all thoughts of anything other than the job were pushed aside immediately as a call came through on their radio. A serious air descended over both boys and Izuku picked up the receiver to confirm their acknowledgement of the job they’d been given; a child with burns from a nearby private school, not life threatening, but urgent.

He wrapped up what was left of his breakfast and clipped his seat-belt in as Denki did the same and flicked on the siren.

Any case involving a young child was a Category 1, so Denki sped them out of the carpark and expertly weaved between traffic, yelling obscenities when cars refused to move over for him, despite the siren and lights. Izuku felt his pulse pounding as it always did when they went to a job, even when it was something minor. This is what he lived for.

When they finally parked at the large impressive looking private school both paramedics grabbed their bags of medical equipment and dashed towards it at a jog. A teacher met them just inside the entrance and directed them to the Science Office; a large room full of desks, littered with scatterings of papers and tall piles of science books. A girl with blonde hair tied into pigtails was sat at one of the desks, sniffling quietly, while a young woman crouched beside her, rubbing her back gently.

As Izuku and Denki approached swiftly the young woman stood tall. Her expression was clouded with worry, dark eyes shining with concern. She wore a lab coat, and her long black hair was tied up into spikes that fanned out behind her head.

“We got a call about a burn,” Denki began, addressing the young woman, while Izuku crouched down in front of the girl, introducing himself softly. “You were the caller?”

“Yes, I’m Clara’s teacher, Momo,” the woman confirmed with a nod, her voice strained. “I’m sorry – I only took my eyes off her for a second. The bunsen burners were still out from the previous class and the gas tap must not have been locked properly. I always make sure they’re locked securely, I should have double checked.”

“Hi, Clara,” Izuku said brightly, smiling warmly at the upset little girl, knowing Denki could get the information they needed from Momo while he began treating their patient. “My name’s Izuku, and this is my friend, Denki. We’re here to help, can you show me where it hurts?”

Clara hiccuped and nodded, then held out the hand she’d been cradling to her chest. Izuku gently removed the ice pack they’d been sensible in making her hold. The side of her wrist was bright red and looked extremely sore, but as Izuku examined it carefully he could already tell that it wasn’t going to scar or need surgery.

He looked back up to Momo and Denki, who were discussing the accident.

“I think that she must have been playing with the burner and accidentally knocked on the gas,” Momo said. “I’ve had a look but I’m sure that it’s only her wrist that’s been burned. I… I should have been paying more attention. That’s the problem with having to share the classrooms between the older and younger students – it means we sometimes have to keep the equipment out, and I know the kids love to mess with the bunsen burners, even though I’ve told them not to,” she fretted, wringing her hands.
“Kids'll be kids.” Denki shrugged with a small sigh, which Izuku found ironic because he knew about Denki’s youth spent spray painting walls, skateboarding around the city and being a general nuisance.

“Looks like it is just the wrist,” Izuku confirmed, placing the ice pack back onto the burned skin. “Sounds like you’ve been brave, Clara.” He turned back towards her and smiled again.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to,” Clara said in a small voice, obviously thinking she was going to be in trouble.

“We know, it’s okay, you just need to keep being brave a little bit longer while we go to the hospital, but you get to ride in the ambulance! How cool is that?”

Izu was rewarded with Clara’s small smile, and he felt a warmth inside his chest that always reminded him of just why he loved doing what he could to help people.

“Wow, you get to ride in an ambulance!” Momo gasped. She flashed her student a reassuring smile, but Izuku could see that it was a carefully crafted and extremely fragile mask.

“It doesn’t look like a bad burn, but we’ll take her to the hospital to get it checked out just in case. We’ve got some burn dressings there too, but for now…” Izuku reached a hand up to where Denki was already offering out a small white package he had pulled out of his red medical kit bag. When he ripped it open there was a square of blue gel inside and he placed it very carefully onto the patch of burned skin.

“That’ll take the sting away for a while,” Denki explained to Momo.

“Thank you so much.” She gave a weak, but genuine, smile.

“Momo,” a voice suddenly called from the entrance to the office. The same teacher who had led them through the school had her head poked around the door frame. “Clara’s mother is here.”

“Oh, good,” she breathed, but her clenched hand on her chest revealed the stress she was trying to hide. Did she think her mother was going to blame her for the accident? “Your mommy is going to come with you in the ambulance, that’ll be fun, won’t it?”

Clara nodded, her blonde pigtails flopping in front of her face as she did.

Denki and Clara walked across the room to the teacher in the entrance while Izuku gave a warm, conciliatory smile to Momo. “Don’t worry, it sounds like it was an accident.”

“There shouldn’t be an accident like that while I’m supposed to be responsible for them,” she sighed.

Izuku looked down at the desk, thinking of something to say to make her feel better. Her desk was so neat and tidy compared to the others in the room. Everything was stacked and organised looking, and there was even a framed photo-

Wait…

Izuku stared at the photograph. In it were a group of girls smiling and laughing, but one of the girls looked familiar – brown hair, brown eyes, pink cheeks and a bright, adorable smile. Ochako!

“Um…” Momo noticed his long pause.

Izuku shook his head, trying to ignore the sudden speeding up of his pulse. “S-Sorry, got lost in
thought there.”

He burned to ask about her. Here was his chance to learn something about her. They were clearly friends! But... he was here as a professional. He had a job to do. “Thank you for your call, you did the right thing. Just try to hold onto that. Accidents happen, and they happen suddenly sometimes – you just have to try to learn from them. Clara’s going to be fine and we’ll explain what happened to her mother, and I’m sure she’ll understand too.”

Momo nodded and a tension left her shoulders as she took a breath. “Thank you.”

Izuku nodded and took one last glance at the photograph as he walked away.

He would definitely see Ochako later, no matter how nervous about it he got. He thought about the smiling picture of her, and he felt something nervous and warm settle in his stomach – it was an expression he really wanted to see on her in real life, he realised with surprise.

Izuku jogged to catch up to Denki and Clara, who were both standing outside the ambulance talking to a smartly dressed woman that was holding Clara’s good hand.

He had a job to do first.
Today is the day Izuku said he'd come and check on her ankle. Ochako is trying to pretend she's not buzzing with anticipation, because it's definitely not a date. Why does she feel like she's forgetting something though? Can't be that important...

Here's a pretty long chapter to make up for the wait! I know I say I enjoy writing each chapter each time I publish them, but I really did enjoy writing this one. I could have written pages and pages of just awkward dialogue. These two emotional disasters just kill me, I love them.

As always I'm over on tumblr as Izupie so join me if you want to see me yelling about my ships or talk to me about this fic or any of my other Izuocha stuff.

Ochako yawned. Was that the third yawn in the last twenty minutes? Maybe it was the fourth? She rubbed her tired eyes again and took a huge gulp of her scalding coffee, slamming the cup back down to her desk.

A more sensible part of herself knew that if she just went to bed earlier she wouldn’t feel so tired when she was inevitably woken up at five in the morning. The stubborn part of her demanded that she should go to bed whenever she wanted to. Ochako groaned and bent over so that she rested her cheek on the cold desk. *I wonder what time Izuku goes to bed…* He seemed responsible and sensible too – she supposed he had to be, to be a paramedic – so he probably went to sleep early. She remembered how alert he’d looked the morning before, while she’d been barely functioning, and tried not to cringe again at the memory. In her defence, three hours sleep wasn’t healthy to try and keep up for long, and that had been the second night in a row. *This morning makes the third,* she realised grimly, sitting herself back up and downing the rest of her coffee.

At least she had the day off and it’s not like she had anything taxing planned, so she could just spend the rest of the day wrapped up in a blanket watching Netflix and it wouldn’t matter. Except… Izuku had said that he would come and visit her after he’d finished work, to check up on her twisted ankle (that no longer even hurt at all) and she hadn’t asked him what time that would be. He’d said he started work at seven, didn’t he? So it’s not like she was expecting him to be early. But what if he’d got a morning shift? Or a half day? Or decided to check up on her at lunch time or something?

Ochako opened her wardrobe and rummaged through her clothes while she thought. She’d never been the sort of person to worry about what she wore, or how her hair looked, or anything like that, she preferred skirts and shorts, even in the winter, just because she didn’t like too much restriction in her legs, and many of her tops were various shades of pink or plain white. She hadn’t got a fussy style, just whatever was cheap and practical. Mina was always bugging her to buy something ‘cuter’
but she didn’t see the need to spend much money on clothing – the plain stuff was always the cheapest. Tsu always said she looked cute in whatever she wore anyway.

So now she felt a little silly trying on clothes and wondering if they looked nice or not, something she never really considered when she picked an outfit. Sometimes it was just whatever she put her hand on first. She brushed her hair while she cast a critical eye at the clothes she’d laid out on her bed. It wasn’t like she was going on a date or anything; Izuku was just going to see if her ankle was better and then go back to his apartment, and unknowingly continue to wake her up at five every morning. She threw her hairbrush back onto her dresser and sighed. That was a problem she was going to have to address eventually, since she knew she couldn’t live like this forever. The smartest solution would just be to tell him that it was disturbing her mornings and she was unable to go to sleep again afterwards, so would he please just turn it down? But she already knew it would distress him to know that he had been disturbing her, and she didn’t want their first meeting to be revealed to be built on something so negative before they’d even had a chance to get to know each other and become friends.

His kind smile flashed in her memory again, and the thought that he’d be upset and guilty about it sat heavy and cold in her gut.

This was getting ridiculous – she’d never felt like this before. She’d met him once. One time. Briefly. Why was she even spending a second thought on what she would wear? Why was she so bothered about hurting his feelings and making him feel embarrassed about his alarm? What was wrong with her?

Shaking her head Ochako settled on a pink shirt and black shorts, sure Mina would be horrified at the plainness of them, and could almost imagine the kinds of tips and advice she’d be telling her she could give on how to impress a boy…

Wait…

Was that what this was? Was she trying to impress him?

Ochako put both her palms flat against her cheeks, hating the way they were heating up instantly at just the idea.

What could he possibly find interesting about her, when he went around saving lives and she poured coffees in a pretend astronaut suit?

No, she had to put that thought away firmly and remember that all this just meant that she’d have her hair brushed, be wearing regular clothes, and show him that she was a normal member of society that he could be friends with – it would be nice to know someone who lived in the building. Nothing more than that.

Ochako yawned again and glanced at the clock, feeling her shoulders sag slightly when she noticed it was only quarter-past six. She had so much of the day left. While normally that would be the only benefit of getting up at obscenely-early-o’clock, she knew she’d be left ruminating over her feelings and thoughts about Izuku all day until he knocked on her door, and that meant the day was just going to be long and tedious, unless she did something distracting.

Once she’d had a nice long shower, she felt slightly more human and had finally stopped yawning after the caffeine from her strong coffee had kicked in. Ochako glanced at herself in the mirror and smiled at her own reflection; the clothes she’d picked out were fine, her hair was freshly washed and blow dried and her body lotion made her smell like vanilla marshmallows (according to the bottle).
(She resolutely and stubbornly ignored the buzz of anticipation in the back of her mind. This was not a date. She had no reason to be excited.)

Ochako shook her head and made her way to the kitchen, ready for breakfast. Her cupboards were full of glass jars and air-tight tubs, all filled with various foods and labelled clearly; it was more cost effective to buy food in huge packets, usually the bulk giant packs that restaurants would buy, and then portion it out into tubs and jars. Porridge especially was almost a fraction of the cost she would have paid at a supermarket, and she lived on the stuff. It made a great breakfast, a hearty snack and even a warming midnight supper.

Most of the food she ate was something instant, or something that accompanied rice or noodles, just for convenience and cost mostly. It had been a long time since she’d cooked something more complex, so she brightened as she thought of a good idea for distraction; she would go and treat herself to some ingredients for a stew. She could even cook enough for two meals, if she ate half and froze the other half for another time.

Ochako bounced over to her coffee table and scribbled down the ingredients she would need in a notebook. She usually hated the amount of time it took to peel and chop all the vegetables, but today that was going to be a blessing.

Just as Ochako was considering what to do with her time before she went on her trip to the supermarket, her phone buzzed nearby, and she picked it up curiously. It was a message from Mina, but when she opened it there was only a picture of Mew from Pokémon with the words ‘Good luck! MEW got this!’ in bold letters on top of it. She spluttered a laugh, wishing she wasn’t as weak to bad puns as she was, and that Mina didn’t know and exploit this fact at every opportunity. It warmed her heart to think that her friend was obviously on her break and had been thinking about her, even though Ochako really wanted to point out there was nothing to be wished good luck for because it wasn’t like that. Instead she rolled her eyes at her phone and tapped out a reply of a flexing arm emoji and a heart. (Mina would get a kick out of that.)

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Cooking her stew was indeed as therapeutic as she had hoped. Ochako peeled and chopped and peeled and chopped. The beef was seared and ready, as per her mother’s instructions from the recipe that she had learned by heart, and the whole lot simmered and bubbled on her small stove for the rest of the afternoon while she watched a movie. In truth she’d almost completely forgotten about her visit from Izuku, so when a knock at the door came at seven, while she was giving her dinner a stir, she nearly dropped the spoon in the pot.

Ochako was about to hurry to the door when she remembered that she was still wearing her cooking apron, splattered with crusty bits of dried stew from earlier, and had her hair tied back to keep her bangs out of her face. She threw off the apron onto her kitchen counter and yanked out her hair tie, shaking her head to let her hair relax back into shape, and flew forwards, turned the latch and swung open the door. She was slightly more flustered than she had wanted to be, but a smile brightened her face before she could stop it as she caught sight of Izuku in her doorway. His green hair was just as messy as she remembered, his freckles dusted cutely across the bridge of his nose and high on his cheeks. He was still in his green paramedic’s uniform, looking professional, even if his eyes and expression looked tired – he must see and do such a lot in one day, she knew how busy the ambulances were in the city these days.

He seemed a little lost for words and Ochako became aware that she hadn’t spoken either.

“Hi-”
“Hey-”

They said at the same time.

She laughed a little while he rubbed the back of his neck. Izuku smiled and motioned with his hand that she should go first but she shook her head wildly and made an even bigger motion that he should go first instead.

“Sorry I’m kind of late, I was hoping to come over a bit earlier than this, but the last patient of the day was a tricky one,” he sighed.

“Don’t be silly, you’re not late at all.” Ochako moved aside to let him into her apartment. She decided not to mention that this was still very early in the evening for her and that she would be up for a long time later than this. (Despite the early morning wake up call she was sure to get.)

He flashed her a smile as he walked inside and took his boots off—they were bright red with a thick white sole. His gym trainers had been red too, she realised, and wondered if he particularly liked red shoes. When he stood straight again, she could see him looking around with his eyes and she became aware, with a creeping feeling of embarrassment crawling up her spine, that her apartment would look so barren and plain compared to his. He said nothing about it though, which she appreciated.

“Wow, that smells amazing,” he blurted out.

Ochako fidgeted with the hem of her shirt. “Really? Thanks, I thought I’d make something a bit more wholesome than I usually do.”

“In that big pot on the stove? Wow, I’m impressed. I usually live off everything instant, since I never know when I’ll be getting back from a shift.”

“Me too usually. Seriously, this is a total one-time limited edition rarity.”

“Well it smells good. You know,” he added conversationally, not meeting her eyes, “I, uh, I almost didn’t recognise you at the door, you look really- Oh no, it’s bubbling over! Your food’s bubbling out the pot!”

“Eh!?” Ochako squeaked in alarm as she snapped around and rushed over to the sudden sounds of bubbling and sizzling as the liquid hit the hot stove. “Oh no no no,” she muttered as she grabbed the handles and pulled the pot of stew off the heat, making it calm down instantly. She clicked the temperature dial to the ‘off’ position and let out a breath, then realised Izuku was close at her side.

“Are you okay? You didn’t burn yourself, did you?”

Ochako felt warmth bloom in her cheeks. “No, I’m okay. Can’t say the same about my stove though… Ugh, I’ll have to clean that up later.” She flicked the heat back on low and returned the pot to its original position. “I was supposed to turn it down before I answered the door and completely forgot— oops.”

“Well at least you’re not hurt,” he breathed. Then, as if he realised just how close he was, he cleared his throat a little and took a tiny step back. “Anyway, I- I just wanted to check how your ankle was doing? The way you ran to that pot makes it seem like it must be fine though?”

Ochako stirred the stew and hung her head with a dramatic groan. “I can’t believe we’ve only known each other for five minutes and you’ve already seen how much of a bad cook I am.”

“That’s not true! I could never cook something like this, so you’re way better than me. Not that that’s
very difficult to do.” He gave her a kind and genuine smile and it warmed her to her toes. “But your ankle – it’s okay now?”

“Oh, sorry, yep, never better, see?” Ochako turned to face him, lifted her foot in the air and twisted it in circles to demonstrate.

*Oh no.*

Her socks.

She’d been so preoccupied with what she was going to wear, then deciding she didn’t care what she wore, (even though she secretly did), that she hadn’t even thought about her socks. Why would she? They were on her feet. So she’d pulled out the first pair she’d put her hands on in the drawer and just yanked them on. Only now did she notice, while her foot was suspended in the air between them both, that they were white with a bright green cartoon rabbit surrounded by hearts stitched into them.

“Wait, are those… are they… *Deku* socks?” Izuku asked.

She slammed her foot to the floor and her voice tumbled out with another squeak, “O-Oh yeah! It’s not like I watch the show or anything, I mean, I did when I was a kid, but he’s kind of retro and cool again now so my mom bought me these last Christmas.”

Ironically, she remembered Izuku being embarrassed by all the superhero merchandise in his apartment, and now here she was cringing because she was wearing Deku socks. It was a cartoon she’d watched avidly as a child and typically the simple kid’s cartoon about a kind and heroic green rabbit was suddenly back in style because it was ‘retro’ – merchandise for him was everywhere now.

When she could bear to glance back up at Izuku’s face she realised he was smiling, with not even a hint of judgement. She supposed she should have expected as much; he didn’t seem like the sort of person to judge anyone by what they liked, especially since he’d filled his entire living room with superhero merchandise. She relaxed and narrowed her eyes playfully. “You recognised him pretty fast, are you a fan too?”

Izuku smiled and tilted his head (which did something very odd to the beating of her heart). “Not exactly,” he chuckled. “I used to watch Deku as a kid too, every day after school with my best friend Katsuki. When we got a bit older, he decided he was too mature to watch it with me anymore and that I was childish for liking it, even though he’d liked it too.” He shrugged with a small frown, as if the hurt was still fresh. “So, he started calling me Deku just to tease me.”

Ochako pouted. “Well that’s mean. He doesn’t sound like he was a very good friend…”

“It was- it *is* a… complicated friendship.”

“Hm, sounds like it.”

“The problem is that he still calls me Deku, even at work,” he sighed.

“You work with him and he still does that?” Her eyebrows scrunched together.

“Oh, uh, sort of. He’s a doctor, so I see him around the hospital sometimes. And he’ll call me Deku every time he sees me to tease me about it and make me feel small. Like we’re still little kids and he’s the mature one and I’m just the green rabbit.” Izuku’s eyes widened and he shook his head, waving his hands wildly. “Ah, I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to ramble about myself so much. You don’t want to hear about my silly nickname.”
“Well we are neighbours. Sort of. So it’s nice to get to know you a little better. And it’s not a silly nickname,” Ochako said defensively, her hands balling into enthusiastic fists, “Deku is the kindest most positive cartoon character ever, he’s always there for his friends, everyone trusts him, he never lies, and he always saves the day… Besides, I think it’s a cute name and, I think it suits you.”

A strangled noise came out of him in reply and Ochako turned away quickly, her cheeks blazing, before she could see his expression and regret what she’d said. She stirred the stew vigorously.

For a long moment neither of them made a sound. She wondered what he was thinking about.

A shrill ringing cut through the silence making Ochako yelp, even though she had been the one to set the timer in the first place, and she slammed her hand onto the egg timer to silence it.

“That means your food is ready, right? I should, um, I should go. But I’m really glad that your ankle is better.”

Ochako whipped around. “You should stay!”

“Wh-?”

“I have so much food,” she explained, “more than I could eat alone. And I bet you haven’t had any dinner either.” She pushed down the small voice that reminded her that she was going to freeze half of it, finding that she cared a lot less than she expected. She had the opportunity to share a mealtime with someone – that was worth not having a portion for tomorrow. She could always make herself something else just as easily.

“R-Really? Are you sure? I don’t want to eat your dinner if it leaves less for you. I don’t mind making myself something.” Surprise flashed across his expression and a dusting of pink crept onto his cheeks.

“Sure I’m sure! Please sit down and I’ll plate it up.” Ochako put her hands gently onto his shoulders, turned him towards her small table, and steered him to a chair. He put up no resistance.

His shoulders were firm and warm.

“Okay, okay,” he laughed, sliding into a seat, “thank you! Wow, I can’t remember the last time I ate a homemade meal like this.”

“I don’t know, I would save the thanks until after you’ve tried it – I’m not a very good cook.” She shrugged and laughed too, but she could barely hear it above the pounding of her heart. Why was her heart racing? So they were eating a meal together, that she had cooked, that still didn’t make it a date, right?

Nerves seemed to jangle throughout her body as she brought the bowls of fresh stew over to the table. If the beef was tough or the sauce too thin, she would eat it anyway and shrug it off, but she suddenly wished she’d taken more care now, and hoped that it would be a good enough effort that he could enjoy.

“Thank you,” he repeated as they picked up their spoons, “I work so hard I forget how hungry I get and standing there smelling your food was torture – I was hoping you couldn’t hear my stomach growling.”

“You’re welcome! Beats having leftovers I can’t eat. And don’t worry, not a single growl was heard.” Ochako paused on that for a moment, her thought process stalling with the realisation that she really needed to improve her brain to mouth filter whenever she was with Izuku because she
needed to stop coming out with stuff that made her look like she had never held a real conversation in her life.

“This tastes even better than it smells!”

When she looked back up at him his eyes were shining with pure bliss.

“I’m so glad! Sometimes it comes out a little watery, or not seasoned enough…”

“No, it really is amazing,” he breathed, “I think you underestimate yourself.”

Something warm flared in her chest, moved up to her cheeks and lit up a smile on her face. “Thank you.”

For a few minutes they ate in companionable silence. The nerves hadn’t quite left Ochako, but she was more at ease and just relieved that she’d made enough extra that she was able to invite him to stay at all. There was no stew left for her tomorrow, but she didn’t care at all anymore.

“So, if today’s your day off, what is it that you do, Ochako?” Izuku broke the silence between a spoonful of stew.

She swallowed down her own mouthful forcefully. “Oh, I…”

The one question she really didn’t want to answer, and it’s thrown right at her. She already knew that he was kind enough not to change his opinion of her, whatever job she had, but she still felt the sting of it being much less important than his successful career as a paramedic.

Ochako looked into his patient, curious green eyes and sucked in a small breath. “I’m a barista in a coffee shop actually. I don’t know if you know it, but it’s called ‘Zero Gravity’ – it’s the space themed one near the crossroads, just outside the city centre.” She carefully crafted her voice to sound casual, but her hands were tense as she spoke.

“Oh, wow, a barista! I think I’ve heard of it... I haven’t been there, but I’m sure my friend Denki has. It sounds so cool, the way the ceiling is full of stars, I bet you could look up into them and feel like you’re about to fall into the sky. I’ve always wanted to go, I’ve never been to a themed café before,” Izuku chattered excitedly.

“Okay, that’s why you’ve got to use your imagination. I love places like that, where you get to pretend that you’re somewhere else. What a cool place to work! I’ve always had a pretty big imagination, at least that’s what everyone always tells me,” he rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly, “I’d be that weird customer asking you what constellations are up there.”

“No, that’s… that’s such a nice thing to have. I forget sometimes, to find the magic in the ordinary, and enjoy the little things.” She thought of her how her dream had never really come true, in regard to her own grand plans for her future, but how happy her job did make her feel deep down and how fulfilled she often felt after a long, tiring day. She thought about laughing with Mina and looking up into the ‘stars’ on the ceiling in the dark, feeling a spark of warmth that felt a little bit like home. Maybe she really was happy, she’d just never let herself acknowledge or indulge in that feeling, because she felt like she should be aiming higher - not because she felt like that personally but because she felt like that’s how she should feel.

She’d always been like that; aiming for the stars that were always out of her reach even when she
was surrounded by them.

She should be looking for the constellations in the fairy lights…

Ochako felt her heart leap in her chest and said in a small, shy voice, “Maybe one day I’ll show you.”

“I-I’d like that.” Their eyes met briefly but they looked away quickly.

“Oh, but, maybe on one of my days off,” Ochako added with a grimace, “my uniform is pretty awful. I don’t think I want you to see me like that.”

Izuku laughed, “It can’t be that bad.”

She shook her head in reply, the grimace still pinching her face.

“Can’t be as unflattering as this,” he added, raising his arms and grabbing the spare fabric of his green shirt. He had a slight, lean frame, despite his broad chest and solid muscles, so the shirt did seem to swamp him somewhat, as if they didn’t have one that went down to his size. The slightly baggy shirt completely hid the definition of muscle she knew must be there underneath it – nobody would know just from looking at him. She tried not to let a blush colour her face as she thought of the piggyback ride he'd given her and how she'd felt them firsthand.

She coughed a little and shook her head. “Nope, sorry, my space suit still wins the cringiest uniform award.”

“Space suit?” Izuku’s eyebrows scrunched, prompting a giggle from her.

“I get to be an astronaut while I'm at work,” she said with a surprising touch of pride, “though I'd say it was the down side of working in a themed coffee shop, my friend Mina would say it's a perk.”

Izuku’s eyes gleamed. “It's like you get to cosplay every day, and get paid for it.”

“T'd never thought about it like that,” Ochako said. ”But I guess people dress up in your uniform too - in the be-”

She'd about to say 'in the bedroom' and mentally stalled.

**Dumb dumb dumb! That's so inappropriate!**

Luckily Izuku didn't seem to have caught on because he tilted his head a little waiting for her to finish. Instead Ochako cleared her throat loudly and gave an exaggerated look to the empty bowls that had been sitting in front of them for a while. "Oh, we're both finished! I should clear up." She reached over with two hands for his bowl at the same moment he tried to pass it over to her – so her hands closed over both of his instead. She could feel rough scars under one of her palms, and smooth, firm skin under the other.

Ochako snatched her hands back. “Sorry.”

Izuku gave a soft laugh and pulled his hands back too. “N-No problem.”

She looked back up, forced a smile through her racing heartbeat and hoped he wouldn’t notice her blazing cheeks, remembering her thought that she just wanted to be friends, and hearing the voice in the back of her head that it was all that she deserved of him anyway.

As she moved all the bowls and cutlery to the sink, wishing she could hide her face behind her


hands, she considered asking him about his scars, partly for a change of topic and partly out of a real curiosity. She really wanted to know the story of how he became a paramedic in the first place, because she found that she really wanted to know more about his hopes and dreams too, and what it had been like to be able to achieve them. She did remember that when they’d first met he’d mentioned being involved in an accident, and being inspired by a paramedic there. Didn’t he mention that he used to be very accident-prone? The boxes of medical paraphernalia she’d seen in his apartment made her wonder if he was a hypochondriac or something…

“Um, Ochako.”

His voice broke her out of her thoughts and made her jump at the sink. She turned back to face him with a curious tilt of her head. “Y-Yes?”

“About what you said earlier… about my nickname…”

“Mm?”

“The next time Katsuki calls me Deku I’m going to think about what you said.” Izuku locked eyes with her. “It’s going to stop being a way he can make me feel small and useless, and it’ll make me feel like the Deku that you described. So, thank you.”

Ochako blinked. She’d never been able to do something like that for anyone before; make a real impact on them. Was this how Izuku felt when he helped someone?

“That’s the spirit, Deku!” she yelled as she punched her arm in the air enthusiastically.

He seemed to stiffen at that, his eyes widening a fraction, but before she could apologise for impulsively using the nickname, he beamed at her. His nose was pink. “It sounds so different when you say it,” he whispered. He suddenly pulled his phone out of his pocket. “A-Actually, I-I really wanted to ask you if I could get your num-

A long uninterrupted string of knocking at her door cut off whatever Izuku was going to say and colour drained out of Ochako’s face as she realised the only person that kind of knocking belonged to. “Oh, no. Oh! I completely forgot.”

Izuku shoved his phone back in his pocket and shot up. “Y-You’ve got company! Don’t worry about it, I should probably get going anyway.”

The knocking continued, mostly drowning out Izuku’s words, so Ochako raced over to her door and flung it open.

“Hiya, Ocha!” Mina said brightly. She had a red hoodie on (that Ochako would say clashed with her pink hair, if she had any kind of fashion sense she could rely on) that she knew must be Eijiro’s, since it was too big on her. She had a black backpack slung over one shoulder that rattled as she bounced on her heels. “I’m a little early because I want to hear all about the visit from your cute paramedic.”

Distress locked Ochako’s voice, and Mina must have noticed her wide eyes because she continued in a loud voice, “No! Don’t tell me he didn’t show? You were the one who told me about how much of a good person he was!”

Ochako shook her head violently, panic still seizing her vocal chords, despite how much she was willing her friend to stop talking. “Oh, don’t shake your head at me, he’s the floor below you, he won’t be able to hear me through his ceiling. I’m so sorry for you, Ocha, I know you really liked him. I don’t think I’ve ever seen you like that over a boy before. Goes to show you that you can’t
trust a cute smile.”

Ochako felt like she was far too well acquainted with the feeling of desperately wanting the floor to open beneath her. Here it was again.

Completely unable to turn around to face the table she knew Izuku would still be standing at, Ochako simply accepted the hug that Mina pulled her into.

Nononononono.

“It’ll be okay, sweetie.” Mina gave her one last squeeze and walked around her into the room, while Ochako closed the door numbly.

“Oh, sorry, didn’t realise you already had company,” Mina laughed, obviously not recognising Izuku from Ochako’s descriptions of him the day before. “Hi, my name’s Mina, I work with…”

Ah, Ochako thought distantly, still turned away from them both, she’s just noticing the green hair and green eyes. And the uniform.

There was a beat of pure and utter silence.

Ochako finally did put her face in her hands.

Izuku barked one strained laugh that came out as barely more than a squeak. “I-I-I should, um, I-I’ll go. Nice to meet you, Mina,” he added as if he couldn’t help his good manners, “thank you for-thanks for the dinner, Ochako.”

She should say something. Something… Anything!

The click of her door sounded before she could lift her face out of her hands.

Mina sighed and slumped into the chair Izuku had just vacated, letting her bag slide off her shoulder and thump to the floor. “That was…”

Ochako sighed too and joined her at the table in the chair opposite. “Yep.”

“And I just…”

“Yeah.”

Mina’s face twisted into a look of pure regret and sorrow, and it almost physically hurt Ochako to see her friend with such a sad expression. “Oh, Ocha, I am so so so sorry! I can’t believe I did that… I’m such a bad friend!”

Ochako shook her head and leaned forward to grip her hands in her own, holding them tightly on the table. “You didn’t know! It’s not your fault. You didn’t know…” She hung her head and groaned. “Except now he’s never gonna talk to me again.”

Mina wailed. “I’m a terrible friend!”

“No you’re not, Mina. Don’t say that!” Ochako swept around the table and hugged her friend tightly again. “I already knew it wasn’t going to work out between us, I didn’t think we’d ever be more than friends anyway. He’s so far away from me, I’d never catch up. He wouldn’t want to be with me.” She didn’t mention that she was scared that he wouldn’t even want to be friends with her anyway. She was all kinds of a disaster.
“Don’t be silly. There’s no ‘catching up’ you have to do at all,” Mina hiccupped, “you’re Ochako Uraraka and you are an amazing person. You deserve love and a relationship with whoever you find that your heart falls for – no matter what profession they’re in. It matters who you are, not what you do. Okay?”

She wasn’t so sure, but she nodded anyway. “Okay.”

“But I really am sorry.”

Ochako pulled out of the hug and returned to her seat, wiping her face free of tears before Mina could see. “It’s okay, really. Let’s just… Let’s just focus on getting everything set up for the D and D session before the others turn up and you’re here crying over me.”

Mina took a deep breath. “Good plan.” She put her bag on the table and began pulling out everything the group would need for their weekly Dungeons and Dragons night. Ochako had forgotten all about it in her enthusiasm of her dinner with Izuku. At least she had a bit of time to compose herself before their other friends turned up.

“Oh, nearly forgot, Toru’s going to be a no-show again tonight,” Mina said while she fumbled with a handful of pens.

Ochako tried to sound normal when she answered. “Again? I swear I never get to see her anymore. But the others are still coming, right?”

“Yeah, Tsu is driving her, Ji and Yaomomo here. Apparently there was some drama in Momo’s class today at school – some kid got injured or something.”

“Really?” Ochako still felt a little bit numb, but she was hoping that would fade.

“Yeah, said she’ll tell us about it later. They’ll be here soon anyway, and- hey, what’s that?”

Ochako looked up from the papers she’d been arranging and lifted an eyebrow at Mina’s curious expression. Mina pointed to the front door. “I think something’s on your doormat.”

Ochako stretched around in her seat, letting the back dig into her ribs a little as she twisted to see. What the…

She got up and strode over to the square of white that was sitting half on her doormat, and half still under the door where it had obviously been pushed through. When she picked it up she realised it was a piece of paper folded in half. Unfolding it revealed paper with a printed Captain America shield in the bottom corner and a string of numbers with the words ‘This is my number, please text me yours ??’ written in neat handwriting underneath. Ochako laughed so long and so loudly that she heard Mina call her name in alarm.

“It’s his phone number,” she explained with a beaming smile that pinched up her pink cheeks. She was dimly aware of Mina yelling excitedly, but she could only hear the loud beating of her own heart in her ears.
Domestic

Chapter Summary

Ochako uses the number Izuku gave her.
Maybe it's finally time to drag herself out of the rut she's gotten into...

Chapter Notes

A quick update ?? What is this ??? The next few probably won't be this quick (sorry!) but I had some holiday from work this week and felt productive.

This chapter is a little different to normal, but hopefully it works??

Honestly, I am just still blown away by how well received this has all been - I am so so thankful for every comment and kudos I get - you all really keep me motivated !! I smile so much when I get an email from AO3 I swear

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As soon as she’d cleared away the snacks, said her farewells to her friends (and given Mina an extra hug) Ochako flung herself onto her sofa, and held up her phone and the piece of paper in front of her.

They’d decided not to tell the others about Izuku, or at least, she’d decided not to and had asked Mina to say quiet about him. It was far too complicated a story, with far too many complicated feelings, to get into on their Dungeons and Dragons night. But it was nearly a moot point anyway when Momo told them about a little girl in her class getting burned, calling an ambulance, and that two great paramedics turned up that calmed down the whole situation, and she didn’t know what she’d have done without them. Ochako felt heat prickle on the back of her neck while Mina threw her a pointed - totally unsubtle - look. Tsu glanced over, cocked her head and placed a fingertip to her chin, but didn’t say anything, and nobody else seemed to notice.

Regardless of who the paramedics were, Momo didn’t describe them so there was no way of knowing if it was Izuku or not, she’d clearly been very shaken up, and the group all offered their sympathy for her. She hadn’t been a qualified teacher for very long, but Ochako couldn’t believe how someone so grounded and mature was always so unsure of herself and her abilities; she always looked so anxious to be responsible for the children in her class as if she was always second-guessing her own qualification and natural affinity for teaching. A child getting injured while in her care was something Ochako knew would play on her mind for a long time. Worry had clouded her expression and her voice, even when she was smiling and explaining that the student was fine in the end and wouldn’t scar.

They’d all sighed in relief and offered Momo words of support, which did seem to brighten her eyes a little.

The rest of the night passed in a blur of dice rolling, laughing and eating snacks, which always
happened when the group got together for their Dungeons and Dragons nights. Considering Tsu was so sensible in real life she came up with the most fantastical situations.

Ochako treasured those happy times, thankful that her move into the city for university had also given her the opportunity to have a good group of friends. The others had all known each other from high school or even earlier, so Ochako was the most recent addition. Momo, Mina and herself went to the same university, while Tsu, Kyoka and Toru had finished school and gone straight into working in and around the city, but they’d all accepted her into their group as one of their own - as if she’d always belonged there. She would always be grateful to them.

But for once she was actually kind of relieved when they finally went home, as it gave her an opportunity to text Izuku.

She hoped he wasn’t disappointed that she hadn’t sent him anything straight away. She’d specifically wanted to send a message after her friends had gone, because it meant that she wouldn’t have divided attentions during their night, or any awkward questions about who she was talking to. And it gave her time to think of what she could say to him. Mina hadn’t meant to make things awkward between them, but Ochako could feel her face heat up by just thinking of what he’d overheard.

*What can I say?* She thought with dismay as she watched the cursor blink on her phone's message screen, thinking of a dozen different things she could send. Her thumbs didn’t move.

She rolled onto her back on the sofa and clutched her phone to her chest with a groan.

It was getting late now, and Ochako realised he could even be in bed already, so she wondered whether it would be better to just send him a message tomorrow instead… But if she put it off for too long she could end up with it being too awkward to send him one at all, and then they might never speak again… Ochako stopped her racing thoughts and tried to remind herself that putting off sending messages had never worked out for her in the past and that she should just do it.

She sucked in a deep breath and sat upright, crossed her legs on the sofa cushions, and let her thumbs dance across the screen.

*<Hello, it’s Ochako. Thank you for the number, here is mine.>*

She’d barely punched in the full stop before she slammed a thumb on the backspace. *Way too formal.*

*<Hi! It’s Ochako! Here’s my number! Thanks for yours! Text me anytime! Hope this doesn’t wake you up!>*

She tapped the backspace again with growing frustration. *No way. Too enthusiastic.*

*<Hi Deku, it’s Ochako :) Thanks for a really nice evening earlier>*

Her thumb stopped mid-sentence, hovering uncertainly above the screen, wondering if she should mention Mina and what she’d said. Should she should apologise? Things had gotten... awkward. Her friend had practically inadvertently admitted that she’d got something like a crush on him.

Wait... *Had* she got a crush on him?... Ochako thought of all the fluttery, happy feelings that warmed her chest whenever she was around Izuku, and the nervous beating of her heart when she thought of him. She’d been almost fixated on his opinion of her and so full of anticipation and excitement at just the thought of seeing him again.

*Oh, Gods…* It really was a crush.
Ochako fell back onto her sofa and hid her face in her hands while she let out a high-pitched squeak. She had a crush on her neighbour that lived in the room right below hers, who she’d bumped into at five in the morning because his alarm clock kept waking her up and she’d decided she’d had enough. The neighbour who jogged to work every day, saved lives and who’s smile could put butterflies in her stomach. The neighbour that had given her a piggyback, let her into his super hero themed apartment and put a bag of frozen peas on her ankle.

She had a crush on him.

But there was no way he’d have a crush on her.

She was just a girl from a small town living in the city, working as a barista in a space themed coffee shop, wearing a pretend space suit, hoping to make her parents proud one day.

Ochako let out a long sigh. She really needed to get over herself before she got hurt. The fact that he still wanted to be friends with her after what happened was a miracle, and she needed to enjoy it for what it was, even if ultimately, she had to push her own feelings down.

With renewed energy, Ochako pushed herself back up and finished her message.

<Hi Deku, it's Ochako :) Thanks for a really nice evening earlier! Sorry about Mina, she likes to Exaggerate! – hope she didn’t make you feel uncomfortable, she felt really bad, she thought she was being funny. Hopefully we’ll bump into each other sometime?? (Also, I really hope this doesn’t wake you up!)> 

She tapped the send button before she could think about it, relief singing through her bones, butterflies still churning in her stomach. Done. She really did hope that he didn’t get woken up by her message. Ochako stretched her arms up in the air and placed her phone on her coffee table, feeling somewhat emotionally drained from the last few hours, and wondered if she should try to get an early night for once too, when her phone vibrated. She hadn’t been expecting a reply, so the buzz made her jump slightly and she jolted forwards to grab her phone, nearly dropping it on the carpet in her haste. It was from Izuku.

<Hey! I’ve got your number saved now thanks. And don’t worry about it. She seems nice :) I just got shy and that’s why I ran off so fast without really saying bye - sorry!>

So they weren’t really going to address what Mina had said – that was fine. She could live perfectly well with never thinking about it again.

Another message popped up.

<And it's ok, you didn’t wake me up I’m not really feeling sleepy tonight? Keep thinking about that great stew – was a really nice evening. Hope we bump into each other too! Not literally though – otherwise I’d have to start keeping in a stock of frozen peas for twisted ankles!>

Ochako laughed aloud at her phone and felt a blush creeping up her neck. He seemed so much more confident in his texts! The butterflies in her stomach were responding accordingly, and she felt her heart quicken as she typed out a reply, her fingers skimming the screen with speed so that she could send her message without overthinking it or backing out. (Was this flirting? Was she flirting? She didn’t know, and she knew she wasn’t supposed to be after she’d just decided to be friends, but she couldn’t make herself stop.)

<Lucky for you I heard that they’re making the Frozen Pea Pack a new addition to the standard
equipment a paramedic has to carry around with them?!! You were ahead of the trend. You can say you did it first :O>

This might have seemed so tame to anyone else, but she’d never sent messages like that to anyone. Teasing. Flirting?

Unable to take the wait for a reply Ochako stood up and began pacing around her apartment, gripping her phone tightly as if she might miss the vibration. Did he think that was too far? She should have just replied with a laughing emoji or something generic like that. The phone finally buzzed, and she unlocked it immediately, feeling a rush of affection and laughter at the small reply.

<Frozen Pea Hipster ?>

Was all it said.

<Frozen Pea Hipster>

She replied simply, smiling fondly at her screen. There was a little bit of a wait before the next message buzzed.

<I still can’t believe I didn’t have a single icepack in my apartment, that’s really not like me?!>

<I’m tellin ya, frozen peas are the future.>

<Well if it got rolled out then everyone would need to know the story about how it became a medical discovery...?>

<Nooooo! I’d make you swear never to tell a soul about my pyjamas and sandals! You wouldn’t tell the whole medical field about the most embarrassing moments of my life would you?? ;n;>

<No no! I was only joking!! Actually they probably wouldn’t let me back in an ambulance if they knew I’d nearly knocked out a sleepwalker with my front door – your secret is safe with me!>

Ochako paused at that and finally sank back down on her sofa. So, he thought she’d been sleepwalking... That must be the explanation he’d come up with for her appearance outside his door that early in the morning, looking like she’d just got out of bed. It made sense in a way, though she wondered if anyone who had been sleepwalking had ever successfully made it down a whole flight of stairs in an apartment building and still been asleep.

Her phone buzzed again.

<Still sorry about your ankle!>

Should she go along with it? Or was this her chance to correct him and get the alarm sorted out? Over text it wouldn’t be quite so bad, right? Maybe he’d take it better, and she wouldn’t have to try and function on such an extreme lack of sleep all the time. But she knew he’d be devastated about it – he was still apologising for her ankle. He seemed like the type of person to take blame and guilt straight onto his own shoulders, whether it made sense to or not.

<Lol no probs! Seriously, it’s a-ok ^^ don’t be sorry>

<Well I know a really good sleep therapist if you want her number? Could help with the sleepwalking ?>
It’s fine! I’m fine! Not a problem! But talking about sleep made me look at the time and shouldn’t you be doing that right now? You get up super early right? Go to sleep! >:( You’ve got work in the morning!

But I’m still full on good stew….

Ochako pressed send after each statement to make the messages stand out more, her heartbeat increasing with each message.

Here’s a deal

We can go get the ingredients next time we’ve got an evening off together and I can make it again for us?

But only if you go to bed and get some rest

He replied almost instantly.

Wow really?? Maybe we can cook it together and you can show me how you make it?? It would keep us eating something healthy once in a while??

Ochako’s pulse was racing and she didn’t really know what to do with herself. She got up and paced again as she reread his message, her smile almost hurting her cheeks. He wanted to spend more time with her?

I’d love to!!! Now sleeeeeep

Ok ok, goodnight Ochako x

She placed her phone on the kitchen counter and flapped her hands excitedly, a high-pitched squeak escaping her throat while she did, as if she had no idea how to express the warm and fuzzy feelings spreading through her body. The butterflies in her stomach had long since migrated to her chest. Did he mean for there to be a kiss at the end of his message? People put kisses at the end of their messages all the time, she reminded herself, it’s not like it meant anything. It was like an end to the conversation, she was sure. Like an ‘x’ shaped full stop. It didn’t mean anything more than that.

Did it?

It’s not like it was an actual kiss.

She only ever really texted her parents and her friends and they used kisses all the time in their conversations. She needed to calm down. He was just so much more confident through written words that it had really thrown her off. She could still hear his voice in her head while she read his messages, but it was almost as if that voice was much bolder than the stuttering and awkwardness that he portrayed in real life. Maybe that was the kind of self-assurance he used while he was at work, a sort of natural confidence that he held deep inside himself that came out when there were no social cues to contend with.

With a little start Ochako suddenly realised she hadn’t replied yet, so she grabbed the phone and quickly typed out a small message, pressed send, slammed the phone back to the counter and covered her face with her hands.

Goodnight Deku x

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Ochako woke to the sound of a song softly breaking through her sleep. She tapped her phone screen lightly, turning off her own alarm, and peeked at the display that read ‘4:30’. Despite the early hour Ochako was too excited to feel tired and threw her off her quilt with more energy than she’d ever had this early in her life.

She’d gone to bed herself just after finishing her conversation with Izuku, already deciding she was going to get up even earlier than him and surprise him by being already at the gym when he got there. She’d been intending on taking the gym back up anyway at some point, and she was already up at five every morning anyway, so she was going to meet him there this time and ask if she could tag along with him during the week. She’d only have to suffer a four-thirty get up this once, she reasoned, and she might as well start doing something productive with her early mornings. It did mean she would finally have to get more disciplined with herself on going to bed though, but figured it would be easier if she had Izuku to use as a good example. (Or be a good example for, she thought ironically, since she was the one telling him to go to sleep the night before).

Her old gym kit bag was stuffed down the back of her wardrobe, but she managed to yank it out and shake it back into something resembling its original shape. She was rapidly running out of time if she wanted to beat Izuku there, and she still had something else to do first. Ochako shoved some shower bits and pieces in the bag and quickly pulled on her old workout clothes, thankful that they still fit and that she had planned ahead and kept them, knowing she would one day go back to the gym. Her bed could be made when she got back.

Despite her surprising amount of energy; equal parts excitement and having had a decent night of sleep, Ochako could feel her eyes stinging, and rubbed them with her palms as she shuffled into her kitchen. She grabbed some bread from her cupboard, realising she’d have to get a new loaf out of her freezer again soon, and laid four slices out over two pieces of tin foil. She often made sandwiches for herself that she could take to work, so that she didn’t have to spend as much money on convenience foods and overpriced sandwiches from the city centre, so today she was going to make him one at the same time. There was something very domestic about making sandwiches for them both. Not exactly nutritious, she thought with a good-natured huff, buttering white bread and laying out slices of cheese in it, but satisfying and quick. He could even eat it inside the ambulance between patients. She hoped he liked cheese.

Ochako wrapped the sandwiches in their foil and stuffed his inside her kit bag, while hers went into the fridge to take to work later. She knew she’d be suffering by the end of the day by going to the gym before her shift, but she’d build up her strength and it would get easier every day.

It was funny how just a couple of conversations with Izuku had prompted her life-changing epiphany. But she felt motivated to get herself out of the stagnation she’d been floating in with her life ever since she finished university and get out there and do something. She didn’t have to change her life, but just… do more with it. Let herself enjoy it.

Find constellations in fairy lights.

Ochako ran into her bedroom and quickly ran a brush through her hair before pulling it back into a small rough ponytail, then dashed out of her apartment.

She smiled in determination as she jogged down the steps of the apartment building, checking her watch. His alarm would be going off now. She couldn’t wait to see his expression when she was already there waiting for him.

Ochako pushed out of the door to the apartment building and gasped at the early morning chill. Frost glittered across the city and made it look like something out of a dream. She pulled the zip on her jacket up around her chin and put her iPod headphones in her ears securely – knowing she’d need to
jog fast if she wanted to get there first now. Her heart galloped in her chest and she let out a little mischievous laugh that billowed out into the frozen air in front of her. She felt so alive!

Her trainers thumping against the concrete was a steady beat as she jogged, falling back into the rhythm of the movement she used to do so often. There were barely any cars on the road, though she was surprised to see just how many delivery vans and lorries took advantage of the lack of traffic this early in the morning. Her eyes were still stinging, even more so in the cold air, and she was beginning to feel her limbs tire already. They’d warm up if she kept going, she reasoned, increasing her pace and turning up the volume of her music to keep her energised. She just needed to go a little faster or he’d catch her up before she even got there.

Ochako felt herself smile widely when one of her favourite songs came on and she tapped the volume up further, rubbing her stinging eyes with her hands as she hopped down the curb into the road. She had to get there fast! He was going to be so surpr

Chapter End Notes

?? Ochako ??
Chapter Summary

Izuku is faced with his worst nightmare as a paramedic - the patient is someone he cares about.

Chapter Notes

Wow, this was one heck of a chapter to write. So many emotions. I felt like, physically drained after writing most of this.
I ended up having to split this chapter into two, so the whole story has been extended to 10 - which is a nicer number to end on than 9 anyway, right?

There were a lot of cameos this chapter....

Thank you to everyone again for your support, I am so happy to be sharing this project (of blood sweat and tears) with you all, and I can't describe how pleased I am that it's been so well received.

As always, join me at my Tumblr- Izupie ☆

Izuku dashed into his kitchen, tugged down the hem of his shirt and gulped down the remainder of last night’s cup of water, shuddering a little at the familiar stale taste. His alarm had woken him up, but he’d been so tired that he’d switched it off instead of snoozing it and then fallen back to sleep before he’d made it out of bed. He was only twenty minutes behind schedule, but his morning routine relied on him fitting as much in as he could with the time he had. He’d just have to jog to the gym a little faster.

He shook his head as he tried to tie the laces up on his trainers but fumbled with the knot in his haste and had to start again. He really shouldn’t have stayed up so late texting with Ochako… But just the memory of their exchanges brought a smile to his face as he swept out of his apartment and locked the door behind him. He had been so nervous about putting his number under her door – determined to do it even though he’d missed the opportunity when they were face to face – and then spent the next few hours trying not to constantly glance at his phone. He’d assumed that maybe she was too embarrassed about what her friend had said and didn’t want anything to do with him anymore. Or she’d been offended by how fast he’d taken off from her apartment.

The girl with pink hair, that had introduced herself as Mina, let slip that Ochako thought he was a ‘good person’, and that had made him so happy in a way he didn’t fully understand. He had been told he was a good person many times by his patients, but it had never produced that kind of reaction from him before. Did he... like her? Did she like him?

He tried not to let his mind wander back to last night, but he couldn’t stop thinking about it. He had a bad habit of letting thoughts bounce around his head too much, so he’d been unable to sleep, even after he’d stopped texting Ochako with his promise of going to bed. His mind had been buzzing with
the strange turn of events over the last couple of days.

In the corridor Izuku considered taking the lift down to the bottom floor, but he could take the stairs just as fast; he could go down them two at a time, even with his fairly short legs.

By the time he shoved open the building’s front doors into the frozen air he was already hot from his jog down the stairs, so the chill hit him with force and made him shiver. He was only wearing a thin jacket, but he knew his fast jog would warm him up quickly. Izuku took a deep breath in and out, watched it swirl away, then set off.

He went over the messages he’d sent her last night in his mind while he jogged, even though he didn’t really want to – he was worried that he had come across too forward. It was always difficult to read tone through texts, so he’d tried hard to keep it light and playful, even though he was agonising over the phrasing of each message before he sent it.

Izuku spent a lot of his free time blogging about the movies he watched, participating in forum discussions, and even writing his own fanfiction, but typing messages to the girl who lived upstairs had made him so nervous that he’d been wiping sweaty hands on his sleeping shorts between texts.

The effect she had on him was so strange, he couldn’t explain it. He could calm people down when they’d been in accident, he could bandage bleeding wounds, pop a joint back into its socket, chat to lonely old people, make a worried child smile, but he blushed and stuttered around her like he’d never spoken to a girl before in his life. Which, admittedly, he’d not spoken to many girls. But even then, he could speak to them without feeling highly conscious of not only everything he did, but hyper aware of everything she did too. The way her hair bobbed when she made motions with her head was so cute, her animated hand movements while she spoke made him smile and her cheeks (that were always pink anyway) would bloom even brighter sometimes when they spoke. She had such pretty, kind, big brown eyes. When she looked at him, he just felt good somehow, like she was seeing him in a way nobody else ever had…

Izuku ran a hand through his messy hair, his heartbeat racing not just from the jog.

Maybe I… Maybe I do want to be more than just friends with her…? Maybe ‘friends’ just won’t be enough for me…

He blinked as he realised it.

The warm feelings and the butterflies in his stomach when he spent time with her, especially when they had their almost-a-date last night was because… Oh.

No wonder he’d impulsively asked her to spend more time with him.

At least the best thing about texting was that he couldn’t stutter. But it was easy to send something and regret it – which is why he also couldn’t stop thinking about that ridiculous text kiss he’d sent her.

Izuku could feel heat creeping up his neck and into his cheeks as he remembered his horror at seeing the text send with a kiss. He hadn’t meant to type it, but he’d been sleepy and happy and it just kind of happened. As soon as he’d tapped the send button, he’d immediately noticed his mistake. He threw his phone away from himself and shoved his pillow over his head, burying himself under his bed quilt as if he could escape what he’d done. But it was too late.

When his phone buzzed again he’d spent a few minutes putting off the inevitable, until he couldn’t take it anymore and rummaged on the floor for wherever he’d flung it. She’d replied with a kiss
Izuku smiled widely into the fresh early morning air, nodding his head politely at a passing dog walker who shuffled along, bundled up in a thick winter coat.

He was keeping up a good pace, so it wouldn’t take him long to get to the gym at the rate he was going – he’d be able to make up the time he lost soon. Izuku stopped at the side of a road, jogging on the spot to stay warm, as a few delivery vans sped past. There were many businesses and stores in the city that relied on the early deliveries they provided, but they usually just interrupted the momentum on his jogs. He checked his watch again and waited until there was a big enough gap to cross, leaping over the pool of ice that always formed in the gutters of the roads. There was something beautiful about all the ice and frost that glittered and shined before the sun rose, but he’d been to so many accident scenes where someone had slipped on ice that he knew first-hand how dangerous the winter beauty could be.

He only needed to go around the corner, cross the road, and he’d be there. He’d made great ti-

Izuku slowed slightly as he rounded the corner and saw an ambulance across the road ahead of him. The crouched forms of two paramedics were easily identifiable by their bright green coats, nearly shining in the gloom. He could just about make out a lady in a purple tracksuit that was stood off to one side, clutching a fluffy dog to her chest.

His eyebrows pulled together sharply, and he pushed forwards with speed.

As he approached the scene he recognised the two paramedics crouching over the patient on the floor; Shino’s perfectly sculptured burgundy bob and Ryuko’s bright blonde ponytail gave them away instantly.

His boots thumped on the concrete as he got closer, which must have alerted them to his swift approach because Shino spoke over her shoulder in a voice full of authority, “Sorry, but can you please keep the area clear, this is an accident scene.”

“I-” he started.

Ryuko looked up sharply. “Sir, you’re going to have to- oh! Izuku!” Her blue eyes widened.

“What’s happened?”

Shino gave him a quick nod, but her attention remained focused on the patient, who was still hidden from Izuku’s line of sight. “We’re still assessing, but looks like head trauma. Can you hear me?” she added, raising her volume. “We need to immobilise your neck so that your spine stays still, okay?”

The patient didn’t reply.

Izuku knew he should stay a respectful distance away, so that he didn’t get in their way while they worked, especially since he didn’t have his uniform on, but he was physically unable to stop himself from moving forwards and seeing if there was something that he could do.

“Can I help with- … Oh… no… no, no, no… It can’t be-” he croaked.

Ryuko gave him a questioning glance at him but continued to help Shino with the equipment they would need, both working with care and speed.

Izuku’s whole body ran cold.
No.

No no no.

It felt like the ground had opened beneath his feet, leaving his stomach and heart flipping over as he plunged down and down and down. He had never frozen at an accident scene before, but it felt like every limb had locked in place. His throat seemed to constrict, and he took in a deep sharp breath, feeling like his chest was too tight.

“Ochako,” he whispered hoarsely.

She was lying in the frozen gutter of the road, eyes closed, with a wet scarlet patch of blood in her hairline. A drop trickled down her face, like a nightmarish red tear. She was so pale; there was no pink in her cheeks, and her lips were almost blue. Izuku didn’t notice himself get to her side but suddenly he was there, kneeling beside her. He thought he heard a protest from Ryuko and Shino, but his ears seemed to be blocking out sound, and he ignored them as he reached for her hand.

“Ochako- Ochako!” He squeezed tightly and felt a rush of relief as her eyelids fluttered slightly in response.

He felt a hand lay heavily on his shoulder and Izuku remembered the paramedics, and that they had a job to do. His anguished face looked over to them in turn and Shino gave him a sympathetic but hard smile. “Izuku, I can see this is someone you know, but please, you need to give us some space. You’re not in uniform right now, let us help her.”

“Is Ochako her name?” Ryuko asked gently.

Izuku nodded wordlessly.

“We’ll take care of her, Izuku, just give us some space, okay?” Ryuko fitted an oxygen mask over Ochako’s nose and mouth, as Izuku stood back up, while Shino moved a red head brace over and fixed it securely to either side of her head, so that she wouldn’t be able to move and agitate any neck or spinal injuries she may have sustained. They both periodically called her name and explained what was happening, even though her eyes remained closed. It made him feel sick to see her like that. Izuku’s fingers twitched with the desire to join and help them in some way, but both ladies had been paramedics far longer than he had – he had to trust them.

Belatedly he noticed a fluffy coat laid out over Ochako’s body and glanced behind him to where the woman in the tracksuit was standing with her dog. Her face was lined with worry and she petted the fluffy dog in her arms repeatedly. Izuku cast an agonised look at Ochako, but the two paramedics were taking her blood pressure and carefully but urgently checking her body for any hidden injuries, so he made his way the short distance to the lady at the edge of the scene. She was tall, with blonde hair tied up at the back, except for long wavy bangs that framed her face, and her purple tracksuit was both impeccably clean and bore the golden snake motif of an expensive brand. Large sunglasses sat on top her head, which was strange considering the darkness of the early morning.

“Excuse me, but… did you see what happened?” Izuku managed to croak out, feeling tears burning in his eyes and closing his throat.

He had to believe she was going to be okay. But he needed to know what happened.

The lady nodded, her golden eyes full of sympathy. “Mm-hm, I was walking my darling Izako, and this girl goes running across the road without looking. She was lucky the van driver saw her last minute and swerved, just at the same time she must have noticed him and jumped out of the way.”
She sighed and petted her fluffy dog on the head. “Poor girl missed the van but jumped straight onto the ice and fell down hard. I think she hit her head on the curb because she didn’t get back up. I didn’t know what to do so I covered her in my coat and called an ambulance.”

Izuku felt his heart sink. What was Ochako doing running across the road just after five in the morning? “Thank you,” he replied sincerely, “you’ve been a big help.”

The lady was about to say something more but caught sight of something behind Izuku that made her shake her head and pull down her sunglasses. When he turned around there were three men crouched on one knee, flashes coming from their huge cameras. She gave Izuku a thin smile at his puzzled expression. “I like to walk Izako this early to avoid them, but they always find me somehow. I better go and reassure them I’ve not been involved in any way.” She waved a hand of expensive looking nails. “Hm, maybe they’ll spin me into some kind of hero,” her voice wasn’t without a note of excitement at the prospect, “but I’ll try to make sure that they don’t get any more pictures of the poor girl. She can keep the coat.” With that she put her dog down, gave a look to Ochako as she passed, though with her large sunglasses on it was impossible to tell her expression, and made her way gracefully over to the photographers.

“Izuku!” Ryuko yelled.

Izuku dashed back to the scene; Shino was trying to hold Ochako’s chest down while Ryuko swatted at her swaying hand that was trying to remove the oxygen mask. Ochako’s eyes fluttered open and she was murmuring incoherently into the mask, her breath fogging up the plastic. Her eyes widened when she saw Izuku practically throw himself to his knees beside her and her mumuring increased in urgency.

Shino struggled to keep her lying flat. “I tried putting a dressing on her head and she started waking up - but her concussion is making her confused. You need to stay still for us Ochako! We’re going to take you to the hospital – you’ve been in an accident!”

Izuku grabbed hold of the hand that Ochako was using to paw at her mask, and gently pulled it away from her face. He thought he could feel his heart breaking at the stricken and panicked expression on her face. Her brown eyes were wide with fear, but unfocused. Blood continued to trickle from her hairline.

Izuku placed his hand against her cheek, regardless of the blood. “Ochako, it’s okay. You’ve got a concussion, but you’re going to be okay… I promise.”

Shino shot him a look; her brown eyes fierce and narrow. They should never, ever promise a patient that. No matter who they were or what circumstances they were in. But the strong, deep voice of his mentor had given him that same promise many years ago, and he’d kept it – so Izuku was going to do the same now.

Ochako shook her head in frustration, her eyes fluttering closed as she struggled to remain conscious. She reached up to her mask again and Izuku finally pulled it down from her mouth a little, despite the stern looks from both paramedics.

Ochako’s voice was halting and weak, “I need to… tell you about… the alarm.”

“Alarm?” he echoed, “What alarm, Ochako?”

“The alarm… I was supposed to tell you… about it.”

Izuku tilted his head a little, a frown pinching down the corners of his mouth - she must be very
confused, he needed to replace the oxygen mask and get her off to hospital. He reached over but Ochako’s eyes suddenly snapped open and focused brightly on him. “Sandwich,” she said clearly, “for you… in my… bag.” She faltered again and her eyelids softly closed.

“Okay it’s time to go,” Ryuko snapped, pulling up the mask while Izuku hesitated. Her bag?

A small look around had him finally notice the sports bag on the ground nearby, so he grabbed it.

Izuku hadn’t even noticed they’d put her on a stretcher while he’d been talking with the lady, but he helped the paramedics with putting Ochako into the back of the ambulance and made moves to get in too. They weren’t leaving him here. Shino gave him a curt nod before she jumped into the driver’s seat while Ryuko stayed with him and Ochako in the back. The siren blared out as they pulled away from the accident scene and Izuku squeezed Ochako’s hand tightly, while Ryuko applied a dressing to the wound on her head, though it had already stopped bleeding. He had to hope that it was just a concussion.

The ride to the hospital was blessedly short, though it still felt like too long. Ryuko didn’t try to talk to him during the ride, which he was thankful for, because he knew that if he opened his mouth to speak, he would probably just burst into tears.

He had to let go of her hand when they entered the hospital and Ochako was transferred onto a hospital bed, but he hovered close by as Shino and Ryuko recounted their patient’s injuries and vital information to Katsuki, who was stood next to her bed prising open her eyelids with his fingers to check her eyes.

“Concussion… No obvious fractures… Fell on ice… BP low…” Shino’s voice seemed far away and Izuku only half paid attention as he wiped sweat from his forehead, keeping his focus on Ochako - who would look like she was just sleeping peacefully if it wasn’t for the dressing on her head, the blood on her cheek and the ghostly pallor to her skin. He glanced down at the drying red blood on the hand he’d just used to wipe his face, remembering that he’d cradled Ochako’s bloody cheek earlier. He probably looked like such a mess now. Katsuki glared back at him with a scowl, obviously just noticing his presence and odd appearance.

“Make yourself fucking useful Deku, take this.” Katsuki shoved the lady’s fluffy coat at him. “And get out of my work space. You’re not even in uniform.”

Izuku gripped the coat tightly and clenched his teeth.

“Come on Izuku, let’s get a cup of coffee,” Shino said softly, leading him away with a motherly arm around his shoulders.

“And get you cleaned up,” Ryuko added.

He ducked under Shino’s arm and strode back to Katsuki, who looked up and took a tiny half step back in surprise. His scowl deepened.

“I swear Kacchan, if you don’t take care of her because she’s my friend, I’ll…”

“You’ll what, Deku?” he hissed.

Izuku inhaled sharply, but this wasn’t the time. His gaze flicked over to Ochako, lying still as the nurses attached an IV to her, and he let the breath go.

Shino and Ryuko both grabbed at one of Izuku’s arms each, their tight grip leaving no room for escape this time, and he saw Ryuko throw a venomous look over shoulder at Katsuki, just as he
turned back to his patient and the two nurses at the bedside.

As soon as they were sat in the busy, noisy waiting room Shino went straight to the vending machine to get him a coffee.

Ryuko tightened her ponytail. “She’ll be going for some tests now,” she said softly, “but I think we can be quietly hopeful, Izuku. The open wound on her head was small, you know how head injuries just like to bleed a lot – it wasn’t as bad as it looked. The way she’d fallen makes it look like her shoulder might have taken the impact before her head did. Can’t be sure there’s no internal fractures until the x-rays come back, but that might have softened the blow.”

Shino returned just as Ryuko finished talking, adding her agreement, and handed him a small plastic cup of steaming coffee.

Izuku nodded and smiled at them, grateful for both of their support and professionalism. They were great paramedics. Which only made the guilt and shame he’d started to feel bubble up more intensely.

“I didn’t smile at her,” Izuku said with a pained sigh. The two ladies blinked at him and he continued, staring into his coffee cup, “Toshinori used to tell me off for that all the time when I first started my medical training. I would get so caught up in the accident and the treatment and trying my hardest to do the best thing for the patient that I’d forget to smile.”

Ryuko laughed, “Figures Toshi’d tell you off for something like that.”

“But he was right. Someone in an accident doesn’t want you reciting your medical training under your breath while you help them, or- or looking like you’re going to burst into tears any moment,” he added bitterly, “they want to know they’re going to be okay and that you’ve got it all under control. He always said that a smile says, ‘don’t worry, I am here’. Argh, he would have been so disappointed with me just now!” Izuku groaned and ran his hands agitatedly through his messy hair.

“As soon as Ochako wakes up I’m going to give her the biggest smile I’ve got.”

“That’s the spirit,” Shino encouraged kindly, “honestly Izuku, you’re one of the best paramedics I’ve ever met – you’ve got bags of potential. You’ve got such a way with people. You’re a good person. I’ve always thought that was your biggest strength.”

“You care,” Ryuko added with a nod.

Their words made Izuku feel a little bit better. “Thank you both. Really. From me and from Ochako – thank you for everything.”

“Just doing our jobs,” Ryuko said.

Shino stood up, stretched and winked at him. “What she means is, ‘you’re welcome’. But speaking about jobs, we really need to get back to ours. Will you be okay?”

Izuku nodded and waved his hands. “I’ll be fine. Don’t worry about me!”

“Alright, well we hope your girlfriend gets better soon, Izuku.” Shino smiled as she walked away and Ryuko ruffled his hair on her way past. A blush crept into his cheeks as he couldn’t quite find the words to deny their assumption.

Izuku sipped at his coffee, though it was still a little too hot and kept burning his lips. The typical bustle and noise of the waiting room, even this early in the morning, continued around him while he sat and waited for news of Ochako. He wondered if Katsuki would even come to him when they
were finished with the tests... He’d probably just let him sit there all day. Although, he’d have to leave eventually, since he still had a job to do too. Izuku checked his watch, hoping they’d be able to give him some kind of news before his shift started.

Something next to his foot caught his attention, and he realised it was Ochako’s bag that he’d picked up and took with them in the ambulance. Shino or Ryuko must have put it there when they’d escorted him to the waiting room.

He scrunched his eyebrows together and tilted his head a little as he recalled her saying something about her bag before, when he’d pulled down her mask… she’d said there was a sandwich for him, hadn’t she? Izuku wondered if it would be immoral to look inside, especially since she’d seemed very confused and concussed and probably had no idea what she was saying. But she had looked at him very clearly in that moment…

Making a decision and pushing away all of his reticence at looking in Ochako’s bag, Izuku pulled the zipper sharply. A glint of foil caught his eye and he lifted out a squishy square shape with the word ‘Izuku’ written on it in permanent marker pen. Oh... She’d made me a sandwich. For some reason, that was what finally released the fragile grip he’d got on his emotions, and Izuku let his tears flow freely, sniffing loudly and rubbing at his face. She had the kindest, biggest heart of anyone he’d ever met. He desperately wanted to know more about her; good, bad, happy or sad.

She just had to get better first.

No more dancing around his feelings anymore – he was going to ask her on a date. Maybe she would say no, but it was something he was willing to be brave about.

Izuku had regained his composure, eaten his sandwich, washed off the blood in the bathroom, and was on his third cup of coffee by the time Katsuki finally reappeared. There wasn’t long until his shift started, but he’d already messaged Denki and asked him to bring his spare uniform with him that he could change into, so he was just considering leaving and making his way over to the paramedic hub when his old friend stalked over.

Izuku leaped to his feet. “What happened? Is she okay?”

“Tch. Of course she’s okay. She was under my care wasn’t she?”

Izuku’s expression darkened. “That’s why I was asking.”

“You know what, Deku? Fuck you. I am sick of you always checking up on my patients! You second-guess me all the time and you think I’d purposely not treat someone properly because they’re something to do with you? You can’t help yourself! You think I’m not a competent doctor, just like he did!”

Izuku recoiled and hissed, “What?”

Katsuki gripped his hands tightly by his sides, voice exploding, “You walk around the ward double checking my patients just like Toshinori did, don’t even think about denying it!”

“I- No- Kacchan, I don’t- I check in on the patients I helped bring to the hospital, because I care about them! Why would you think I’m doing it because I don’t think you’re a good doctor?”

“Because you were his favourite, you were always his favourite – but it was supposed to be me! Fuck!” Katsuki’s voice carried loudly through the now silent waiting room.

Izuku blinked, too stunned for words.
Katuski continued just as loudly, “I was the one with perfect grades. I always wanted to be a doctor – it was my dream. You… You were just little Deku who wanted to be in the police, but would never make it with your mediocre grades and scrawny body. I looked at you and it made me feel better about myself because at least I was going places, at least I would be successful. But then you had your accident and you kept on telling me you were going to be a paramedic and Toshinori helped you to achieve it! He helped you! He had the best medical mind in the city, and he mentored you.”

Izuku nearly choked. “Kacchan I nearly died in that accident! Without Toshinori helping me at that crash I would be dead. He was my inspiration, I didn’t just decide it on a whim. He used to tell me he saw himself in me because he had a change of career just like I did, because of someone who inspired him too. He could have been a doctor, no problem, but he wanted to be out there helping the people who needed it. Just like I wanted to- like I want to! I’m sorry you see me as a little green rabbit that only exists to feel better about yourself, but that’s your problem, not mine. Someone made me realise that Deku was a hero, and I am too.”

Katsuki’s eyebrows shot up as his red eyes widened.

Izuku shook his head. “You looked at me and saw something pathetic that would make you feel better, but when I looked at you, I saw something to aspire to. You were always so brave and confident and smart, Kacchan! You’ve got a temper, and you’re terrible with people, but you’re one of the best doctors in this hospital! I’ve always told everyone that you’re an amazing doctor.” He took a deep breath. “Did you know that Toshinori stuck up for you every time a patient complained about your attitude. And you think he was doubting you?! He told me how talented you were, but that he feared you’d end up like the Director, he was keeping an eye on you to try and help you!”

Izuku’s fists were balled up in front of him as he spoke, compassion and a desperation to reach Katsuki with this truth filling every word.

Finally, doubt filled Katsuki’s expression and he stood speechless.

“What is going on here?” The high-pitched croak of the Chief Nurse snapped both boys back reality. The entire waiting room was staring at them. Izuku felt his ears heat up in shame and even Katsuki looked away with a scoff and folded his arms.

“S-Sorry Nurse Shuzenji,” Izuku said meekly.

“I come down here because someone tells me there’s a ruckus going on in the waiting room, and what do I find? Two of our best members of staff yelling at each other like school children in the playground.” Her tone was stern, and she had the hand that wasn’t holding onto her walking stick firmly planted on her hip. Chiyo Shuzenji was a small lady, hunched over and probably well over retirement age (nobody knew how old she actually was) but she had been Chief Nurse for a long time in the hospital, and she was to be respected. Nobody argued with her. Not even Katsuki Bakugou.

“Break it up before the Director gets involved, boys. Back to your jobs now- go on. This is a hospital, not a barn,” she added more softly, trying to keep amusement out of her voice. She shepherded them away from the waiting room and Katsuki stalked away instantly, while Izuku gave one more glance over to his old friend, watching his back disappear out of the room.

Everything about the morning was going so wrong.

Izuku changed into Denki’s spare uniform as soon as he got to their break room, and recounted the whole experience. When he got to what had happened with Kacchan, Denki whistled long and loud. He asked what he should do but his friend just shook his head and refused to comment, then pulled
him into a hug. Izuku appreciated it.

"You'll know what to do, Izu," Denki said with confidence, "and Ochako will be okay, I can feel it. Come on bro, let's go save people. I'll even drive for you today again."

Izuku gave him a weak smile and nodded. "Thanks."

"But you're driving next time, yeah?"

They settled into the ambulance and Izuku realised his shaking had finally stopped.

He’d never found out what exactly Ochako’s injuries were. But Katsuki had said she was okay. For now, that would have to be enough - but it was going to feel like an agonisingly long shift until he could see her again. At least for now she could rest. He would be back as soon as he could be.
(Strengths and) Weaknesses

Chapter Summary

Ochako wakes up.

Chapter Notes

Somehow this chapter ended up being 7,000 words long? Heck
I really enjoyed writing the character interactions in this one - hopefully my dialogue
writing is improving!

As always, I thank you all with my full heart for taking the time to read this story!
(Especially since my updates are so sporadic - what's a schedule???)
If you've ever written me a review just know that it's what genuinely keeps me going
(even when I'm typing away at 2am wondering what I'm doing with my life) and you've
definitely made me smile.

My cat sadly passed away last week so I'm half dedicating this to him, because I still
miss him desperately, and I'm half dedicating it to all of the lovely kind people on tumblr
who sent me messages when I was heartbroken. I was blown away by the support and
kindness! So this is to Dizzy, my squeaky tabby best friend, and to the kindness of
strangers!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

BEEP...... BEEP...... BEEP......

Ochako scrunched her eyes shut tighter.

BEEP...... BEEP...... BEEP......

Why wasn’t the alarm switching off? He never usually let it run for this long.

BEEP...... BEEP...... BEEP......

Ochako slowly opened her eyes, wincing at the bright, white light that dazzled her vision. She
blinked a few times as her eyes adjusted and felt a strange sense of disconnect from what she saw
around her; thin white bed sheets, a plastic chair beside her bed, and blue curtains drawn shut.
This… wasn’t her room? It smelt strongly of the tang of disinfectant. Her eyebrows drew together as
she looked at her surroundings again in disbelief. The last thing she remembered was going to the
gym to meet Izuku...

Ochako’s head tilted against the flat pillow beneath her, her attention shifting to the source of the
beeping sound - a screen with different coloured lines dancing across it, in time with the beeps. The
rhythm of her heartbeat. It was surprisingly steady for someone that had just woken up in a hospital
bed, she thought with a dark kind of humour. All things considered.
She yelped as she tried to sit up and cringed with the pain that lanced at her from different directions; a dull ache from her head, a sharp sting from her ribs and a throb from her shoulder. She hissed in a breath and with careful movements Ochako managed to prop herself upright, using her pillow as a support for her back. (Even though it was kind of flat and lumpy.) A tube was connected to the back of her hand, covered over with white tape, and it tugged oddly against her skin when she moved. She shuddered.

Now that some sense of awareness had trickled back, Ochako began to recall hazy details from the blank spot in her memory; a dazzling flash of headlights and something that sounded a bit like the screeching of tyres. Had she been run over? She turned her palms over and back again, but they looked fine. She flexed her toes and fingers and bent both her knees inside the bed, but it didn’t seem like she’d broken anything. She gingerly touched the left side of her ribcage and winced at the pain, though it didn’t feel like she’d broken anything, and she couldn’t feel any bandages beneath her hospital gown. Her left shoulder was very stiff though and there was an intense burning sensation that lit up in the joint as she tried to rotate it, Ochako bit her lip to stop from yelping again, but she could still move it, so that was a good sign, right? She carefully reached up and touched her head, feeling the rough texture of stitches beneath her fingertips.

Oh, a head injury...

That explained her inability to recall what had happened to her, and the headache that was creeping through her skull.

She let out a small breath and laid her hand back down beside her.

Izuku had probably gone to the gym completely unaware that she’d been going there herself to surprise him. It would have been such a fun moment for them... She’d been so excited to see his expression. And he didn’t even get to eat his sandwich! For some reason, that last thought hurt most of all. She was so lame.

Unless... He’d already heard she was in the hospital from his friends who worked there? (She kind of hoped not, she really didn’t want him to see her like this.)

Ochako rubbed her hands over her face, careful to avoid her stitches, and heaved a huge sigh in and out. She really needed to find out what had happened, see if she could get a glass of water, and maybe get a snack for her growling stomach too. Her mom used to say that if she was feeling hungry that was the best sign that she wasn’t too sick. But thinking of her mom tapped into childhood memories of get-better-kisses and it’s-okay-hugs in a way that made tears sting the backs of her eyes, so she turned her attention to finding a way to sorting out her own problems. Usually there was a little button you could use to call for a nurse or something - she was sure she’d seen that on a television show once. Ochako shifted slightly and frowned at the wires hanging next to her bed, tracing them down with her fingers, and felt her mood brighten as she discovered a small control pad. Those cheesy hospital dramas on television had taught her something at least. A click of what she hoped was the correct button made the bed whirr as the back raised up and she could finally lean back more comfortably without having to use the hospital pillow as support (since it didn’t offer any anyway).

It might not have been the button she was after, but at least she was more comfortable.

Doing something positive had improved her mood considerably, and she desperately tried to silence the whispering doubts in the back of her mind, wishing she knew what had happened to her. Fear trickled down her veins and she willed her body to stop shaking.

What if she’d got some kind of huge brain injury?
What if she’d been asleep for a week or something?

She supposed they wouldn’t have just left her to wake up naturally in a ward if there was something seriously wrong with her... would they? It didn’t feel like a week later… But then, how would a week later really feel any different?... Ochako shook her head slightly to dislodge her spiralling thoughts and brought a hand up to her forehead with a cringe as the action set off a flare of pain in her skull.

The curtain surrounding her bed was pulled open slightly as a head poked into the gap and Ochako jumped with a squeak, cringing again at the twinge of pain the motion caused.

“Oh, sorry, didn’t mean to make you jump,” a calm, quiet voice said as a figure walked in and pulled the curtain shut behind himself.

He put his hands inside his long white coat as he approached her bed, and Ochako couldn’t help her eyes straying to the large red scar across one side of his face. It had obviously been done some time ago, as it was faded and as healed as it would ever get, but it was still a stark contrast to the rest of his pale skin. His hair was white all over, in a fashionably floppy kind of style, with one red streak dyed into it just above the scar – almost as if he wanted emphasis to be drawn to it. Even his eyes were two-tone; one was grey, and one was a piercing aqua blue.

“No problem, I’m having a weird kind of day, so I’m probably a little jumplier than usual,” she replied with a sad smile.

“Yes, I imagine so,” he agreed, his voice almost at the tone of being considered flat. “I’m Doctor Todoroki, Izuku is a good friend of mine and he asked me to check in on you while he’s on shift. He’s got a meeting with the Director as soon as he gets back so it might be a while before he can come to you himself.”

So he did know she was here. The thought was both alarming and comforting all at once. But he wanted to come and see her, and that warmed her inside. He’d even asked one of his doctor friends to check in on her. At least now she had time to make herself look more human before he arrived at her bedside; once she’d had some water, some food, and some pain killers she’d look and feel much better. Though there wasn’t much she could do about the hospital gown, she lamented. That would make it the third time they’d met face-to-face and in only one of those meetings had she been wearing normal clothing...

She pushed down the sigh that threatened to spill out of her.

“Thank you for checking up on me,” Ochako finally said, remembering her manners, “but I don’t suppose you could tell me what happened to me? And what’s wrong with me? And can I get some water? And maybe a snack please? I’m not going to die, am I?” she added in a panic.

Doctor Todoroki smiled crookedly, the corners of his mouth twitching up on his scarred side. “I can see why you and Izuku get along so well, you’ve got his same earnest spirit.”

Ochako’s blush deepened.

His smile faded. “I’m not actually your doctor, so I haven’t been involved in your care while you’ve been here. Protocol is that I’m supposed to have you wait for your doctor before your condition is discussed with you, but he’s currently in a meeting with the Director himself and I don’t think he’s going to be in a good mood afterwards, so I’ll just tell you what I know anyway, as a favour to Izuku. Your other requests can be easily sorted out for you.”
“Really? That would be so great, thank you!”

The doctor leaned down and examined her stitches. “Hm, these are very well done.” He straightened and checked her heart monitor, still beeping away to itself, though he was seemingly satisfied by what he saw because he made a light humming sound of approval. He took a few steps to bottom of the bed and lifted a clipboard, flipped over the sheets, and finally nodded. “You’ve had a mild concussion. Head wounds tend to bleed a lot, so even though your laceration wasn’t too deep it still needed stitching, but it’s been done up neatly so it looks like it will heal cleanly without much scarring. You’ve been quite lucky as far as I know – your shoulder and your ribs took some of the force of your fall so that by the time your head hit the concrete the impact was minimal.”

“Oh,” she squeaked, taking in what she could as he spoke.

“Your shoulder has been quite badly bruised, as have your ribs, but there’s no fractures. The scans on your brain came back negative for any internal bleeds and it doesn’t look like there’s any other internal damage in that respect. You lost consciousness for a while because of the impact, but you’ve been sleeping the last few hours. Looked like your body needed the rest, regardless of your injuries.” There was something a little like judgement in his tone as he replaced the clipboard, and his pretty eyes flashed a sharp look at her, like he could tell she was sleep deprived and exhausted most of the time, which was ridiculous because how would he know that? But her sheepish smile all but confirmed his suspicions. He seemed like a very astute doctor. Though maybe he liked to jump to his own conclusions too quickly.

“It seems likely that you’ll be able to go home soon. You’ll need to go to your local GP to get the stitches removed though, but the receptionist will give you some advice for when to book the appointment. You might have some lasting effects, in the form of headaches and possible vertigo, but your injuries were so mild they will most likely be temporary. If it continues beyond three months, you’ll need to come back and be checked out again,” he advised, his hands returning to his pockets. He finally paused, turned his mismatched eyes back to her and nodded. “In short- you’re not going to die, and I’ll get a nurse to bring you what you requested.”

With that he turned to leave.

“Th-Thank you!” Ochako managed to squeak out just as he disappeared behind the curtain.

She sighed with relief. She was going to be okay!

After a small moment processing everything he’d said, Ochako scrunched her nose - what a strange doctor! The only time his professional mask had slipped was when he talked about Izuku. The freckled, green eyed paramedic seemed to have that kind of effect on everyone it seemed... Maybe he was just so good-hearted that he treated everyone the way he’d treated her, and she wasn’t really special to him at all...

A sharp, sad pang ran through her chest.

Ochako was running her hands through her hair, to brush out the tangles with her fingers, by the time a nurse came in to her a few minutes later. The nurse was pushing a small trolley that was nearly the same height as her, though she would probably look a little bit taller if she stood up without hunching as much as she did. Her grey hair was scraped into a tidy bun and she had a friendly expression on her face as she looked over at Ochako.

“Ah, you’re awake,” she croaked, her voice cracked with age, though it was warm in tone.

Ochako was about to nod just as she remembered her head injury and instead smiled and said, “Yes,
awake and ready to go home I think.”

“Good, good, yes – home is a great healer.” The nurse pushed the trolley closer and Ochako could see a pitcher of water, a cup beside it, and a plate of hot buttered toast and two pills.

“Mm, I know I’ve been asleep already, but I can’t wait to get home and make a blanket burrito and just stay there. Only emerging for food. Or maybe I’ll just take the whole blanket into the kitchen with me,” Ochako said wistfully. For some reason waking up in a hospital had started to make her feel embarrassed. She didn’t like to be fussed over and couldn’t wait to be in her apartment again.

“That sounds like a good plan, you’ll be needing your rest. It looks like you’re going to be okay, at least Doctor Todoroki thinks so, and you can trust him. Though… It was odd to see the Chief of Surgery asking me to bring a patient some water and food,” the nurse said curiously, with a sharp sideways glance at Ochako as she fit a wooden tray onto the side of her bed.

“The Chief of… Eh?” Ochako burst out. That young doctor had been the Chief of Surgery? “No way... But he was so young!”

“Yes, yes, he’s nepotism personified you see,” the nurse said with a sigh, as she placed the toast and a cup of water on the tray she’d attached to the bed.

Ochako tilted her head.

“It means ‘giving a job to friends or relatives by someone in power, regardless of whether or not they deserve it’,” the nurse clarified. “His father put him in that position as soon as he passed his exams and joined the staff, and the poor boy seemed to do nothing but hate his extremely unusual promotion.”

“Really? That sounds rough. He did seem a bit…” She didn’t quite know how to describe the air of melancholy surrounding the surgeon. “But then… why not move hospitals?” Ochako took a big bite of her toast, crunching into it gratefully, and gulped down a mouthful of water.

“Ah, now there’s a question. I suspect there’s only three people in this hospital who know the reason - Izuku, Shouto and his father Enji Todoroki, the Director.”

Ochako waved her toast in the air. “His father’s the Director of the hospital?! You’re kidding. This all sounds like a drama on television, y’know? Hard to believe this sort of stuff actually happens.”

The nurse laughed heartily, hunching over even more. “Where do you think they get their inspiration from? Art imitates life, dear.” She leaned heavily on the trolley and Ochako wondered if she was using it to hold herself up. “He’s a very good surgeon, and this hospital has a high reputation. Maybe he just wants to be in the best place to hone his skills, regardless of who got him there. I think his friendship with Izuku did a lot for his decision to stay here too.”

Ochako looked away from the nurse as a familiar bubble of anxiety settled in her gut; the feeling that she should be dissatisfied with what she’d done in her life, even though she enjoyed where she was and the friends it had led her to make. She’d worked hard to get earn her degree and she worked hard at the café in every shift she had. The way she’d got there didn’t matter, what mattered was how she felt about the destination she’d arrived at, and right now she was content with it. The pride she had in her hard work was real and hers, and she shouldn’t deny them, even if it was just pouring coffees, serving cake and laughing with Mina. Izuku had inspired that kind of feeling in her, she just had to accept it. (She should be looking for the constellations in the fairy lights.) Maybe that was what he’d inspired in the surgeon too.
The thought of Izuku made her want to see him badly. “They’re good friends then?” she asked as she crunched another bite of toast. “He did say he was checking up on me as a favour to Izuku.”

“Oh, well now, that certainly makes more sense - it’s not every day that I get the Chief of Surgery asking me for small favours like this, but he’d do anything for Izuku.”

“Yeah, I… I get the impression he has that kind of effect on lots of people,” she whispered.

“Well, once Todoroki started talking to Izuku he became much friendlier and seemed to smile a little more. I tell you- that boy can save people even from themselves.”

Ochako smiled, even though doubt niggled in her heart. She was happy to know him and happy to call him a friend, so even if he didn’t think of her in a special way, she thought he was. “He’s so kind,” she breathed, “and generous, like a real-life superhero. But he’s also kind of awkward in a cute way and a bit of a geek, and he makes me smile.”

“Ah, I see,” the old nurse croaked warmly with a chuckle, “well, you look after him dear, he’s precious to many people but he’s got a bit of a self-sacrificing nature – he’d do anything to help anyone, even if it hurt himself in some way. You look like you’ll be able to keep him in line though, he’ll look after himself better if it’s to come back to you, I’m sure.”

Ochako nearly choked on the pain killers she was trying to swallow. “I-I don’t- It’s not- It’s not l-like that! He doesn’t-”

The nurse chuckled again as she put the empty cup and plate back on the trolley, ignoring Ochako’s protests. She wheeled them away but looked back as she got to the curtain. “You’ve got colour in your cheeks again, that’s good. I’ll get started with your paperwork so you can go home, and I’ll be back soon.”

Ochako almost deflated as silence descended once more.

Well, this officially took the trophy of the weirdest day she’d ever had (and she didn’t think anything would ever beat the day she’d first met Izuku.)

If the nurse came back too soon though, she wouldn’t be able to see Izuku after his meeting. But then she would be able to see him back at the apartment, where she would be showered and in her own clothes… so maybe it was a blessing in disguise.

She blinked as she realised she still didn’t know exactly how she’d been injured. Had she been hit by a car? There was still a blank spot in her memory after setting off on her jog to the gym.

At least she got to go home soon.

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“Ochako? Can I come in?” Izuku’s unmistakable voice was muffled from outside the curtain, making her jump again.

She beamed - he’d made it! - and replied instantly with a, “Yes!” before she remembered her hospital gown. Ah well, too late to worry about it now.

A hesitant Izuku entered through the curtain and shut it again behind him. He stayed far away from her bed and that puzzled her. She really really wanted to jump out of bed and throw her arms around him but she was still connected to various monitors and she knew it would make her head throb. It’s not like she really knew him well enough to do that anyway, she thought sadly, and he seemed to be
purposely hanging back for some reason?

“Izuku,” she breathed, full of emotion at seeing a familiar and welcome face at such a scary time, “I-I’m so happy to see you.” She clapped her hands together, resting her fingertips against each other, trying desperately not to cry.

He gulped visibly and cleared his throat loudly as he turned away from her. Was he wiping his eyes? But he didn’t say anything.

Ochako continued in an overly-cheerful voice, getting increasingly worried at his distance and strange demeanor. “The doctor- I mean, the Chief of Surgery, told me you had a meeting to go to, and that you wouldn’t be able to see me for a while.”

“I- I do have a meeting, I kind of got in trouble for standing up to that friend I told you about, but…” Izuku sniffed and took a deep breath. “But they can wait.” He finally made his way over to the bed. “I was so worried, Ochako. I thought I was going to lose you… I thought…”

Oh, there were tears in his eyes.

Izuku sat down in the chair beside her bed and pulled it closer, making it screech loudly on the shiny floor. The sudden absurdity of it made her giggle. He smiled with her and reached slowly, slowly to the hand closest to him, taking it in his calloused one. She stopped laughing, surprise widening her eyes, while he averted his green gaze from her, and a blush bloomed behind his freckles.

He threaded his fingers through hers as he spoke again in a soft voice, “I’m happy to see you too.”

His skin was rough - working hands. But they held hers oh so gently.

Her heartbeat monitor began to increase the frequency of its beeping and Ochako felt her face flushing as she realised he would be able to hear the effect he had on her. She gave a couple of strained, high-pitched laughs as she fought with the desire to rip all the tubes and wires off. Izuku noticed her distress and subtly reached up to press some buttons on it until it muted, even though she could still see the lines dancing across the screen.

She twined her fingers with his firmly, as a thank you, and bit her lip, feeling her heart race even faster.

“H-How-,” his voice broke slightly, and he cleared his throat, “-how are you feeling?”

“I’m fine really. Except the headache… and the pain in my shoulders… and my ribs. But, y’know, not dead or in a coma and I’ve got all my limbs, so I can’t really complain!” It sounded like she was trying too hard to be cheerful, even to her own ears.

Izuku frowned, concern shining in his eyes. “I could suggest you stay in the hospital longer?”

“Oh no, no. I’m alright, honestly. The worst thing is the embarrassment that not only have you seen me in my old pyjamas but now here I am in a fashionable hospital gown too,” she sighed overdramatically with a shrug, trying to play it off as humour.

Izuku frowned, concern shining in his eyes. “I could suggest you stay in the hospital longer?”

“I could suggest you stay in the hospital longer?”

“Of no, no. I’m alright, honestly. The worst thing is the embarrassment that not only have you seen me in my old pyjamas but now here I am in a fashionable hospital gown too,” she sighed overdramatically with a shrug, trying to play it off as humour.

Izuku reached up with his other hand, almost as if he was going to touch her cheek, but he left it suspended in the air between them and then let it fall back down slowly. He finally smiled and something tight relaxed in her chest at the sight, like he was making everything better just by being there. His voice was soft and almost lost in a breath as he said, “And you’ve looked pretty every time.”
Ochako’s heart thumped in her chest, making her intensely grateful that he was no longer able to hear her heartbeat out loud.

“But I still haven’t seen you in your uniform yet,” he added playfully, the redness in his cheeks extending over his nose and the tips of ears.

A laugh hissed out from her lips. “No! I’ll die of embarrassment – just the thought might make me stay here forever!”

His grip tightened, and pain flashed over his face. “But then we couldn’t go on a da-” He stopped and looked away.

He was quiet for long enough that Ochako felt the need to fill the odd silence he’d left. “Doctor Todoroki told me I’m okay to go home soon, and the nurse is getting everything ready so I can go.”

“O-Oh yeah.” He perked up at the change of subject. “Shouto said he’d talked to you. I wish I could take you home myself, but I’ve still got the rest of my shift left. But I’ll ring a taxi for you. I’ll pay.”

“That’s okay, really, I can get the bus – it won’t be too expensive. They’re pretty regular from this part of the city and- what?”

“Ochako, you’ve had a mild concussion. You’ve been in hospital all morning. You can’t catch a bus home. As a medical professional I can’t let you do that, let me order you a taxi. Please.”

Ochako shivered at the intensity of his gaze and the emotion in his voice. “…Okay. But I really do feel fine.”

Izuku visibly relaxed, but his hand remained entwined with hers. “You do look much better than when I saw you lying on the ground. Until I saw your eyelids moving I thought you were-”

Ochako snatched her hand away from his, and only briefly registered his wide eyes, before she hid her face behind her palms and pulled up her knees, so she could rest her forehead on them, hiding further. “No-o,” she groaned into her hands, ignoring the burning from her ribs and shoulder and the throbbing in her head.

“What!? Ochako, are you okay?”

“I can’t believe you’ve seen me unconscious on the floor too,” she moaned. She was such a mess!

“Don’t be embarrassed! You’d had an accident! You were unconscious- just lying there… and I was just panicking, I was so useless, I didn’t really do anything, I-I just froze at the sight of you - some paramedic I was - and it-it really doesn’t matter what you looked like,” he rambled, as he waved his hands in a fluster. “I was just so happy you weren’t… Gods, you were so pale, and I was so scared you were… A-Anyway, now that you’re awake again and okay I can relax.”

He sounded so sad…

She peeked at him from between her fingers. “Really?”

She hadn’t seen him look that vulnerable and raw before.

Izuku nodded, a smile pinching up his cheeks, tears shining in his eyes. His voice regained some of its usual cheer as he said, “Besides, you did wake up for a minute or two.”

“I did…?”
“Yeah, you mentioned something about you needing to tell me about an alarm?”

“I-I did?” she squeaked as her whole body went rigid, the colour draining from her face. “Did I say why?”

“No, you just said you needed to tell me about it, and then you told me you’d made me a sandwich.”

“Wow!” she laughed a little too loudly, but Izuku didn’t seem to notice. “Sure do say some weird things when you’re concussed!”

“The alarm didn’t make any sense, but since you told me there was a sandwich for me in your bag, I really hope you don’t mind that I looked for it, because it was so good.”

Ochako pushed away the weird sense of relief she had that she hadn’t revealed that their friendship had begun as being built on a lie, but her face lit up at him liking her lunch she made him. It was only a simple sandwich, he was too nice. She finally laid her legs flat in the bed again and removed her hands from her face, folding them in her lap. “No, no, I’m glad you looked for it, I was kind of upset when I woke up and thought you wouldn’t be able to try it – how silly is that?”

“Well I wasn’t going to eat it at first because I couldn’t bring myself to do it. I thought if I ate the last thing you’d made it might jinx you or something – that’s silly. But Denki told me if I didn’t eat it, he would.”

She laughed. “No, I’m… I’m so happy you enjoyed it. It fulfilled its delicious lunch-y purpose,” she added dramatically with a wave of her hands.

She loved it when Izuku smiled. Everything just felt warmer and better somehow. She only wished she had the courage to ask if they could be more than friends, but there was still the tiniest trickle of doubt in the back of her mind that he was just a very kind person and didn’t consider her differently than he did everyone else he was friendly with. But he’d held her hand, hadn’t he? And he continued to persist in being in her life, even after all the bizarre situations he’d seen her in, and despite her inability to flirt successfully. Sometimes, she even thought that maybe he was flirting with her…

Deciding that she could blame her actions on her lingering concussion if she had to, Ochako reached out a hand to gently hold his again. Her heart fluttered in her chest as she gripped it tightly.

His green eyes were full of emotion when she glanced up and gave him a shy, hesitant smile, but then he cleared his throat and looked away. “Ochako, now that you’re awake I really wanted to- to, uh, ask you something- Would you… like to go on a da-”

The curtain at the foot of her bed was suddenly ripped aside, the metal rings screeched in protest on the curtain pole, and both Ochako and Izuku jumped, his hand pulling out of hers instantly as he leaped up from the chair. A girl with pink messy hair launched herself at her bedside. “Ocha!”

“M-Mina!”?

“Us too,” Tsu croaked as she calmly entered behind Mina.

“Oh, Ochako, are you okay?” Momo moved to her other side and stroked her hair carefully.

“How are you?” Kyouka’s usually stoic expression was full of concern.

Her group of friends amassed themselves around her, looking at her with worried faces. They were all in their work clothes, shouldn’t they be working?
She was about to respond when she noticed Tsu tilt her head and place a finger to her chin, looking at Izuku, who had naturally taken a few paces back when the girls had entered. “Sorry,” she said in her uniquely croaky voice, “we didn’t know Ochako already had a visitor.”

The other girls turned to look at him and Mina shot a look back at Ochako; her eyebrows wiggling above her eyes.

Ochako felt heat rising up her neck while Izuku looked terribly uncomfortable.

“Uh. Hi, I’m Izuku, I’m a... friend of Ochako’s from her building.” He looked down at his uniform. “Oh, I’m also a paramedic that works in the hospital. I bumped into Ochako one day in the corridor of our building. I also jog to the gym every day, including this morning when I saw her on my way to the gym because she’d had an accident- but I guess you know that already- and since I work here and she’s also my friend I thought I’d visit her between jobs,” he mumbled rapidly, completely losing the others who couldn’t keep up with disjointed storytelling.

“I should be going anyway, I have a meeting I should have been at a while ago. I’ll see you at the apartment building later Ochako.” His gaze softened. “I’ll come ‘round after my shift, okay? I’ll be able to finish my question then. I’m glad you’re feeling better. Uh, bye ladies,” he added awkwardly as he swiftly made his exit.

“All eyes returned to her.

“Yeah, I’ll be there,” she promised, even though he’d already gone.

Ochako waved her hands wildly in front of her flushed face. “I-It’s not what you think!”

“Oh? What do we think, Ochako? You’ve been hiding a boyfriend from us? That’s the paramedic who helped me at the school the other day, you know! I can’t believe it.” Momo clasped her hands to her chest. “You fell in love and you didn’t tell us?”

“No, no! Nothing like that!” Ochako protested, though it was weak, and she knew it. She had fallen in love with him.

“It’s okay if you don’t want to tell us about him, but Mina will probably tell us all later anyway,” Tsu pointed out, tilting her head towards the girl who was grinning so widely and so desperate to talk that she was nearly vibrating on the spot.

“Ah-!” Mina burst out, unable to contain her excitement any longer. “Ocha, I can’t believe you two! He looks at you like you’re his world! That’s so cute!” She fanned her face with her hands.

“H-He does?! N-No, you can’t have been looking properly, he just thinks we’re friends,” Ochako said, though hope sang through her veins. Did he?

Her friends exchanged bemused expressions. Tsu even shook her head with a smile.

“So how come you know about this mystery man, Mina?” Kyouka rested a hand on her hip.

“It’s a long story,” Mina replied diplomatically with a shrug. “I’ll tell you all about it in the car,” she couldn’t help but add.

Ochako sighed heavily, but she was smiling. She loved her friends so much!

“But- wait, what are you all doing here anyway? How did you know I was here?”
“How...?” Kyouka echoed.

“Yeah.” Ochako looked around at them, confusion making her voice high, “I mean, I only had my accident this morning and I- Oh! My accident! I still don’t know what happened to me! I keep forgetting to ask.” She rubbed her forehead, careful of her stitches.

“Why we’re here, and what happened to you - you mean you don’t know?” Momo looked at her sadly, and it made her skin crawl with dread.

“I’m not sure I like where this is going... Did Izuku get in touch with you?”

Mina shook her head, making her pink hair bounce cutely, and passed over her phone. (She had one of those pretty phone cases that was filled with a sparkly gel, and it always made Ochako feel self-conscious of her old scuffed phone.) With a sinking feeling she looked down at the page Mina had left it on. She gasped in horror.

“No, no, no, no! I can’t believe this!” she wailed, gripping the phone so tightly her knuckles went white. There was an article on the screen with the title of ‘Supermodel Saves Girl’ in huge text above two photos, one of a lady with golden eyes holding onto a fluffy dog, and one that was a slightly blurry picture of herself lying unconscious on the ground with a coat over her, there were two female paramedics beside her and... Izuku. It was hard to see his expression on the dark photo, but he was there, holding her hand. She scrolled down, but she couldn’t bring herself to read the text.

“Mina sent us this article as soon as she saw it this morning, and we all came as quickly as we could. People are kind and offered to cover us at work while we were gone,” Tsu said warmly, even though her eyes looked teary. “I hated seeing you like that Ochako, just from a photo. It must have been very hard for your paramedic friend being there.”

Ochako bit her lip, feeling a tug of sadness in her gut. She was torn between feeling mortified that she was on the internet, and probably the papers tomorrow, lying on the floor like a loser, and sad that Izuku had seen her like that in person. She could only imagine how she would feel if their roles were reversed. That must have been so horrible for him.

“It says you nearly got ran over, Ocha!” Mina explained as she took back her phone gently. “The grape juice truck-”

“-Grape juice truck?!”

“-just missed you, but then you slipped on the ice-”

“-I slipped?!”

“-and fell and hit your head.”

Ochako wanted to curl up under the covers and never emerge into society again. That was the worst story of how someone ended up in hospital ever, and it was on the public domain! She could only pray that nobody else knew it was her in the article, since it thankfully didn’t include her name.

Momo laid a hand on Ochako’s shoulder softly in a motherly gesture. “You’re lucky that Uwabami found you while she was walking her dog - she’s the one that called the ambulance. It was just an unfortunate accident honey, it couldn’t be helped, don’t worry.”

“We’re just glad you’re okay,” Tsu added with a wide smile.

Ochako looked around at her best friends while warmth bloomed in her chest, and returned Tsu’s
smile, hoping they could hear the sincerity in her voice when she replied thickly, “Thanks everyone.” There was a small pause before she spoke again, scratching the side of her cheek. “Just a question though, who’s Uwabami?”

The friends all dissolved into laughter and Ochako soon joined in, wondering why such a simple question had brought such good humour to them all. She guessed it was just a release of tension. Worry, concern and fear for her had clearly affected them all, and now they knew she was okay they were able to release all those emotions that had been built up. She remembered seeing a crease above Izuku’s nose for most of their time together, where his eyebrows were pushing together. He’d still seemed tense, and she wondered if that would go away if he saw her in her own apartment looking well in her own clothes. She wondered how many times Izuku had been at a patient’s bedside wondering if he would ever see them awake again. It must have been scary for him.

“Uwabami is only one of the most famous actress-turned-supermodels there is, Ocha. You been living under a rock?” Mina managed through her subsiding giggles. “She’s got one of those cool stage names that’s just one word.”

“And nobody knows her real name,” Kyouka added, with an air of admiration.

“The article said she’s gifted you her coat for being a brave fan of hers, isn’t that kind of her?” Tsu’s eyes twinkled mischievously.

“Really?” Ochako blinked. “Hm, I don’t know if I’d want to keep a reminder of this actually.”

“I’ll have it if you don’t want it!” Mina gasped.

They all laughed again and Ochako felt her cheeks hurt with how much she’d been smiling. Her friends were the perfect medicine to feel better.

“Here’s your paperwork, dear, all ready for- What’s going on here?” The unmistakable croak of the old nurse from before exclaimed in horror as she emerged from the other side of the curtain to see three girls surrounding Ochako’s bed. “How did you girls get in here? Out! Come on now.” She made shooing motions with the hand not holding her up with a walking stick.

“Ah yeah, we kind of dodged past the reception,” Mina admitted to Ochako as she was herded out by the small old nurse.

“I drove us here, and we’re going to take you home too Ochako, so meet us at the entrance!” Momo threw over her shoulder as they left. She could hear the others giggling as they went.

The nurse huffed as silence and order descended once more, but when she turned around Ochako could see the good-natured smile on her wrinkled face.

“That was more excitement than a recovering patient needs just after she woke up,” she reprimanded gently, “but they look like a good group of friends.”

“They really are. I’m super lucky.”

The nurse placed a bundle of clothes, with a few pieces of paper on top, on the chair beside the bed. “Here’s everything you need. Be sure to stop by the desk on your way out, and in the nicest possible way I hope we don’t see each other again, dear. Be careful and look after yourself. Oh, and here - have a candy.”

Ochako’s hand was pulled up and a small candy block was deposited in it from one of those odd little plastic dispensers.
“Thank you for everything,” Ochako chirped, popping the candy into her mouth (it was sweet peach, one of her favourite flavours). “Oh, wait! Could you please take a message to Izuku? He said he was going to phone for a taxi to take me home, but my friends are going to take me instead - could you tell him for me? I don’t want him to spend money unnecessarily, and I don’t want him to worry. And could you please tell him... um... that I’ll be waiting for him after his shift, so please come see me!” She grinned, her cheeks pink.

The nurse shook her head and muttered something that sounded like ‘kids’ but gave Ochako one last wrinkly smile as she said, “Of course I’ll tell him. Now you go home and get some rest.”

“Thank you, I will.”

Alone once more Ochako heaved a huge breath in and out before swinging her legs over the side of the bed, ready to get dressed and go.

She was sick of all the weaknesses inside herself - it was time to replace them with strengths. She’d danced around thinking Izuku had feelings for her then thinking he didn’t, and she wasn’t going to let it stop her anymore. She was sure he had been going to ask her on a date when he’d been interrupted and she wasn’t going to let her own doubt talk herself out of it - whether he had feelings for her or not, or whether he was going to ask her out on a date or not, she only had one life and she intended on living it. No more dreams and stars that she couldn’t reach that only served to make herself unhappy. She was already living among them. She was going to stand on her own two feet, proud of what she’d achieved and happy to see what else she could do without judging herself by other peoples’ standards.

When he came to visit her later she’d be the one to ask him on a date.

And she was going to confess to him about his alarm.

Chapter End Notes

Now with fanart from @jellojolteon on tumblr! Precious Izuku! (I literally can't believe this fic has fanart I smile every time I look at these aaa)
Longing

Chapter Summary

Will they finally get together???

Chapter Notes

Thank you all again so much for the amazing comments and feedback I get from this fic! I work so hard on it, and it's so rewarding to know that you're all enjoying it. (I am still so surprised and humbled whenever I think about it too long! People are enjoying my random quirkless AU???)

I'm going to Japan next week for a couple of weeks, so there won't be an update from me for about a month now - sorry!! The last two chapters will be worth waiting for, I promise. We're getting kind of close to the end now! I'm so excited!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Izuku was so distracted by thoughts of Ochako, and the nervous flapping of a thousand butterflies in his stomach, that he hadn’t even realised he’d made it to the Director’s office until he was stood staring at the door handle.

He rolled his shoulders and ruffled his hands through his already messy hair, readying himself for the reprimand that was surely coming. He could imagine the Director had been happy to find out that they had caused a scene in the waiting room; he’d never made any secret of the fact he didn’t like either of them.

Izuku paused and took a breath.

He would need to pull the frayed ends of his nerves back together before he went in there, but he was still buzzing over finding out Ochako was okay – seeing her awake in that hospital bed had made him so emotional. He was proud of himself for only allowing a few tears to fall. She’d looked so fragile and so strong at the same time... He supposed that summed her up well actually. Anyone who ever underestimated her was in for a shock.

She was pretty and fierce and soft and funny all at the same time, and he'd never met anyone who made him feel the way he did when he was around her. A warm peaceful feeling settled in his chest as he couldn't help the smile that slowly lit up his face. He’d totally fallen for her, no doubt about it.

He couldn’t wait to go to her apartment later and ask her out on a date, since his earlier attempt had failed. (He also couldn’t believe it was the second time he’d built himself up to ask her a question that her friend Mina had accidentally interrupted.) He only hoped she'd say yes.

Izuku mused that he hadn’t really been able to take it in at the time, because he had been so distracted by the interruption and his own shyness, but Ochako’s teacher friend from the school had been at her bedside too. She’d seemed much calmer and far less pale than when he’d seen her before, which
gave her a confident and motherly air that suited her better, like the kind of vibe Shino gave off; she seemed like the kind of friend who looked after the others. It probably made her a great teacher, he thought, and he hoped to ask her about Clara if they met again. Actually, he hoped to meet all of Ochako’s friends properly one day – he shook his head to dislodge the phantom sound of Ochako’s voice in his imagination introducing him as ‘my boyfriend, Izuku’.

They seemed like a nice group of girls, and they clearly cared deeply for Ochako. He was happy for her, but he couldn’t quite suppress a small pang of jealousy, since he had never been lucky enough to be in a solid friendship group like that; he’d only really had Katsuki through his childhood and had focused so hard on his studies and medical training that he hadn’t thought much about making best friends during those years either. He had Denki and Shouto though... Maybe he’d see if they would go for a drink with him after work one day… Hm... maybe Denki might find it a bit weird to be socialising with the Chief of Surgery...

Izu sighed and rubbed his hands over his face as he stalled his rambling thoughts and realised he was just delaying the inevitable - he’d have to go into the office at some point.

He wasn’t scared of Director Todoroki. But he was scared of what he could do, and the ways that he could make working in the hospital more difficult. The man had too much power for someone as selfish and conceited as he was.

Toshinori had told him that he and Enji had been friends in high school, though he’d chuckled and corrected himself by saying that they had been more like good-natured rivals than anything else. But things between them had gotten really bad when the Director of the hospital at the time announced her retirement and offered Toshinori the position as her successor. Although Izuku knew she’d been Toshinori’s mentor through his medical training, like he had been for him, she didn’t seem like the kind of person who would be giving him the job out of bias. But when Enji found out he was furious. When Toshinori declined it, not wanting to give up his job as a paramedic, it fell to the next best person qualified for the job. Enji himself. He never forgave his friend for being her first choice, severing their friendship and twisting Enji with bitterness about his own position and how he’d got there. He was so bitter that the grudge had extended right down to Izuku, just for being Toshinori’s student.

But Izuku would always bare that grudge with pride.

He hoped it was because he reminded Enji of the old paramedic so much that he couldn’t help but dislike him for it. He hoped he embodied everything that Toshinori taught and believed in. Anything that kept his memory and presence in the hospital alive was worth shouldering, even unfair resentment from his former friend.

Toshinori had been an excellent mentor and an even better paramedic. Izuku would be forever grateful that he had been the one to treat him after his accident, and that he had not only given him the inspiration to change his career choice but had taken him on and coached him through his training. He had been a true real-life hero, and he was always everyone’s first choice.

Izu knew there was so much more he could have taught him, even when he’d said otherwise with a thin painful smile, patting him weakly on the back and telling him ‘my boy, you have already surpassed me’.

Izu blinked away tears as he finally opened the door.

The handle was smooth and polished as Izuku pushed it down and the door swung right open on its well greased hinges, making him practically stumble through the doorway into the room. Izuku coloured slightly as he knocked lightly on the open door, even though he was already inside.
Enji Todoroki scowled darkly at him from behind his desk, the creases on his face forming crevices that looked as if they’d been chiselled into it. His flame red hair and beard contrasted brightly with his plain navy coloured suit and his turquoise eyes were a perfect match for Shouto’s left one.

“You’re late,” he rumbled.

Izuku inhaled sharply, nearly choking on the sharp tang of polish and leather, and suddenly wished he had come up with a valid excuse as to why he hadn’t come to the office immediately.

“Oh, yeah. Sorry, there was an unexpected emergency downstairs that I had to deal with—” Izuku rushed out, stopping dead when he heard a disbelieving snort behind him.

Katsuki Bakugou was slouched against the back wall of the room, hands in his pockets, his white coat standing out amongst the drab colour scheme of the Director’s office. His expression was fierce.

Enji’s eyebrows furrowed even closer together. “Is there something funny about that, Doctor?”

Izuku’s stomach churned uncomfortably at the silence following the Director’s question. Katsuki knew that he’d been to visit Ochako. Now he was going make him admit he hadn’t come running when summoned because he’d gone to visit a friend instead. And then lied about it.

Katsuki’s red eyes locked onto his own for a second – Izuku couldn’t read the emotion in them – before he lazily rolled his shoulders and moved to stand at the front of the desk. “Only that if someone so much as sneezed selfless little Deku would be there with a tissue for them, call it a medical emergency, and keep everyone waiting.”

Izuku was so taken aback by Katsuki not getting him in trouble that he stood motionless for a moment, staring at his back with wide eyes.

Kacchan…

Enji huffed, though whether it was in agreement or disapproval Izuku wasn’t sure, and his frown increased as he waved an impatient hand in his direction. “Don’t just stand there Midoriya, close the damn door and come forward.”

“Y-Yes sir.”

The door closed with a tiny click and he made his way to stand next to Katsuki, trying not to fidget as he stood in front of the Director’s imposing dark wood desk. He’d always hated the way that Enji didn’t have any chairs there, so when he spoke to someone he made them stand at his desk. Somehow Enji managed to project an aura of complete authority by leaning back in his expensive plush leather chair, while his guests stood like naughty school children before him.

“I have had multiple complaints this morning from patients and their family and friends,” he rumbled, passing his fiery glare over each of them. “Apparently my staff think it’s appropriate to act unprofessionally in front of a waiting room full of people. Do you think this is acceptable?”

Neither of them replied. Was it a rhetorical question, or did he want an answer?

“Do you?” Enji snapped.

“No, sir;” they managed to say in unison, though he could hear Katsuki’s voice was strained and spoken through clenched teeth.

“Good. Then don’t do it again. I don’t think I need to remind you of the high standards my staff
should work to, and the reputation we hold here. Anything that tarnishes that reputation will be removed. Like a bad stain from a trophy.”

Izuku’s heart thumped, but he felt indignation rising in his chest. He chewed the inside of his cheek and let his eyes stray to the various certificates hanging in frames on the wall behind the Director, willing himself not to voice his opinion on the gods-awful trophy metaphors and thinly veiled threats.

He could practically feel the waves of rage emanating from Katsuki, but he also managed to hold his tongue.

“I am aware of the skills you both possess and the results you achieve,” he grudgingly continued, “but neither of those things place you above the professional line I expect my staff to tow. Arguing in front of a busy waiting room is not acceptable, even if I understand the passion that drove you both to it.”

A surprised "Huh?" popped out of Izuku's mouth before he could stop it.

Enji’s frown deepened. “Katsuki told me about what your disagreement was about.”

“He... did?” Izuku blinked. His gaze shifted to the unusually quiet doctor beside him, but his red eyes were narrowed and steely and resolutely not looking in his direction. He could see the muscles tensing on his jawline as he clenched and unclenched his teeth.

“Katsuki told me you disagreed about how to most effectively treat a patient and it erupted in front of the waiting room. Is this wrong?”

*Izuku lied to the Director about what our argument was about so we wouldn’t get into as much trouble...*

Izuku waved his hands and shook his head wildly. “N-No, that’s, um, that’s definitely what it was all about. We just want to work our hardest and do our best.”

Gods, he had never sounded more like he was lying in his life.

He swore he could actually hear Katsuki’s teeth grinding together.

Enji huffed, making his nostrils flare widely. It reminded Izuku vaguely of a dragon. Whether he realised they were both lying about it or not, he must have sensed there was no way they were going to expand any further on it. He narrowed his eyes and his voice lowered, “I’m letting you boys off with a warning this time - I appreciate tensions run high when discussing disagreements in treatments, and I don’t want it said that I don’t encourage my staff to think critically about their approach to achieve maximum results. But know that this will be your only warning. I don’t want to be calling either of you back in here again, understand?”

“Yes, sir,” they replied again.

Enji dismissed them with a sharp wave of his hand, picking up a pile of papers and turning his attention to them as if the two professionals in front of him were no longer worth his time.

As soon as the door closed softly behind them Katsuki spoke before Izuku had even taken a breath.

"Don’t,” he growled, “don’t thank me.”

Izuku jumped - his usual response at the biting tone of his once-friend - but he blinked slowly and bit his lip. Eventually he nodded and smiled sadly. “Fine, I won’t. But at least let me say I’m sorry.”
Surprise flashed across Katsuki’s expression before he looked away with a snort.

Izuku wasn’t put off by his attitude and continued with as much feeling as he could, “I’ve been feeling terrible about what I said to you earlier, about- about not treating Ochako properly because she was my friend. That was unfair of me. I was just stressed out and worried. I mean, I know that’s no excuse for what I implied, but… I’m sorry. You really are the best doctor I know, Kacchan, and I should never have thought you wouldn’t treat her like you treat all your patients.”

Katsuki folded his arms tight across his chest, seemingly very uncomfortable with the emotional turn the conversation had taken. “I should fucking think so.”

“But you have been a massive jerk to me, so you can’t really blame me,” Izuku added with a frown.

Katsuki snorted out a laugh and a wry smile cracked through his severe expression.

Izuku thought the air still felt charged with something unsaid.

“Look,” Katsuki snapped suddenly, “I’ve been really pissed off for a really long time... I hated that you decided to change careers into something like mine. I hated that Toshinori handpicked you, like you were better than me. I hated that you were always over my shoulder as if you thought I needed your help - always there like he had been.” His grip on his folded arms was so tight his knuckles turned white. “I’ve always hated that seeing you do well makes me feel so fucking worthless.”

Izuku didn’t know what to say. His voice came out as a dry croak when he finally replied, “I never thought of you as a rival Kacchan, only my friend. I told you before that I never intended you to think like that - I was only ever caring about the people that I’d helped and checking how they were. Like he did.” He laughed a little, but the sound rang harsh and bitter, and he clenched his fists by his sides. “You put all of that on me like your bad attitude and your misunderstanding of people was my fault. You pushed away Toshinori by yelling at him whenever he asked how you were doing. The three of us could have worked together, we could have helped each other and been a team.”

Katsuki barked a laugh. “That’s a load of shit and you know it! I’m a leader, Deku. I’m not a team player. I was jealous that he chose you over me, but I think you needed him more than I did anyway - I didn’t need the help like you did. There had to be someone helping you make the grade, or you’d have never made it through your training. I did it all on my own. And I’ll keep doing it on my own.”

Izuku shook his head and felt his voice rise, “I always looked up to you Kacchan, just like I looked up to Toshinori. Maybe even more than that! I wish we could have talked about all this, but all you ever did was yell at me and then I got defensive and clammed up. You’ve been blaming everyone else for your problems, but I think you’ve always blamed yourself.”

“I do blame myself!” Katsuki’s voice broke and cracked.

Both glanced at the door not too far away, but when nobody barrelled out of it shouting at them to get back inside, they realised that their argument must not have travelled through the heavy door of the office.

An awkward silence followed Katsuki’s explosive admission. His expression was pinched and his eyes were shining with conflict.

“Kacchan... You... All this time... Why didn’t you just talk to me?” Izuku said.

“Talk? Like talking would have made me feel any better.”

“But it does you idiot!” Izuku burst out. “That’s how normal people work stuff out!”
“Yeah,” Katsuki growled, “talking about my fucking feelings would have made everything better. Of course. Fuck that!”

Izuku clenched his fists so tightly it hurt his palms, and he tried to push down the strong, unexpected and uncharacteristic urge to punch his old friend. "You don't get it - you hated me for doing well because you hated feeling like I was better than you, but I never entered into the contest you put me in in the first place! And you know it. That's why you blame yourself. You know that all of this is on you."

Katsuki yelled in frustration and turned to throw an explosive punch to the wall opposite the Director's Office, his fist slammed against it with a force that made Izuku flinch. Distantly he hoped that he hadn't broken anything. Katsuki held his hand there for a moment before he shakily lowered it to his side. He seemed to almost deflate with the action; some kind of emotion seeped out of his shoulders and the tension wound tight in every angle of his body loosened.

“I’m…” Katsuki seemed to struggle with what to say. "Fuck!" He sighed loudly and harshly.

Izuku understood now. Katsuki had struggled with his feelings of self-confidence and self-loathing, knowing how he was coping with them wasn't healthy, but unable to stop it from escalating, and had then placed them all on Toshinori and himself. Katsuki had the bravado of someone full of regret that couldn’t find a way to voice it. He had issues, that much was obvious, but maybe... this was the first step to something better for both of them.

"Everything about this just pisses me off. It doesn't matter if you think you've figured me out, Deku. It is what it is.” Katsuki scrubbed both of his hands through his fluffy, spiky hair and Izuku noticed the red skin on his knuckles.

Izuku let out his anger in a long breath. “Your way of apologising is awful Kacchan.”

“That wasn't a fucking apology!”

Katsuki would always be someone who wasn’t good with people or feelings, but it felt like that edge of fiery hatred that cloyed up the atmosphere between them whenever they spoke had faded from him. Izuku was glad of it.

It would take some time, and it would never be the same kind of friendship they’d had when they were kids but...

“You covered for me twice in there, so I know there must be a part of you that remembers our friendship. I think… I think we’ve been on a different page for so long, and so full of negative emotions towards each other that what we had before is gone. I don’t think we can repair it. You said that you’ve been going forward alone and that you’d keep going alone, but the only one who put distance between us was you in the first place,” Izuku pointed out gently.

The deep line between Katsuki’s eyebrows deepened.

“Stop talking about me like I’m some kind of psychology project for you Deku,” Katsuki snapped.

“Sorry, sorry, I just didn’t see it before... but I see it now. It doesn’t mean you had an excuse to be such an asshole to me for so long though,” Izuku sighed, letting a smile ghost onto his face. He felt lighter somehow.

Katsuki’s eyes widened at Izuku’s foul language, and the crease between them finally smoothed out in his surprise. “Hearing something like that come out of you is all kinds of wrong.” There was a pause as he shook his head, making his explosive spikes bounce with the movement. “Fucking
Deku,” he muttered with a tiny smile. “Alright look, you’re only going to hear this from me once. Ever. So listen up… I’m sorry for being such a shit to you. There.”

Izuku nearly gasped. A real apology...? From Kacchan?

“Thank you Kacchan,” Izuku said as sincerely as he could, “but there’s just one more thing… I really did mean what I said before, about our friendship being irreparable. But I’d really like to start again. You don’t have to keep being so alone okay? It’s easier to keep going forward if you’ve got people to do it with, support and friendship isn’t something you should scoff at. I think it’s how you end up like that-” Izuku motioned to the office behind them.

That’s what Enji had done to the relationship he’d had with Toshinori, and he’d even succeeded in pushing away his own son. Katsuki had clearly been taking the same path and maybe he’d have ended up the same one day. To try again and clear the air was something he thought Toshinori would be proud of him for – and something he was sure he wished he’d have done for his own friend many years ago.

Katsuki snorted. “Shit, I think that’s the most Deku thing I’ve ever heard you say.”

“That’s only until what’s next I bet.” Izuku cleared his throat and held out his hand. “My name’s Izuku Midoriya, but you can call me Deku. I’d like us to be friends?”

For a long moment Katsuki didn’t move. Finally, he laughed long and loud, some rumbling sound from deep in his chest. “Are you serious?”

“O-Of course!” Izuku suddenly felt a little foolish, but he kept his hand high in the air.

Katsuki’s red eyes glared down at the hand his old friend was offering out to him, and for a few heartbeats Izuku was uncertain as to whether he would take it. Suddenly he heaved a huge sigh, making his shoulders sag and look less broad and proud. A small thin smile twitched at the corners of his mouth as he finally shook his head again and gripped Izuku’s hand tightly. “This is the lamest shit I’ve ever heard or done, but fuck it. My name’s Katsuki Bakugou, but a scrawny green rabbit used to call me Kacchan, and even though it’s a shitty nickname it’s kind of stuck, so you can call me that. I don’t care.”

“Nice to meet you, Kacchan,” Izuku said brightly, shaking his hand with enthusiasm.

“Oh, Izuku, how did it- go...?” Shouto’s deep voice sounded from down the corridor as he walked towards them, his white coat swishing behind him as he moved. His white eyebrows were raised with curiosity at their clasped hands.

Katsuki instantly snatched his hand away and shoved them both into the pockets on his own white coat with an irritated click of his tongue.

Izuku was unconcerned about Katsuki’s embarrassment, trying not to laugh at how easily he became bashful. “We got let off with a warning thanks to Katsuki, so it could have been worse.”

Shouto narrowed his eyes at his father’s office door, and Izuku felt uncomfortable at witnessing the depths of the hatred he saw in both colours. “Good.”

“Oh, I’m busy tonight but make sure you both keep some time free after an early shift one day – I’ll explain more another time, okay?” Izuku added.

“Sure.” Shouto smiled a little, while Katsuki scoffed, and then he checked a watch from inside his pocket. “Anyway, I need to get back, I just thought I’d check you were okay, Izuku.”
“Thanks, Shouto.”

Shouto nodded. “Katsuki,” he said in an icy acknowledgement of the doctor’s presence, not even breaking his stride as he moved past them and down the corridor.

“That guy blows so hot and cold. What’s his fucking problem,” Katsuki growled with a scowl, as Shouto disappeared around the corner.

Izuku wondered if they could ever be friends, but he doubted it – their relationship would always be strained by their personalities being so different. Like the difference between ice and fire.

He was just glad that the air had been cleared between himself and Katsuki. It would be nice to consider them to be something like friends again. He couldn't wait to tell Ochako about it. He felt like they'd had a battle and only his courage and nerve holding out had stopped Katsuki from storming away and them never being able to reconcile.

She was going to be so happy for him, he was sure.

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Izuku’s emotions felt utterly drained by the time he finally climbed back into the ambulance. Denki slurped loudly out of a can of energy drink. “Congratulations my dude, you’re still in employment!” he announced as he pulled a fresh can out from under his seat and presented it like a gift.

Izuku took the can gratefully, jumping a little as he pulled the ring to open it and it responded with a loud hiss. “Thanks Denki, I’m pretty happy I still have a job too.”

Denki flicked some of his blonde bangs out of his eyes. “Although I won’t lie when I considered you being fired meant I’d be able to replace you with Mandalay or Pixie Bob. You were gone so long I was considering radioing them and asking them to partner up with me anyway.”

“What! I thought we were partners to the end! If the Director fired me, I would have told him we come as a package deal and you’d have to go too.”

Denki made a pained noise and nearly choked on his drink, fizz spurting out of his nose. “Dude! Not cool!”

Izuku couldn’t hold back his laughter as his friend wiped his nose on his sleeve. “Anyway, they’d kill you if they knew you were still using those nicknames. You’re as bad as Katsuki, he’s a bad influence on you.” He paused. “Does everyone know about my meeting with the Director?”

“Of course. The rumour mill in this place is something else.”

Izuku sighed.

“So, what actually happened? You’re lookin’ a little dead behind the eyes there.”

“Gee, thanks.”

“I’m serious, you look a bit pale. You okay? ‘Cause if he threatened you there’s, like, a hospital full of people with the knowledge to make him itch horribly in some special places.” Denki wiggled his eyebrows, but his tone was serious beneath the joke.

Izuku was touched by Denki’s real concern, but he didn’t want what happened between him and Katsuki to get around the hospital - not that he didn’t trust Denki to keep a secret. (Though as much
as he loved Denki, he had to admit he wasn’t the most tight-lipped person he’d ever met.) Izuku smiled and shook his head. “No, nothing like that, I’ll be okay. I think I made a new friend today - that’s exhausting for a nerd like me.” He wiped imaginary sweat from his forehead.

Denki laughed, though his eyes shined with more intelligence than he ever let on, so even though he clearly knew there was more to it, he let it drop. “You’ll feel re-energised once we get going,” he promised, turning the keys to get the engine started.

“I thought I was going to have to drive this time?”

“Nah, don't think I trust you behind the wheel today, bro. I'll drive for the rest of the day. Don't want to be explaining to the Director why you've still got a job and then ran someone over in the ambulance.”

“Mm, that's fair,” Izuku said with a huff of tired laughter. He'd still got the rest of his shift left and he felt like he was exhausted already.

They hadn’t gone far from the hospital before Izuku remembered something. “Oh! I’m busy later, but I’ve already asked a couple of people to keep some time free after work soon, so I’m asking you too. I’d like us to go out for a drink or something one night, what do you think?”

Denki kept his eyes securely on the road, but he smiled widely. “Sure thing. Sounds fun. I even know this cool bar called Deep Dope that recently opened, we could go there! They have live music some nights from a local band.”

“That would be so amazing, I-”

The sound of the ambulance radio once again cut him off as a call came in. Denki flicked on their siren and lights as Izuku confirmed they’d received the call and would go straight there.

The first call was to a motorcycle crash, and after that they didn’t seem to stop - they also attended to an old lady that had fallen down trying to feed her cat, a hoax call from a phone box in the city centre, an old diabetic man that had Hypoglycaemia at a supermarket, a young boy that had fallen out of a tree and a young woman having a panic attack at work.

By the end of his shift, that had ran over like usual, Izuku would usually have been ready to get back to his apartment, have something to eat, watch a few YouTube videos and crash into bed, but he was running on pure excitement and he could barely wait to get into his car and get home and see Ochako. Nerves slowly began churning in his stomach too, at the thought of finally asking her out on a date. A flash of inspiration hit him part of the way back and he pulled his car into the carpark of a late opening store, barely putting it between the lines of a space in his haste, and shot inside.

The flowers he purchased were placed gently on his passenger seat. He couldn't help but glance at them as he drove back, smiling at how the pink petals reminded him of her blushing cheeks.

He tucked them under his arm as he locked his car in its usual spot at his apartment building. He was barely able to get the key into the lock because of the shaking in his hands, though he didn’t know whether it was due to nerves or excitement. What if she says no? What if she says yes? Once inside he jabbed the button for the elevator and tapped his foot with impatience as it whirred and descended. Too slowly. He pushed his way into the stairwell and took the steps two at a time.

Izuku finally stood outside of her door with one hand poised to knock, trying to catch his breath back with short gasps, and the other holding the bunch of flowers carefully. He wished he’d gone back to his own apartment and gotten changed out of his uniform first, but it was too late now. At least
nobody had bled on him today.

Izuku let out a little breath and readied a smile, looking forward to seeing her out of the hospital and looking well in her own environment. Then he knocked.

And he waited.

Silence.

Izuku tried to ignore the shiver of something cold creeping down his spine.

She was just busy and hadn’t heard his knock obviously.

He tried again with more force.

Still nothing.

With increasing unease Izuku finally hit upon the inspiration that he’d been so busy and so excited that he hadn’t actually checked his phone since finishing work - maybe she’d sent him a message to explain that she was staying at one of her friend’s places? That would be a blow, but he would keep the flowers in some water and see her tomorrow -

A notification on his screen informed him of seven missed calls and a WhatsApp message - all of them were from Ochako.

Izuku swallowed loudly as he opened the message, his mouth completely dry. It read,

<**Izuku I am so so - S O - sorry!! My mom and dad found the article about my accident online (I can’t believe my mom reads the local news when she’s on holiday - who does that??) and they caught the first plane back. They literally didn’t even go home - they just came straight to get me ! I really couldn’t refuse after that. They’d come a long way and they both looked so tired. I even told them I was fine!! :( So I’m in the car now. I tried ringing you but I know you can’t look at your phone at work. I was kind of hoping I’d catch you after. It’s going to be a long four hours back, and an even longer week. I’m really sorry I wish I could have seen you before I went... there was something I wanted to ask you :( hopefully we can meet up next week when I get back?? X>

Izuku let the hand holding the bouquet drop to his side and he leaned his forehead against her door. Every time it seemed like they could be getting closer something pushed them apart again.

He quickly typed out a reply, blinking tears out of his vision so he could see what he was writing,

<**Don’t worry! It’s fine! Enjoy your week ok? You get to be looked after and pampered like you deserve after your accident and your nasty morning waking up in the hospital. Have fun! I’ll be here for you whenever you get back, just let me know. I wanted to ask you something too - I wonder if we were going to ask the same thing? We’ll find out next week I guess! X> 

When Izuku was back in his own apartment he locked his door and threw his keys to one side with a sigh. He placed the bunch of flowers gently onto the coffee table before flopping down on his sofa with an even bigger sigh. The strength of his longing surprised him. He pulled a Captain America cushion onto his chest with one arm, remembering when he gave it to Ochako for her ankle when they first met, and lay his other arm over his eyes as he tried desperately not to cry. He hated that his response to most emotional triggers was to cry.

It was going to be a long week.
Chapter End Notes

This fic is tagged with fluff right??
Tranquility

Chapter Summary

Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Chapter Notes

Nearly the end now, I'm getting emotional. This will be the first multi-chapter project I've ever completed (still gotta complete it first I guess before I start getting all congratulatory ahaha a)

As always, your kind comments really kept me going on this one! I changed the way this chapter went about four or five times, but knowing I wanted to make something good for you guys kept me coming back to it to improve it. It's very different to the rest, but I actually really love this one now, so I hope you do too!

Last chapter next time! Get ready

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A persistent buzzing sound woke Izuku up gently. He blinked in confusion and looked over to where it was coming from – a tiny blinking green light on his bedside table revealed his phone was the culprit. Oh, he'd got a message.

He'd turned his phone onto silent mode since the day he'd got it, so he didn't even know what any of its tones sounded like. It wasn't like anybody ever contacted him on it except his mom anyway, so he'd never had a problem with leaving it on his bedside table while he slept. He didn't think it had ever gone off during the night before. It was odd for something like a phone vibration to wake him up though, since he slept so deeply.

Izuku pushed himself upright and reached for his phone.

BEEP BEEP BEEP

Izuku jumped and slammed his hand onto his alarm. It had startled him so badly that his phone had slipped right out of his fingers and clattered to the floor between the bed and the table.

His heart was still pounding as he picked up the old clock and checked the cracked display; it read ‘5:00’ in softly glowing red. That explained why his phone had been able to wake him up – his body clock usually got him up around this time anyway, even if there was a rare occasion that he didn’t set an alarm. He let out a small huff as he tried in vain to turn down the volume, but the button for it had broken a long time ago. When it woke him up through sleep it seemed quieter somehow. He tapped the volume button harder, but it still did nothing, so Izuku placed the clock back onto his table in defeat. It had been stuck at maximum for quite a while but hearing its broken volume properly for the first time made him suddenly very conscious of his neighbours. The sound wouldn’t be able to travel that loudly through walls would it?
Izuku ruffled his hair and threw off his duvet.

He really needed a new alarm clock.

Izuku stretched his arms above his head and felt a satisfying pop of sleep-settled bones in his back and elbows. He absentmindedly rubbed his scarred arm as he glanced guiltily over at his to-do list, catching sight of the reminder to ring his mom. Maybe he’d offer for her to have the clock back instead of throwing it away? She got overly emotionally attached to stuff like that. (Which was why she had a loft filled with an embarrassing amount of boxes of baby photos and old toys.) But that would kind of feel like he was returning her gift, despite it being years old… He supposed there was space on one of his comic book shelves in the living room… It could live there as a memory of moving out to university rather than as an actual functioning clock, since the display was cracked too.

Maybe he’d grown to become overly emotionally attached to stuff too and hadn’t even realised it. His mom had always joked that the only thing he’d inherited from her was her height, but he knew from the sad smile she gave the photo in her purse (when she thought he wasn’t looking) that deep down it didn’t really bother her to think that he was more of his father than her.

Not that he knew much about him.

Izuku splashed cold water onto his face and rubbed it dry vigorously with a towel. Yesterday had been a stressful day, so he was feeling a little more tired than usual. At least getting up on time meant he had plenty of time for his standard morning routine.

He was trying desperately not to think of Ochako, but in trying not to think of her it of course meant she was all he could think about. He put on his gym clothes and tried to focus on the workout routine he was going to do; he’d read a great post on Instagram about a training set that would put more focus on his core muscles. It sounded like it was going to be tough, but he relished the challenge. Though he probably wasn’t going to be quite so enthusiastic about it when he was complaining about his aching body to Denki in the ambulance later.

Izuku checked his watch and grabbed a banana from the fruit bowl on his kitchen table while the kettle boiled. It was definitely a coffee morning. The banana was a little browner than he would have liked - since he hadn’t gone shopping in a while and he often neglected to eat the fruit he bought, despite insisting on always keeping the fruit bowl full - but it was the energy that he needed. Still waiting for his old and slow kettle to boil, Izuku opened his cupboard and winced at the baskets of pills and first aid kits he still had stashed away in there. He really needed to sort it all out. Some of that stuff was probably out of date. He picked up a box of vitamin supplements and swallowed a little vitamin tablet down dry. He’d been very prone to accidents and illnesses as a child, and he’d been so scared about dying and leaving his mom all alone that he’d developed anxiety towards his health. When he’d moved out of his mom’s house he’d taken all of his remedies with him, though he’d slowly started needing them less and less.

Nobody ever would have believed he would end up being a paramedic; meek little Izuku who visited the doctor’s every other week with his injuries and maladies. Toshinori was the only one who truly believed that he could do it. Even his own mom had been concerned about how he would deal with surrounding himself with the very thing he’d been falling into his whole life. But that had been part of the reason he’d wanted to do it. In the end it was his own experiences and hard work that had helped him to grow beyond his anxieties and his accident-prone nature, and now Ochako had opened a whole other world of life outside of his work that he was excited to explore too. Friendship and enjoying someone else’s company… preferably hers.

Izuku shook his head to stop that train of thought while he added a touch of cold water to his
steaming mug of coffee and downed it all in one go.

He couldn’t wait for her to come back, but he hoped she was doing okay and getting some quality
time to heal up, though he was sure her parents would be taking good care of her.

The door locked with a definitive click behind him as he turned the key to his apartment, then he
took off at a brisk jog down the corridor.

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It was only when Izuku finally made it into the ambulance that he remembered his cell phone. Denki
was lounging in the passenger seat, cursing and swiping his finger on his own phone.

“C’mon, be a shiny, be a shiny. Damn- it’s not shiny. Gonna catch you anyway for leading me on-
Hey, you okay? You look like you’ve seen a ghost bro.” Denki continued to swipe virtual pokéballs
across the screen on Pokémon Go, not even appearing to look up as Izuku settled into the driver’s
seat. (It was his turn to drive.)

“Oh, yeah, I’m fine,” he sighed, “I just saw your phone and remembered that I got a message on
mine this morning, but I dropped it before I could check it. So it’s currently still sandwiched
somewhere between my bed and the bedside table.”

Denki hissed between his teeth. “Man, I’d be losing my mind if that was me. I didn’t think you’d be
that bothered though, don’t you leave it in your locker while we’re on shift anyway?”

“Yeah, but what if someone needed me! And I’m sitting here with no idea. I should have checked
it,” Izuku lamented, placing his forehead on the steering wheel. What if it had been Ochako?

“What if it was your girlfriend?” Denki finally looked up from his phone, somehow echoing Izuku’s
thoughts.

“Sh-She’s not my-” Izuku jolted upright and waved his hands in a fluster but stopped as he saw the
grin on his friend’s face. “Evil,” he mumbled with narrowed eyes.

Denki laughed. “Ah, you’re too easy, bro. I should feel bad ‘cause you’re such an easy target.”

Izuku put his forehead back onto the steering wheel with a tiny thud. “Thanks.”

Denki laughed louder and patted Izuku’s shoulder playfully, then leant back in his chair and folded
his arms. His voice was uncharacteristically serious when he said, “Dude. Listen to me. I know all
about relationships and-”

“I thought you’d never actually been in a relationship?” Izuku pointed out from the steering wheel.

“Fu- that’s- hey, that’s literally not even important to the point I’m making, okay. I could have had a
relationship before now. I’m not afraid of flying solo, so I’m just biding my time until someone meets
my crazy high standards.” Denki pouted. “Anyway, I’m trying to have like. A moment here. Bro to
bro. So…”

“Oh, yeah, sorry. Go on, I’m listening.” Izuku could barely hide the amusement out of his voice. He
smiled as he sat back up to give his friend his full attention.

Denki cleared his throat a little. “Look, it’s simple - you just need to ask her out.”

“I’ve been trying to,” Izuku groaned wearily. That’s his big advice?
“Well try *harder*!” Denki gripped a fist in front of him in a battle pose.

Izuku was about to protest that he’d been trying as hard as he could, but he blinked and thought about it instead. Had he been trying his hardest? At any point he could have asked her out if he’d really gone for it. The times they’d been interrupted, or something had disconnected their schedules… He could have forged ahead and found a way around any obstacle if he’d really put his mind to it. That’s what he was good at. He thought of the flowers currently sitting in a saucepan of water on his kitchen table (on account of him not owning any vases). *Try harder*… That had been a step in the right direction but… It was such simple advice, but maybe Denki was right…

Ochako could have died that day…

The realisation hit him; it was time to be bold.

Denki must have seen that he was seriously considering what he had said because he continued in a smug voice, “See? I know what I’m talking about. From what you’ve told me about her, it sounds like she’s totally into you. Next time you see her you’ve got to go for it man, seize the day, go big or go home!”

“That’s actually... Wow, um, thanks for the advice Denki.” Izuku scratched the back of his neck, affection lighting up his smile. He spent so much time working with Denki that he forgot that they’d already built up a strong bond, just from how much they had to rely on each other and work so closely together. He was a jokester and didn’t take himself or life too seriously, but he was a loyal friend. It made Izuku even more determined to invite his friends to do fun things outside of work.

“You two will be one of those really grossly adorable couples,” Denki added, pulling a face.

Izuku gasped and playfully tapped him on the arm, pretending it was a punch. “*Hey!*”

Denki grinned and swatted his hand away. “Too easy.”

Usually a call came in while they were taking over from the night shift crew and getting settled into the ambulance, but today the radio was silent. Between incidents they would drive around the local area, ready to attend anything if they were contacted, so Izuku put the vehicle into gear, pulled away from the hospital and followed a familiar route around the city. Denki occasionally got his phone out of his pocket and cursed and muttered about shiny Pokémon.

Izuku could feel the anticipation of getting to his own phone like a background buzz through his mind as he drove. It had been days since he’d been able to work without something on his mind. Ever since he’d met Ochako…

He guessed he needed to prepare for the next seven days being like this. Hopefully they’d be able to stay in touch and it wouldn’t seem that bad.

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By the time Izuku dragged himself back through his front door they’d attended a vast array of different calls and incidents. He shrugged off his coat and threw it onto the kitchen table, beside the saucepan holding the bouquet of flowers, ruminating on the most notable calls they’d attended as he shuffled into his shower. There was a young woman who’d broken her arm in a horse riding accident, an old couple with scrapes and bruises after a minor car crash, a lucky young boy with some bruises that had fallen out of a tree and terrified his parents, and a middle-aged man who’d had a cardiac arrest at work. Denki had successfully shocked the man’s heart back into a rhythm with the defibrillator, but it had been a stressful call, and had kept them busy long after their shift had
supposed to end.

Attending patients like that made Izuku glad that he chose the career he did. Without the two of them that man would certainly have died – cardiac arrest was as bad as it got. But he was safely in the hospital and things were looking positive for him, so Izuku wanted to check on him tomorrow and see how he was doing. It felt good to be able to do that without fear of Kacchan catching him checking in on the patients and yelling at him. The air between them was clearer now, though he suspected Kacchan would never be friendly and pleasant, but that was okay – it’s just the way he is.

Izuku gratefully stood under the shower’s hot spray and sighed. His days were long and hard, but he couldn’t imagine doing anything else. The water soothed his tired muscles and washed away the sweat of a good day’s work, so for a little while he simply stood and let the water run in hot rivers over his skin. He rubbed his scarred arm gently and flexed it up and down, working out the stiffness and aches.

Once he’d rubbed his hair vigorously with a towel and put on a sleeping shirt and some sweatpants, he made his way back into the kitchen, flopped onto a chair, and laid his head on his arms. Not only had it been a busy day, but the new workout he’d tried meant that nearly every muscle was aching, so it would be amazing to eat some quick food and climb into bed-

My phone!

Izuku leaped up from his seat so fast that his chair screeched and fell backwards with a clatter, and he ran to the bedroom, almost sliding to his knees on the carpet in his haste to get down to the floor. His hand groped in the narrow gap between his bed and the small bedside table and he crinkled his nose a little at the feeling of all the dust on the carpet, knowing he hadn’t ever put the hoover down there the whole time he’d lived in the apartment. Finally, he felt his pulse quicken as his fingers closed on something solid.

Izuku pulled it out with a triumphant sound and unlocked the screen. His eyes widened. Eleven new messages. That was more messages than he got in a whole month.

They were all from Ochako.

<Hey Izuku! Just wanted to let you know I’m feeling much better (^v^) I think I had too much sleep in the hospital though, I’ve woken up naturally at 5am and I can’t get back to sleep lol>

<I know you always get up at 5 though so I thought I’d say good morning too!>

<Oh the reception here is reallyyyyy baaaaad so I can only get a signal when I’m standing at a crazy angle in the bath tub (don’t ask how I found this out) so I can’t get your messages or reply to them very easy (T_T) unless I spend my whole week standing in the bath….. hm….. tempting…….>

<OMG I just remembered the clock in my old room is 10 mins too fast!! I really hope this didn’t wake you up!!! Sorry!!!>

<I guess you’re busy today with work – hope it’s not too bad for you! I’ve been alternating the last few hours between being made to relax on the couch and being sent into the garden for some fresh air. My mom’s favourite cure for like *everything* is Fresh Air,, she says it’s why she’s always ‘healthy as a horse’ lol.>

<My parents are off for the next few days then they’ll be going back to work. I’m hoping to spend some time with my friend Iida when they go back, since he only works until mid-afternoon each day. It’ll be really fun to spend some time with him again! I haven’t told my mom yet but I’m probably
going to go and work with her on some of the days next week too. She works on a farm just outside of town, so hopefully I can take a picture of some of the animals and I’ll show you when I get back? I can’t believe my dad still hasn’t got wifi for the house!! And mobile internet around here isn’t even good enough to send you a photo (rip me)

<Mmmm, just had some home-made stew, and I couldn’t stop thinking about how much you would have loved it!! (>v<) I hope you’re not working too hard Deku! And please eat something filling and wholesome if you are! (I know I know it’s like the pot calling the kettle black) (omg my mom’s terrible small town phrases are rubbing off on me and I’ve only been here one day,..) (I’ll come back into the city and you won’t be able to understand me!!) Also I finally convinced my mom to stop sending me into the garden now the sun’s going down. I told her I’m feeling better but if I stay out there in the cold too long I’ll just get sick again>

<*SICK>*

<It made him sad to think that she hadn’t had a reply from him all day.>

He looked at the timestamp on the last message and realised she’d sent it half an hour ago, so chances were she’d still be awake. She’d said she can only receive and send messages when she was in the bathroom, so it’s not like she’d get it until tomorrow anyway, but he’d still send it, he decided, tapping on the screen.

<Hi Ochako! Really sorry I haven’t been able to reply to your messages. I dropped my phone down the side of my bed this morning! (Long story but I need a new alarm clock) I forgot to grab it before I left today and I’ve only just seen what you sent me. I’m so so glad you’re feeling better! I bet you can’t wait for the stitches to come out now. I remember how much I hated them. Shouto is a wizard at removing stitches, it’s a shame you’re not having them removed here, I could have asked him for a favour!>

<Please take lots of photos! :) It would be so cool to see where you grew up. Working on a farm sounds like fun but I bet it’s loads of hard work?? And definitely have lots of fun with your friend, he’s the one you said you used to watch the superhero movies with right? Pretty sure you mentioned him back when we first met? Wow, that feels like such a long time ago now! (me remembering that doesn’t seem creepy right?) (me bringing up that it might be creepy makes it creepy doesn’t it??) Relax and heal up, I’m sure we’ll get to talk soon x>

<P.S. excellent autocorrect fail!! X>

Izuku huffed out a little laugh as he tapped send on his final message and smiled tenderly at his phone. A knotted, concerned feeling lifted from him; knowing that she was going to be having a nice week away was both comforting and sad.
He missed her.

<Hey Izuku! I had a bit of a lazy start to this morning, since my extra sleep finally sorted itself out, so I know you’ll be at work by now but I hope you have a nice rest of your day! X>

<Hey Ochako! Thanks for your message, hope your day has been good so far too. Just having lunch back in the break room at the hospital for once. Usually Denki convinces me to have a McDonalds in the ambulance, but I wanted to send you a message, so we’ve come back so I can grab my phone out of my locker and I made him have a cup of instant noodles with me. That’s a little bit healthier right?? Haha x>

<Ah! Sorry I just got your message, I was having lunch out with my parents! There’s this amaaazing little restaurant near the farm my mom works at, and they use all the produce from it. I swear you can taste the Freshness! It’s literally a signal black zone though. Oh! There’s this really cute wishing well that they’ve built into the restaurant so I threw a coin in it and made a wish (can’t tell you what it was though or it won’t come true!!) but I did take a good selfie with it that I’ll probably make my profile picture as soon as I return to the land of reliable internet x>

<Hope you enjoyed your noodles, definitely better than a burger, but did it taste as good? I’m not going to tell you what I had – it might make you too jealous! X>

<Late reply but Wow, wishing well restaurant sounds cool. I hope your wish comes true. Don’t tell me what you ate, I’ll definitely get jealous! Another microwave dinner for me tonight. 12 hour shift ran over again and I’m so tired I think I’m just going to eat and crawl into bed. Hopefully we’ll be able to catch each other tomorrow? Night night x>

<Hey Izuku! You’ll already be at work when you get this again (T_T) by the time I saw your message last night it had already been a couple of hours and I didn’t want to send you something and maybe wake you up :( :( I can’t believe we keep missing each other like this! I’m not busy later so I’ll spend a while going and checking my phone (I think my mom is getting worried by the amount of times I keep disappearing into the bathroom lmao) x>

<omg noooo, change of plan! There’s a projector being set up in the town hall tonight and they’re going to show some old clips from the school plays through the years – me and my old school friends will be in them! I’ll get to see Iida there too! Sorry Izuku!! X>

<Don’t worry! Hope you’re having fun looking at some old memories! We finished on time today so me and Denki are having an after work coffee at a café you might know well… Your friend Mina was there and she said to tell you that she’s having to cover some of your evening shifts so you owe her, but she also said to tell you that she loves you and misses you. She’s so funny – and so full of energy! Hopefully I’ll get to see you there too one day?? X>

<Aaaaa! I can’t believe you went to Uravity! Please tell me that Mina didn’t tell you all the embarrassing stories she has of me! (>A<;) If she did, they’re all lies!! (I’m glad you can’t see me now actually, I’m sitting on top of Iida’s shoulders in the parking lot of the town hall – it’s the only place signal gets through here!) (again, don’t ask how we found out.) x>

<I’m dying over that image, and I don’t even know what your friend looks like! I loved it at Uravity, the stars and planets and stuff are really pretty. I can see why you like it. I’ve never
even seen you there, but just the aesthetic and being there reminded me so much of you :(

<When Mina’s boyfriend came to pick her up, she sent him over to us to wait while she got ready and he’s a really cool guy! I recognised him from the gym sometimes, though we’ve never spoken, so that was really funny. Him and Denki got on like a house on fire! Next time I go to the gym and see him there I’ll say hi, and maybe we can go back to Uravity again the three of us sometime. I’ll see if Shouto wants to come next time too! Ah, sorry, rambling – anyway, hopefully we can actually chat tomorrow??! Goodnight Xx>

<A bit late but I’m so pleased for you Izuku! Eijiro is super cool, you’ll like him a lot. I’d love it if you two could be friends! (^v^) I told Iida about you and about how we met and it made me miss you too. Night xxx>

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<Day off today :) having a long overdue visit to my mom’s. I decided to turn up as a surprise and when she opened the door I gave her a bunch of flowers and she burst into tears haha it was cute. Made me feel bad that I haven’t been in touch with her as often as I should. But she cries really easily anyway so it wasn’t that surprising. (It’s where I get it from...) Have a good day - I really hope we can synch up schedules and chat properly later! Xx>

<Sorry I haven’t been in touch today Izuku! I got my stitches out! I was kind of excited because I can usually get some signal at the doctor’s surgery, but I forgot to charge my phone last night and it died on the way there. Noooo! RIP. Good news though: stitches came out fine. Doctor said I might get a little scar on my head, but it might heal over time completely instead. Guess I’ll wait and see?? Hope you had a nice day with your mom - me and parents went for a walk in the park after my appointment so that was nice <3 Cold though! Glad I had my scarf on. And yes! Definitely! I hope so too xx>

<Izuku? Are you free? Xx>

<??? Xx>

<Ochako I am so so sorry! I just got your messages! How are we doing this?! I’m at the hospital - I’ve been called in to cover a night shift at the last minute and it’s for a good friend so I really couldn’t say no. Shino was one of the paramedics who helped you that morning and her daughter isn’t very well so she’s taking a few days off to look after her - I said I’d cover for her :). It means I’ll be sleeping tomorrow for my night shift tomorrow night, so I won’t be able to message you. I’m going to switch my phone off now though, so please keep sending me messages and I’ll have a read of them after I get up tomorrow night before my shift. It’ll make me smile before I start! :) Sorry again, this is such bad timing huh? Xxx>

<Sorry, just saw your reply! Ah no don’t worry! It’s ok! Night shift sounds rough! Please get some good rest tomorrow! You’re so kind Izuku, ready to jump in at the last minute to help out a friend. It’s not long until I get to come home anyway, so we’ll see each other then for sure! Can’t wait xxx>

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<Another cold and dark morning here. I hope your shift wasn’t too bad! Got up with my mom this morning and went with her to work. Oh boy. It was waaaaaaay too early to be working that hard oof. The animals never do what you want them to do... The owners of the farm are this sweet old couple though and they usually give my mom lunch every day so they did one for me too - bread slices>
nearly as thick as my arm(!) huge wedge of cheese inside and some kind of homemade pickle? It was super tasty.xxx>

<It’s been nice to be looked after by my parents again for a little while but I’m ready to come back home now. It’s been nice to have a bit of tranquillity, since I’m always so busy and I don’t really make enough time to enjoy the little things - but I’m working on it, something you inspired in me xxx>

<I’m missing friends and I actually really miss my job. Every morning my dad makes himself a coffee so by the time I get into the kitchen there’s this lingering coffee smell and it makes me nostalgic xxx>

<I got to briefly ring Mina today (still standing in the bath) and the signal was a bit crackly but it was nice to hear her voice again! She said it’s been a mixture of herself and the new boy Kurai who’ve been covering my shifts, so I feel kind of bad that I’ve put them both to so much trouble (he’s a student though so I expect he was glad of the overtime too) xxx>

<Ok. I told my parents I’m going home tomorrow. I’ve enjoyed it but I really want to get back - so I’m hopping on a train tomorrow afternoon. Should be back in the city about 7.30ish? I could get a taxi from the station, but they’re so overpriced, so I’ll get the bus to the apartment - which means I’ll be getting home about 8 ! (^o^) I know that your night shift starts around then so we won’t be able to see each other, but I’ve still got a few days off work for my sicknote, so I’ll be in all day the day after! Xxx>

<Please knock on my door when you get back in the morning if you’re not too tired!! I’ll be happy to see you whatever time it is xxx>

<Hey Ochako, just about to head out for work and I can’t stop smiling - your messages really did cheer me up before my shift! I’m so excited to see you and talk to you properly finally. You can tell me all about your hometown! And your parents! And your friends! I’m so sad I’m working tomorrow night, I wish I could see you straight away, but I’ll be sure to come see you the morning after - no matter how tired I am xxx>

<Xxx>

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<Train feels extra long today. I think it’s because I can’t wait to get back! Nearly home! Xxx>

<On your way though! Xxx>

<Wait., omg are you there?? X>

<I am! Are you?? X>

<I AM! Ahh I can’t believe we’re finally messaging at the same time!! (T_T) <3 xxx>

<It’s so good to talk to you in real time! Xxx>

<This is Amazing! I literally just screeched at my phone and there’s a lady looking at me strangely lmao!! X>

<I’m just getting ready for work, I’m having ‘breakfast’ haha x>
Hope it's nice then! I brought some snacks with me but it's getting really hard to resist the lady that comes down the train with the snack trolley... I might have to get a coffee... X>

I’m not going to encourage anything but you should totally get the coffee xxx

That’s completely encouraging me!! xxx

Man, it sucks that we’re going to just miss each other :( xxx

I knowwww ! But we’ve already planned tomorrow and I will fight the universe itself if it puts anything else in our way xxx

No way, tomorrow will be perfect - no crazy interruptions, no accidents, I promise xxx

Oh, got to go! No time for coffee! It’s pulling into the station! Xxx

No problem, see you tomorrow! Have a good night xxx

So I just got back, wow that whole journey was long,,, Hope you have a good shift, I’ll see you tomorrow morning (finally!) can’t wait xxx

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter is different to the others, so please let me know what you think - even if you hated it. I really wanted a snappy way of passing time, while also giving a little bit of an insight into what they're doing respectively. My heart squeezed with how badly I wanted them to be able to reach each other.
Warm Snuggles

Chapter Summary

If the stars won't align for us to be together... I'll align them myself.

Chapter Notes

So, this is it. The end.

This story started out as a oneshot a long time ago, then it got extended for Izuo cha week - I intended on publishing one chapter a week (ahahaha) - then it grew wildly out of control and here we are over 50,000 words later. Also I completely edited the previous chapters. So if you read through it from the beginning you might get a surprise here and there~

I'm not going to embarrass myself by gushing about how much everyone's support and kind comments have meant to me, because I'll just start crying and you all just want to get on with the story right? But if you'd like to join me on my blog on tumblr @Izupie you can find me sobbing over my keyboard~

I still can't believe this is the final chapter - it's been such a ride, thank you all so much for joining me. I really really hope that it provides a satisfying conclusion, I've worked super hard on it for you guys and I'm pretty proud of it. I've never finished a multi-chapter project before, so this is really exciting and sad for me. Like saying goodbye to a good friend.

Please enjoy Izuku and Ochako's final Beep Beep Beep antics! (and all of that sweet second-hand embarrassment)
- Izupie

Ochako locked her phone and shoved it into her backpack as she gathered up her belongings quickly. She hadn't even noticed how close she was to the city when she’d heard the announcement that the train was coming to her stop – being able to talk in real-time to Izuku had been so much fun that she’d lost track of where she was. The breaks screeched loudly as Ochako scrambled out of her seat, wrestled with her heavy case, and hastily dragged it to a set of open doors.

She leapt out of the carriage just in time; the doors beeped loudly behind her as they slammed shut. She let out a little sigh as she adjusted the backpack on her shoulders, hearing the train set off again with another screech of metal on metal and feeling people push past her on either side as they rushed towards the exit. It looked like most of the train had got off here. Ochako had only spent a few days in the country, but she’d already nearly forgotten what such a crowd looked like; young, old, families, tourists, workers, shoppers…

By the time Ochako had made it outside the underground station she was wiping sweat away from under her bangs. She pulled her case to one side, out of the way of the steady stream of passengers
also exiting the underground, and she took off her heavy coat to appreciate the frosty air. The city stations were always so crowded and heated so fiercely that it felt like a furnace down there. It didn’t help that her old suitcase was so beaten and worn that sometimes the wheels stuck, so she’d have to drag it with both hands. A gratefully cool breeze whispered over her clammy skin. It was so cold outside that she knew she’d be putting her coat back on soon, but for now it felt wonderful.

It was good to be home.

Funny that she’d started thinking of the city as her home – but even the sour smell of drainage and the sharp tang of exhaust fumes brought back a feeling of contentment and belonging. People walked with their heads bowed over cell phones, lighting up their faces in the gloom, or chatting loudly with friends and colleagues as they went by her, and she had to resist the urge to smile. It was like a sea of anonymity; nobody cared who you were, what kind of job you’d got, or what you were doing with your life.

Back in her hometown, it had been almost cloying to have everyone want to know her business – What had she been doing since university? Where was she living? Had she got herself a boyfriend? That last question had sure thrown her a few times. Green eyes, freckles and a warm smile had never been far from her thoughts.

Ochako slipped back into her coat with a shiver.

It had been annoying to answer personal questions over and over when kindly neighbours asked (though she knew there was more than a hint of nosiness involved in the asking too) but she was surprised to find that she wasn’t embarrassed to answer. She hadn’t cried over physics textbooks, had nightmares about equations, fallen asleep studying in the library, and spent hours in stuffy lecture halls for nothing – she’d earned her degree, whether she was using it or not. She was happy with where she was and what she was doing, even if it was something that she hadn’t been expecting. The disconnect between her real feelings and her desire to conform and make everyone proud had left her torn for so long. It was amazing how just one person could have such an effect on her life, and how his enthusiasm and optimism were so infectious.

She got asked about her healing head wound a few times too, when she hadn’t cleverly concealed it under her fringe. She always kept her explanation vague. There was an unexpectedly sharp pang of embarrassment, regret and guilt whenever someone brought it up, and she just hoped that nobody in the town would ever see that article about her accident online.

Ochako shook her head and glanced at the sky, feeling a jolt of disappointment at the hazy darkness – no stars to be seen at all. One of the best things about being in the middle of nowhere had been the lack of light pollution obscuring her view of the night sky. It had been beautiful.

Ochako turned her head to throw a wistful look at the line of taxis nearby the station, pursing her lips as she considered jumping into one to get back to the apartment… but they were always so expensive, and the bus stop was only a short walk for a fraction of the price... With a decisive huff she turned away from the line of black cars and tugged at her case to get the wheels rolling again.

The bus was busy, so she had to stand near the doors with her luggage, but she enjoyed seeing the bustle and diversity of the city again; a group of young men were shouting and whooping, an old lady sat with an enthusiastically singing child on her lap, someone on their phone was loudly discussing their grocery list, and a couple nearby were sharing headphones and singing along. The cacophony of chatter and laughter and people made Ochako want to smile again.

The journey was uneventful until a few stops in, when she jolted with a start and craned her neck to
see out of the window. They were about to pass the hospital. It was always a sight; towering high over the city, lit up brightly night or day, with the words UA Hospital in huge shiny letters above the glass entryway. The place had never meant anything to her before, but she felt a rush of affection as she looked up at it through the window now, despite her ordeal there not too long ago. Ochako put a gentle hand to the white line of puckered skin on her forehead, just under her small sweeping fringe.

There was a bus stop right outside the imposing building, but nobody wanted to get on or off, so the bus sailed by and she watched the hospital disappear behind the other tall buildings nearby. Her heart lurched in her chest as she realised Izuku could be there now. Or maybe he’d already got into the ambulance and would be driving around the city?

Ochako kept her eyes peeled for the rest of the trip, hoping to see an ambulance with his recognisable mop of green hair through the window.

She didn’t see any at all.

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When she finally made it through her apartment door Ochako threw herself onto her couch and took a deep breath.

Home at last.

At least she was seeing him tomorrow, she conceded with a soft smile. Properly. No twisted ankles, no head wounds and not while she’s in her pajamas to chew him out for his alarm clock waking her up. But... it was time to tell him the truth about their first meeting; once that was out in the open between them, she’d feel much better, even though she was sure he was going to feel intensely guilty about it. Then that would make her feel guilty, and he’d apologise for disturbing her, and she’d apologise for lying, and then they’d just be two idiots apologising.

She hoped.

A tiny voice of doubt whispered that maybe he wouldn’t want anything to do with her again if he couldn’t trust her. It was such a small thing to lie about, but maybe he would decide he couldn’t be with someone who had lied to him the moment they’d met.

Ochako rolled from side to side on the couch and rubbed at her face, trying to push the distressing thought out of her head. She sighed in defeat as she glanced over at her luggage beside the door and jumped off the couch to pull it all into her bedroom.

She unzipped her case and sighed loudly at the haphazard appearance of the contents, stuffed and shoved inside. Her decision to leave had been so sudden that she’d kind of thrown her clothes into her case without much consideration to the amount of time and effort it was going to take to unpack it all at the other end. But then she supposed she needed something to take her mind off eagerly waiting for Izuku to finish his night shift anyway.

Ochako gulped down the rest of a bottle of water from her backpack and coughed with a frown, disappointed that it did nothing to alleviate the feeling of butterflies flapping consistently and persistently in her stomach. It was going to be a long night.

Abandoning her case Ochako impulsively shuffled into her bathroom, twisted the taps for the bath and dumped a large glug of her sweet-smelling bubble bath into the water. A relaxing hot bath seemed like the best idea before anything else, to get out of the clothes she’d been travelling all day in, if nothing else.
It was a pain that it had taken so long to get back, since there were no train routes from her hometown that could get her directly into the subway station she needed – she’d had to change three times, and one train nearly had to loop back on where she’d come from to get on the right track. But it was the only way to get back home without troubling her parents any further. They’d already done so much for her.

Ochako shed her clothes and sank into the bubbles with a long exhale, surrounded by the gentle, sweet scent of vanilla and hot water that soothed every muscle in her travel-weary body.

Her parents were always so kind and patient with her, even after they’d cut their own holiday short – it had been heart-breaking to look through their photos and see how much fun they’d been having before rushing back for her. She knew that one of the reasons she’d always strived for a high-flying well-paid job had been because she’d so often wished there was some way she could pay them back for all the times they’d taken care of her. But… she couldn’t remember a time when her parents hadn’t been supportive of anything she’d tried or done; whether it was pouring over physics calculations or pouring someone a coffee. They’d seemed so excited for her to just be at home with them, cooking her favourite meals, endlessly asked if she needed anything, and listening to all her stories with a smile. She’d always assumed that getting a well-paid job would allow her to finally be able to repay some of what her parents had done for her and give them the comfortable lifestyle she thought they deserved. But maybe just going to visit more often, and showing them that she was happy and doing well, was enough for them?

After all, dreams and aspirations could change.

It was time to reach for new stars.

Ochako formed some of the bubbles of her bath into a lumpy, bubbly shape that resembled a heart and blew on it gently.

Hadn’t Izuku told her in one of his messages that he’d gone to visit his own mom over the last few days? She should take some inspiration from that. Maybe next time she could take Izuku with her and introduce him to her parents and the townsfolk… What would her neighbours make of that?

The thought made Ochako blush and she sank her face below the soapy bubbles, letting the hot water envelope her.

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She was in a fresh pair of pajamas, blow drying her hair, when she noticed her phone buzzing on the bed. She peered over at the screen as the buzzing stopped – the notification on the screen stated that she had ‘4 Missed Calls’. Ochako snatched her phone from the bed immediately and fumbled to unlock it with her pin code, annoyed that her bath-wrinkled fingers wouldn’t work the fingerprint sensor.

They were from Mina.

Ochako tapped to call her back and paced the room, listening to the ringing tone in her ear, while she absentmindedly rubbed the scar on her forehead. Why on earth would Mina try and ring her four times?

It connected.

“Mina?”

“Hey Ocha! Finally!”
“Mina, are you okay? I’m so sorry I didn’t get your calls, I was having a bath, is everything alright? Are you alright?” Ochako tumbled out, repeating herself and clutching the phone with a tight grip.

“I’m fine, but I really need your help! It’s terrible.”

Ochako’s heart thumped painfully. “Wh-What is it? I promise I’ll try and help any way I can.”

“I’m at Zero Gravity closing it down and I don’t know what I’m doing.”

“You’re… closing… huh?” Ochako pulled a face as she felt her heartbeat finally begin to slow down, sitting heavily on the bed. “I-I thought someone had died! Why would you start the conversation like that after trying to ring me four times?”

“Someone has died,” Mina wailed. “Me! Inside!”

Ochako tried not to sigh in relief, glad it was nothing serious but not wanting her friend to think she was making light of her struggles. “I didn’t even think you did close downs. I thought Kurai was supposed to be covering those for me?”

“He rang in sick,” Mina explained, a pout in her voice, “so I’m stuck closing, but I don’t know if I’ve done it right. And now I can’t find the key to the fridge to turn it off.”

“Okay, okay, don’t worry, I can talk you through it. Let’s start with the key - it should still be in the fridge at the back, top left corner.”

“Thanks!” Mina brightened up immediately.

Ochako could hear her the swishing of her friend’s alien uniform coming through the phone as she moved. There was a pause.

“There’s no key here…”

“Wh- Huh? Really? But it’s always there!”

“Definitely no key,” Mina said. “Can I just maybe… not turn the fridge off for tonight?”

Ochako waved a hand, despite nobody being able to see the action. “No, no, that’ll make it overheat and you won’t be able to use it tomorrow.” She looked up at the ceiling while she thought. “Ah! It might be in the manager’s office. There’s a drawer she keeps spare keys in.”

“Right, here I go.”

There was another pause as Ochako listened to the sounds of Mina moving through the empty café; a door creaking, footsteps, a drawer opening.

“Um, Ocha, there’s like a billion keys in here.”

“What? Ah… okay… that could be a problem.”

“What am I gonna do? It’ll take all night to go through these one by one. If I ring the manager and tell her the fridge key is missing, she’ll never trust me on my own again…” Mina sighed loudly.

Ochako cringed and ran a hand through her almost-dry hair, letting her bangs float back in front of her face. She’d been doing nothing but travelling all day, but her friend needed her... “Don’t worry Mina.” She clenched a fist in front of her and nodded. “I’m coming over. We can sort this together.”
“Really? Oh, Ocha! You are the best! The best friend I’ve ever had!” Mina nearly yelled down the phone.

Ochako laughed lightly, turning bashful at her praise. “I suppose I do owe you one for taking this shift on at all, since it’s my fault it needs covering in the first place. I’ll catch the next bus straight over! I’ll be—oh, I don’t know—ten minutes? Fifteen tops. I’m on my way!”

“Love you babe!” Mina ended with a sing-song voice as Ochako smiled and tapped her screen to end the call.

If she wanted to catch the next bus, she was going to have to be swift. Her eyes flicked to her bedroom clock as she flung open wardrobe doors, jogging on the spot as if that would somehow make her faster. She didn’t have time to get dressed again—she’d just shove on some black sweatpants and keep her pajama top on underneath her coat. Ochako threw her dark green pajama bottoms onto the bed as she left the room, still pulling up the sweatpants, and grabbed her coat from the peg beside her door. It felt strange to be putting her coat and boots back on again. A rummage through her backpack from earlier revealed her purse, and she pocketed it and her phone as she flew out the door.

Jogging down the corridor brought back memories of the morning that she’d tried to go to the gym to surprise Izuku. A bittersweet memory. She idly wondered how things would have gone differently if she’d never fallen on the ice.

Ochako burst out of the apartment building’s front doors into the night. The chill made her shiver, even under her coat, as her warm skin from her bath and barely dried hair made her even colder. But she’d do just about anything for her friends. Her boots pounded on the concrete as she ran, determined to get there fast, even as a spike of fear pierced the back of her mind at the ice she could see forming in patches on the floor. She wasn’t going to slip this time.

She made it to the bus stop just as it turned the corner and she raised a hand for it to stop, nearly bent over double. The old bus driver gave her a funny look as she wheezed out what ticket she wanted and handed over some change before she shuffled to a seat and dropped onto it. *Mina better appreciate this,* she thought, looking up at the inside of yet another vehicle of public transport. She leaned back into her seat and ran a hand through her hair, knowing the cold, damp air had frizzed it up even more to make her bob style look even thicker and bouncier.

Lights flashed by outside the window as the bus rumbled through the city. Again.

It was much emptier and far more subdued than the one from earlier.

It only took a short while for the bus to get to the stop near Zero Gravity (it felt even shorter to someone who wanted a moment to catch their breath properly) and Ochako thanked the driver as she hopped down, ready for a brisk walk.

She couldn’t help the little smile that flickered onto her face as she came closer to the café, catching sight of the faded wooden spaceship propped up on the roof. It brought back the same kind of fond feeling of familiarity and home that she’d experienced when entering the city earlier.

Ochako was surprised when she tried the front door and it was locked. At least Mina had found the front door key. The blinds were all shut, but the lights were on and she knew her friend was expecting her, so she knocked on the window. Almost immediately there was a clicking sound of a key in a lock and the door flung open wide.

“Oh, I am *so* glad you came Ocha!” Mina swept Ochako into a hug and spun her around, so they
switched places. “I know you’ll be glad too.”

“Eh?”

“So, don’t worry – fridge is off – everything is sorted, just have a good evening.” Mina winked and kissed her forehead. “It’s great to see you back. Don’t hate me. I love you!” She reached around the doorway to slam the lights off then skipped away before Ochako could even process what was going on.

“M-Mina?! What’s- *Mina!”* Ochako yelled into the street, cringing as a few passers-by threw her odd looks.

But Mina was gone.

Ochako huffed angrily and puffed out her cheeks as she went back inside the café, intending to turn the lights on and just check the place over, but she stopped mid-step.

“What the…” she breathed. The whole café was covered in strings of fairy lights – even more than usual – winding and twisting over the tables and chairs, dripping over the counter and draped over the plastic planets hanging from the ceiling. Softly glowing spots of silver shone through the darkness and bright lights like stars were being projected onto every surface. Ochako lifted her hands in awe to see the spots of light on her skin. It looked like she’d just fallen into the night sky.

It was beautiful.

She looked around, mouth still open slightly, and noticed the ‘stars’ were being projected from a glowing ball in the centre of the room.

Ochako softly closed the front door behind her and began to walk over to the projector, wondering why Mina had set this up, when she noticed a figure standing nearby, nearly hidden in the dark shadows cast by the lights.

She yelped in surprise and grabbed a chair, brandishing it in front of her. “Who’s there?”

“Ah! N-No- Wait, Ochako, it’s okay- it’s just me! It’s just me!”

She could barely make out the figure that jolted forwards quickly and dropped down to crouch by the projector, but the voice was achingly familiar. She heard a few clicks and the starry lights illuminated the café more brightly, making it so that she could see the figure clearly as he stood up and rubbed the back of his neck.

Ochako replaced the chair slowly.

“Izuku?”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you. I was going to say something- but you looked so, um… so pretty standing there and I…”

Ochako wasn’t sure who moved first. But within another beat of her heart, so loud in her ears, they had pulled each other into an embrace. She buried her face in his chest, arms tight around his middle, and gripped onto fistfuls of his soft hoodie. His strong arms squeezed her against him, and he lay his head on her shoulder.

Together at last.
It was like everything she’d been feeling for him came crashing through her in waves all at once; that initial spark, gratitude, friendship, fondness, admiration, affection… She’d missed him so much. Though they’d only been apart a few days but her longing to talk to him and be close to him had only grown with each day that passed.

She inhaled deeply and snuggled into his warm embrace. His clothes had picked up the subtle tang of coffee that permanently lingered in the café.

“I thought you had to work tonight,” she eventually managed, though it still came out as barely more than a whisper into the soft material of the hoodie over his broad chest.

“I was supposed to be.” He turned his head slightly so that his breath tickled the skin on her neck.

She shivered, despite her warmth, and hated that her thick winter coat felt like a barrier between them. She had to resist the urge to just throw it off.

Izuku eventually pulled back gently so that they could look at each other. Silver light kissed the flushed skin of his cheeks, and the projected stars gave him cosmic freckles.

“Someone gave me some good advice. I decided it didn’t matter if the universe just kept on keeping us apart. I just needed to try harder.” He brushed a stray flyaway piece of hair behind her ear and stroked her cheek lightly. “Last time I got you a bouquet of flowers, but this time… this time I got you the stars.”

Ochako could feel tears filling her vision and she tried to say something, but her voice stuck in her throat. Something she couldn’t identify passed between their shared gaze, intense and powerful, and she had the sudden incredible urge to kiss him. She might even have done it if he hadn’t blinked and looked away, a vibrant red blooming strongly across his nose.

“Uh, sorry, that was kind of corny…”

His hand drifted away from her cheek.

Ochako shook her head violently, scattering the tear drops she had been desperately holding back, and knew they would be catching the artificial starlight as they finally trickled freely down her cheeks.

“No!” she squeaked. “Nobody has ever said anything like that to me. Ever.” She took a steadying breath, hoping it would stop her voice from wobbling so much. “Nobody has ever tried this hard to get to know me and spend time with me. I-I can’t believe you’d do all this just for me. All of this, it’s beautiful.”

Izuku stared long and hard at her, a smile creasing the skin in the corner of his eyes. “I’m so glad.”

He gently wiped her tears and Ochako’s stomach flipped like the moment of weightlessness that she loved at the very top of a roller-coaster, just as plunges down the track. She felt like her whole body was being held together by the vibrations of the pulse through her veins.

“Although you did nearly attack me with a chair,” he added playfully.

Ochako blushed as she hiccupped and clamped her hands to her mouth. “Ah! I did, didn’t I? I’m sorry Izuku, I didn’t know it was you.” She couldn’t help the laughter that bubbled out from behind her hand.

Izuku chuckled along with her. “You know, you always make me smile. I can’t understand how I’m
the first person who feels this way about you. I think you’re… kind of amazing. And so brave.” His
hand moved from her cheek to ghost over the scar on her forehead. “Look I… I know I’m a bit of a
mess really; I’m awkward and I stutter when I’m nervous, I work too much, I never eat properly, and
I’m covered in scars… but… I… I just… I really like you Ochako. I want to spend so much more
time with you, i-if you’d like to.

“I mean, you don’t have to or anything. Just, if you wanted to go out somewhere for a nice meal
maybe? Or, um, catch a movie together? Or we could just go to the park or something? But then I
guess it’s a little too cold to do that right now… Something. Anything. Together. As a couple?” His
rambling voice trailed off and he looked steadfastly at the ceiling as he scratched a cheek.

Ochako couldn’t even formulate a reply, filled with so many huge emotions, so she simply reached
out and pulled him back into her arms. She knew her tears were soaking through the fabric of his
hoodie, flowing fast and thick, but she couldn’t pull away – she was terrified that she was going to
wake up on her couch in her apartment, still there from where she’d thrown herself after getting back
from the station.

His arms circled tightly around her.

“You’re wrong,” she muttered into his chest, “wrong, wrong, wrong. You’re the amazing one!”
Ochako pulled back and pinched her eyebrows together as she stared hard at his bright green eyes,
sparkling with the reflected starlight. “You’re not a mess to me. Not at all. You’re so cool and sweet
and kind. You don’t know how much you’ve inspired me! I really like you! I would love to spend
more time with you as a couple. Lots of time!”

Izuku blinked with a surprise so earnest it made her heart ache in her chest. “R-Really?”

He was blushing furiously, and she could feel her own cheeks burning, but she still nodded
emphatically.

“Really really!”

Izuku squeezed her close and spun her around like Mina had done, but his strong arms lifted her feet
off the ground effortlessly and they spun in a complete circle. She laughed loudly until he replaced
her back to the floor.

There were tears in his eyes. She wasn’t sure why she found it so endearing that he wore his
emotions on his sleeve so much, but it just emphasised how genuine he was, and how adorable it
was that he couldn’t hide how he felt. Again, something intense passed between them, but again it
was broken when Izuku wiped at his watery eyes with the back of his scarred hand and Ochako
wiped hers with her coat sleeve.

She shook her head. “Anyway, I’m the one that’s the mess. Compared to me, you’re really on top of
the adulting thing, I promise.”

Izuku looked like he was about to disagree, but instead he paused for a moment and then shyly
suggested, “Maybe we… can be two barely functioning adults that together… make a really
functioning one?”

Ochako’s face softened into a smile. “I-I’d like that. Very much.”

Izuku beamed at her, his expression tender and almost glowing with happiness, (or maybe it was still
the starlight) when he suddenly he tilted his head and held up a finger. “Oh! Just remembered, there’s
one more surprise.”
Ochako blinked as he removed himself from their embrace and vaulted himself with ease over the serving counter. He disappeared behind it and she took the moment alone to scrub at her face with her hands. Could this really… be real? Not a dream?

Joy sang through her veins.

Izuku’s head popped up again and he vaulted back over the counter to her. Under one arm was some kind of green folded-up material. He stood a few paces away and flapped the material into the air, laying it gently onto the ground, then gestured at it proudly with a hand.

“After you,” Izuku said.

Ochako looked down at the blanket and up at the stars before she understood with a little gasp. The green looked just like grass. As she excitedly lay down, she noticed Izuku move towards the projector and heard a click again as the projected light grew slightly darker, like it was when she first walked in. She made a small sound of surprise as she got the full effect from her position on the blanket – it was even more beautiful than the real night sky; pinpoints of silvery starlight speckled the whole room and the soft glow of fairy-lights lit up the planets hanging from the roof, highlighting their bright colours of blue, pink and purple. It looked like something from a sci-fi movie.

She reached a hand towards the ceiling and she had the sudden dizzying sensation that she would be able to tumble up into it.

Ochako felt a shifting beside her as Izuku settled himself down. Their shoulders touched. She jumped slightly (which was ridiculous because weren’t they just hugging and hadn’t she kind of wanted to kiss him?) and she reached a hesitant hand over to his. Izuku threaded their fingers together. A blush continued to warm her cheeks.

“I can’t believe how pretty this all is!” she said again. “Thank you so much. You must have worked so hard on all of it.”

“It was worth it,” Izuku whispered softly.

A thought suddenly occurred to Ochako. “Wait, does the Manager know about all this? Us being here after closing. The lights?”

“I actually asked her not long after your parents picked you up – she said it was no problem. At that point I thought I’d got a week to prepare though, and then you came home early, so I had to improvise a little.”

“Oops! Sorry!” (She wasn’t really.)

“No, don’t worry – it worked out better because I had to rope Mina into helping me, and she’s scarily efficient,” Izuku said fondly. “She kicked out the poor guy already in here doing his job and finished off what he had left, while I set up all the lights. I tasked her with getting you here on short notice and I guess she succeeded.”

Ochako snorted a laugh. “Oh, she certainly did.”

“And since she’s been in on it this time, there’s no way she could… you know. So, it all kind of worked out perfectly.”

Even though she’d never meant to, Mina had managed to interrupt them three times already, and Ochako knew how bad she felt about it. Izuku asking her for this favour must have seemed like the perfect way to make it up to them.
She’d have to make sure to send her a thank you message later.

“Mm-hm,” Ochako hummed in belated agreement, “perfectly.”

For a time, they lay in silence, soaking in the atmosphere and the joy of each other’s company. Izuku’s hand was warm in hers, and she hoped he wouldn’t be able to feel the sweat she suspected was starting to collect on her palm. Was there a way of discreetly letting go and wiping the sweat off on her coat and then holding his hand again without it being obvious that’s what she was doing?...

_Probably not_...

While her ridiculous thoughts raced in time with the beating of her heart a tiny shiver passed through Izuku’s shoulder into hers, and Ochako remembered the heating in the café was set to automatically turn off when the last person finished their shift. Her winter coat was keeping her warm – Izuku was only wearing a hoodie. She bolted upright and pulled down the zipper without hesitation.

“You’re probably freezing, right? Here, we can both fit under this if I lay it out.”

“No, I’m fine, honestly. Don’t take off your coat, it’s fine- you stay warm!”

“Don’t be silly, it can be like a blanket on top of us- oh!” Ochako yelped as she removed it, then immediately crushed it back to her chest. “Oh no. Not again. Not _again_. Can’t believe I forgot.”

“Ochako?” Izuku sat up in concern.

She hesitated and then finally groaned in defeat as she slowly pulled the coat away from her chest. “Y’see… I didn’t have time to get changed after Mina rang and asked me to come here, so I just threw on a pair of sweatpants and stuck a coat over my pajama top… and I, um, I actually bought it in town after I got my stitches removed.” Ochako fidgeted and was unable to look at him. “I saw it in a shop window and it… reminded me of you…” she confessed.

To his credit, Izuku didn’t laugh. Instead, Ochako chanced a glance at him and was able to see the force of his blush darkening his cheeks further, even in the dim lowlight.

Her pajama top was a light grey t-shirt with a huge printed image of Deku the cartoon rabbit sleeping right in the centre. Dark green words printed below him read ‘Some Bunny Needs Sleep’.

She flapped her hands in front of her face. “I swear I wear normal clothes!”

Izuku laughed and said softly, “You always look p-pretty Ochako, no matter what you wear. I told you before, didn’t I? Besides, I think it’s… cute. It suits you.” His voice was barely more than a whisper.

Ochako ducked her head to hide her blush, and frantically gestured for him to lie back down, so she could cover them both with her coat.

The floor felt even harder on her back without the extra layer between herself and the floor, but feeling Izuku shuffle even closer against her to fit under the makeshift blanket was worth it.

A slightly awkward silence descended on them.

“I made up with my friend from work that I was telling you about,” Izuku announced suddenly.

“Really? The one that calls you Deku?”

“Yeah. Well I mean, we kind of got into a bit of a fight first-”
“Huh!?"

“-Oh, fight’s probably a bad word for it, nobody threw a punch or anything. Hm, Kacchan punched a wall I guess, and I wanted to- well anyway, it all worked out in the end. I think we could be proper friends again one day, and I even invited him for a drink sometime after work. Same with Shouto and Denki. I was so happy they agreed to it.”

“That’s amazing Izuku, good for you. In fact, you’ve told me so much about him- I’d really like to meet Denki one day! And find out who this ‘Kacchan’ is,” she mumbled under her breath.

“I bet Denki would love to meet you too,” Izuku continued, unaware of what she’d whispered, “and I know you’ve already met Shouto, but he’s way more relaxed out of work, so that would be fun too.”

“Hm,” Ochako hummed in a distracted agreement, not really being able to imagine Shouto being relaxed, but added more enthusiastically, “I’m sure you’ll have a great time with them.”

“I’m looking forward to it. I’ve never really- had good friends like that. Like you do.”

“Wha- But everyone I’ve met who knows you loves you?” The words tumbled out before she could stop them, since they were entirely true, and Izuku made a small choking sound in reply. It fizzed a joyful emotion in her chest that she wasn’t expecting. Did she enjoy getting him flustered?

“Oh yeah,” Ochako chirped, changing the topic of conversation for him, “I was going to tell you in our texts the other day that I’ve decided to ask the manager of this place if I can work towards becoming the manager myself, and maybe buy the place off her one day.”

Izuku gripped her hand tightly and rolled onto his side to look at her. “W-What? Ochako that’s- I’m so excited for you! That’s amazing!”

“You don’t think it sounds like an impossible goal?” She turned her head a little, but her body remained facing the ceiling.

Izuku shook his head. “No way! I could see you running this place no sweat. You should go for it. I’ll back you up in case she needs convincing. Oh, that kind of came out wrong. I mean, like- in a character reference way. Not in a knuckle cracking way.”

Ochako’s laughter burst out of her. “In case she needs convincing,” she grumbled in an artificially deep voice between her laughter.

Izuku joined in and rolled back to face the stars, letting his laughter subside with a happy sigh.

“Really though, if it’s something you think the manager would even consider, and it’s something you want, you should do it. I don’t think anything would stop you.” There was admiration in his voice and Ochako blushed at the idea that he could find her worth admiring.

“Thank you,” she said sincerely. “Well the good thing going for me is that she’s already opened… hm- like, thirteen cafés already so-”

“Thirteen?!?”

“-Yup. This one is the latest, even though it’s been open a few years. All the others have been sold on, so I figure I could ask her if she’ll wait for me to be able to afford it until she sells this one. I’d really like to keep it as it is- and she’s already told me this one is her favourite- so I think she’ll be pretty open to the idea. Plus, she kind of likes me,” Ochako babbled. “I can work more hours,
though my savings are already pretty good, and I could get a loan for the rest once I’ve got most of it. She could even rent it out to me if she didn’t want to sell it. Though it gets confusing over who is paying who if she’d be paying my wages and I was giving it back in rent… hm…”

“Wow, you’ve, uh, really thought hard about this huh?”

Ochako shrugged (their shoulders were so close that it made his shrug too.) “There wasn’t much else to do back home when everyone was busy.”

“Well count me in for being behind you one hundred percent.” Izuku punched the air above them with the hand not holding onto hers.

“Thank you, Izuku.” Ochako punched her free one into the air too, making them both laugh again.

There was something so easy and comfortable about being around him. Like them being together was just so right.

“I even thought of a name if I did get to buy it- I’d keep everything the same except that. Since the café is called Zero Gravity right now… and my last name is Uraraka… I thought maybe the name Uravity Café would sound cool? Because y’know… combining words, and almost-rhymes. But I don’t really know what’s cool sounding or not if I’m honest,” she finished quickly.

“I love it!” Izuku gasped. “It is cool. Uravity… It sounds like a superhero name. Although I mean, I’m not really the best judge over what’s cool either.”

Ochako smiled so widely her cheeks hurt. It was the best compliment he could have given her. She’d go for it.

She opened her mouth to tell him that he was cool- but she was feeling shy again and couldn’t quite manage it.

The break in the conversation left a long comfortable silence, until Ochako suddenly raised an arm out from under the coat and pointed at a cluster of the lights on the ceiling. “Wow, see that there?”

Izuku jumped a little. “Huh? See what?”

“Just there.” Ochako made a show of squinting and tilting her head while she moved her hand in the air. “It’s a constellation, see? It’s shaped like a rabbit.”

For a moment there was absolutely no reaction and she wondered if he’d forgotten what he’d said to her back when she’d first told him about her job. A pang of panic shot through her and she was about to explain that she wasn’t crazy, it was just something he’d mentioned to her about fairy lights and constellations, when she noticed him rubbing at his eyes again with his free hand. “I can’t believe you remembered,” he added, his voice thick with emotion.

“A really cool paramedic I met told me to look for them,” she said softly, proud that she had been able to tell him he was cool after all, “definitely not forgettable.”

Izuku cleared his throat loudly. “I-I guess that makes it my turn now… Hm- Ah! Wait, see that one little light there…”

“Where?”

“Where, there. You can’t miss it – it’s shaped like a star.”
“They’re all shaped like stars!” Ochako giggled, lightly bumping her shoulder with his, warmth spreading through her.

“Okay, okay,” he laughed, “how about that group of them over there- see that lumpy looking shape? That constellation looks like a spaceship,” he announced proudly.

Ochako gasped. “It does!”

She turned her head a little to say something more, just as Izuku did the same, so that they were looking at each other instead of the ceiling. His nose was so close she could count his freckles. Ochako blinked and quickly looked away at the lights above them again. “Y’know, this kind of reminds me of when I was a kid and my parents bought me my first telescope. I mean, it was a bit beaten up and dented, since it was second-hand, but it worked just fine. I loved looking through that thing, but I wasn’t very good at spotting real constellations.”

“Well, maybe you should get another telescope. And if you can’t find the ones in the textbooks, you should just make your own up and write them down. It sounds more fun that way anyway.”

“I think I should too… You know what, maybe I will. I could take it up to the roof of the apartment building, I bet that would be a great spot. If I did, we could do this together again one day, but with real stars. Though I think… I’ll always prefer the ones you got me.” She nodded decisively, committing this night to her memory. This perfect night between the two of them.

Her stars.

Izuku squeezed her hand gently. “I-I’d love to.”

Her heart fluttered.

They pointed out a few more ‘constellations’ to each other before Ochako began to feel the cold from the floor seeping up through her back and couldn’t keep from shuffling to try and get comfy. It didn’t help much. Izuku noticed and sat up with a concerned smile.

“You look cold,” he apologised. “Come on, it’s getting late anyway, let’s go home.”

He removed himself from their blanket, stood up, and held out a hand to her. She took it with a small smile and he effortlessly pulled her upright, while she clutched the coat to her chest.

“Good idea,” she yawned, feeling the effects of her day spent travelling and the intense emotions she’d experienced. “But what’s going to happen to all of this? Should we take it with us?”

Izuku shook his head and folded up the blanket, stuffing it under his arm again. “No, it’s okay. Mina said she’s opening the café up tomorrow, so if we put them all in a box, she’ll take care of them. The only thing we need to take is this.” He picked up the small projector globe and Ochako stifled a giggle as the lights projected strongly onto his skin that close, making him speckled all over with stars. He looked like an alien. He smiled at her and she felt that strange weightless feeling in her stomach again.

“Oh, I’ll get the lights so we can see better.” Ochako ran the short distance to the light switch for the café and flicked them all on, wincing at the sudden illumination.

They went about the interior, flicking off the strings of pretty fairy lights one by one and wrapping them neatly into a box Izuku had hidden behind the counter.

(She couldn’t watch while he stood on a chair to pull down the extra ones from the ceiling.)
When they were finished Izuku handed her a key. “You’re probably better to lock this place up than me, since you’ve done it before.”

Ochako nodded. “Oh, many, many times,” she said.

The café was in darkness once more as Izuku took the projector out to his car, the box of fairy lights stored safely in the back of the café, and Ochako took a last glance around at the room before she closed the door; remembering how it had looked when Izuku had given her the gift of the night sky itself. She worked there nearly every day, yet it had been transformed into something only they had shared, and she knew that every time she came to work from now on, she’d remember when it had been theirs alone.

The lock clicked firmly into place and she tried the handle experimentally, just to check. Satisfied, she turned back to Izuku, to see him standing beside a small red car. It was as vibrant as his boots. When she trotted over, he opened the passenger door. “Thought you might want a lift, over taking the bus.”

“That would be great thanks!” Ochako slid into the car gratefully as Izuku shut the door behind her. She couldn’t help but glance in the back as he walked around the car; piles of thick medical books were stacked precariously on the seats, a few crumpled up McDonalds bags among them, a stethoscope was peeking out from under a paramedic jacket, and the green blanket lay across it all as if trying to cover it. (Totally unsuccessfully.) The globe sat on top.

Izuku climbed into the driver’s seat and reached over to pull the blanket down further to hide the pile of stuff. “Ah, sorry about the mess,” he apologised quickly.

Ochako was amused to find he was the sort of person who abandoned stuff on the backseat of his car, meaning to organise it later and then never got around to it. It was so much fun to learn about him.

“No problem, it’s your car after all. Thanks for the lift.” She smiled.

Izuku blushed a little. “W-We’re going to the same building, so I’m happy to give you a lift home.”

For some reason hearing him say ‘home’ and knowing it meant the same place for them both made her heart beat a little faster. “Well we are up-door, down-door neighbours, right?” The immediate moment the words left her mouth Ochako cringed. (Gods, when was she going to learn how to flirt.)

Izuku only chuckled though. “We sure are,” he agreed with feeling.

He turned the engine on and pulled the car away from the café. Ochako watched it disappear around a corner in the side mirror next to her.

She settled into her seat and noticed in her peripheral vision how a flash of light illuminated Izuku’s face and then cast it in shadow again each time they drove underneath a streetlamp. He had a strong jawline, she realised as her gaze lingered on him, even though his features were so expressive and soft. His messy green hair and freckles offset the masculine line of his jaw, and he blushed so easily; the pink would dust his nose and cheeks and she’d seen the tips of his ears go pink too, that it gave him an almost boyish quality. Even though they were in their early twenties she could see echoes of the awkward teenager he’d been. She imagined he’d only get even more handsome as he got older.

Ochako didn’t realise she had progressed into staring until he coughed lightly, and his eyes flicked over in her direction.

“S-Sorry! Didn’t meant to make you uncomfortable – I was just thinking about how good looking
“Ochako squeaked and waved her hands in front of her face. “-make driving. That’s some good looking driving. Really correct and good looking driving.”

“O-Oh, uh, thank you,” Izuku replied earnestly, while Ochako flailed.

(Good looking driving?!) Better than admitting she was admiring how good looking he was she supposed, holding in a sigh.

Or maybe that was something couples admitted to each other? … She’d have to ask Mina.

“I was thinking,” he said suddenly, eyes still on the road, “that since this night shift is being covered for me tonight, and I’ve got another night shift tomorrow, I’ve actually got the day free if you wanted to go out for a coffee? Maybe you could tell me all about your hometown?”

Ochako replied immediately with a bright, “Absolutely! My repeated quest to get signal is its own story. The exciting life and times of what young people will do for signal in the middle of nowhere,” she added with a dramatic voice as she wiggled her fingers in the air.

Izuku’s laugh made her smile. His green eyes flicked in her direction briefly before they went back to looking at the road ahead. “I can’t wait. It sounds hilarious.”

“Oh, it is. I’ll never forget my mom’s face when I said I was going to the bathroom for the third time in half an hour and she caught me standing on the toilet lid with my phone raised above my head like that scene in the Lion King.”

They both laughed then, and she never wanted the car ride to end.

She was disappointed when it did.

Izuku pulled into the parking space reserved for his room number and pulled sharply on the handbrake. (It groaned in protest and she wondered if he’d had the car a long time.) She’d not been in the resident car park before, never having owned a car, and had only ever being picked up from the visitor car park, so it provided her with a new angle to a building she had seen many times before. A different way of seeing things.

Izuku reached into the back and picked up the projector while Ochako struggled to unbuckle her seatbelt. The button stuck and she had to violently wiggle the metal clip free. Luckily, he hadn’t seemed to notice, so she only jumped out of the car just after he did. (How old was this car?)

“Ready?” he asked her softly.

“Yep.”

They both walked into the apartment building together, hand in hand.

Words didn’t seem to be necessary anymore.

They went straight to Ochako’s room, as Izuku naturally steered them there to be a gentleman and drop her off home first, even though he was only a floor away from her. She hesitated as she opened the door. It was the end of their perfect evening together.

“Oh, nearly forgot, this is for you.” Izuku held out the projector to her, with a smile lighting up his face as she took it from him.

“F-For me?”
“They’re your stars, right?”

Ochako no longer knew how she could say thank you-

“I’m so lucky,” he continued, with a little shake of his head, “that you ended up sleep-walking outside my door that morning.”

Oh.

Oh.

Something icy cold threaded through Ochako’s veins and a bitter taste rested on her tongue.

She swallowed hard. “I… I…” Her eyebrows pulled together and her mouth pinched into a thin line as she stared at the gift in her hands.

Izuku leaned closer in concern, worry clouding his features instantly. “Ochako? Are you okay? You don’t have to take it, I just thought…”

“N-No- that’s not- I…You should come in.” Ochako shifted the projector into one hand and used the other to gently tug Izuku inside her apartment. She closed the door behind him and fled into her bedroom, catching a flash of his confusion as she went. As soon as she entered her room she threw her coat off onto the bed, placed the projector beside it, and buried her arms into the mess in her still-unpacked suitcase, flinging clothing to the floor as she rummaged through it. Her hand closed onto a small box. She leapt up, her thoughts in as much chaos as her room was, clutched it tightly to her chest, and ran back to Izuku.

His face was lined with concern when she reappeared, a little breathless. He opened his mouth to say something else when she interrupted him.

“Ah, no, please- let me explain first, no interruptions. Please?” Guilt and fear twisted in her gut. They’d had the perfect evening and now she couldn’t stop the feeling that she was going to ruin it.

Izuku looked ready to protest; she could see his emotions clearly battling through every micro-expression he made, but he eventually nodded, even though his eyebrows were still drawn together.

Ochako let out a long breath. “I got you a gift too. This is for you.” She held out the small box to him like he had just done for her.

He hesitated and tilted his head, his eyes shining with all his unasked questions and concerns. She knew he would be wondering what was going on, but he must have remembered his promise because he simply reached out and took the box.

Ochako nodded encouragingly as he opened it, pulling out an alarm clock. It was a classic rectangular shape, with a bright screen of red numbers, encased in blue plastic. Captain America shields were printed onto the top and sides. Izuku’s eyebrows shot up in surprise, clearly not expecting this.

“I got it from the same shop as my Deku pajamas, so I could replace your broken one,” Ochako explained. “Because… I need to tell you something about how we met. I’ve been wanting to tell you for so long, but I was scared that you’d… that you’d think I was a liar. I’d only just met you and I didn’t want to be mean to someone who had been so nice to me- especially since I felt like we could become friends. Then I was going to confess about it so many times after that but it just never seemed like the right time and I was falling further into the lie and I didn’t want to upset you because I’d seen how kind-hearted you are… and now I can’t stand the thought of losing you, but I have to
tell you…” She knew she was rambling, but the words wouldn’t stop tumbling out of her.

Izuku’s expression was unreadable for once as he listened. It only increased her unease, and her heart thumped painfully in her chest.

“I don’t sleepwalk,” she continued. “I actually came to your apartment to give you a piece of my mind.” Ochako thought back to that morning when she’d finally had enough and marched to his room. “Because of your alarm clock,” she said quietly, stamping down on the desire to look at the floor. He deserved this to his face.

“My…?”

Despite the interruption, she didn’t tell him off for it.

“Every morning at five. The alarm would go off every morning at five. I’m a light sleeper, and I don’t go to bed until late, so I was getting about three hours sleep sometimes. Most times. One morning I’d decided to go tackle you about it.” She took another deep breath, wringing her hands. “I could hear it as loudly as if it was in my own room – beep, beep, beep,” she said softly, her voice trailing away as a lump formed in her throat and tears filled her vision at the heartbroken expression developing on his face.

Izuku looked down at the alarm clock in his hands and then back at Ochako. “That’s why you looked like you’d just got out of bed that morning…” His voice was small. “Why you didn’t tell me why you were there… Why you slept so long in the hospital after your concussion… Why you’ve come back from your hometown looking so much better, because you’ve been getting enough sleep… You’ve been carrying this around with you… You’ve been putting up with this because you thought I’d think…”

“I’m sorry, Izuku. I really am. I didn’t mean to lie, I really didn’t. It just got harder and harder to admit to. When you came up with the idea of sleepwalking I just kind of went along with it. I didn’t want to hurt your feelings or make you feel bad, but I guess doing it like this was worse than if I’d have just brought it up at the beginning huh?” Ochako sniffed and clenched her fists to keep her tears from spilling over.

This was where they would part ways then. At least she’d have her stars to remind her of him.

“Ochako, no- no please don’t cry. I’m the one that’s sorry- you-” Izuku bit his lip and placed his free hand lightly on her shoulders. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, please don’t cry,” he repeated, his voice cracking.

He leaned his face closer to hers, tilting his head slightly, and her eyes widened as their noses brushed and their lips met softly. Ochako closed her eyes. Her heart was pounding and the butterflies in her stomach flapped wildly. His lips were barely there for a moment before he leant back again. It was a chaste kiss; barely more than a gentle press, but his cheeks were blooming a vibrant shade of pink, and she could feel heat rushing to hers.

Ochako’s heart was still beating loudly enough to hear in her own ears. She swallowed, even though her mouth was dry, and couldn’t help an involuntary lick of her lips. Something jolted low in her stomach when she realised his gaze was fixed firmly there. She looked away and she heard him clear his throat awkwardly.

(Her first kiss!)

“So, you don’t… think I’m a liar and never want to see me again?” Ochako asked with difficulty,
hoping that her first kiss wasn’t a kiss goodbye.

“O-Of course not! N-No way!”

Ochako looked back at him, hopeful.

“I just feel so bad,” Izuku explained, “that you’ve been having such a tough time because of me. I knew my alarm had been broken for a while – the volume control won’t work. But I’ve been ignoring it, and I never even considered until recently that it might be a problem for anyone else. Nobody has ever mentioned it to me, so I guess I just thought it was fine. I should have changed it as soon as it broke, I’m so sorry!” He waved a distressed hand.

Ochako flapped hers energetically in response. “No, I shouldn’t have got to the point where I had to march down to your room and demand you do something about it! I should have just gone and told you right away like a normal person. And then I should have just explained when I got the chance!”

“But you were just trying to spare my feelings and be a nice person! I can’t believe you thought I’d think you were a liar and never want to see you again, when this was all my fault to begin with.”

“No, no! I knew you’d feel really bad about it, that’s why I couldn’t tell you about it! Please don’t feel bad.”

There was a tiny pause and Ochako suddenly bowed her head down and clamped a hand over her mouth to hide the smile she could feel twitching at the corners of her lips and hoped to hold in the laughter threatening to bubble out of her. She realised that she’d well and truly predicted that they were just going to end up apologising back and forth like idiots and couldn’t help but find it funny.

Now was not the time for her terrible sense of humour to emerge.

Instead she heard a loud snort from Izuku and looked up to see him shaking with the force of containing his laughter.

Ochako just about managed to speak between giggles, “We are… so weird… I can’t believe… we’ve found each other…”

Izuku burst out with a force of laughter at that and Ochako couldn’t hold her own in any longer. They laughed until they were both gasping for breath. Ochako waved her hands frantically in the air as she tried to get her breath back, while Izuku clutched his stomach and wheezed, the sound was loud and raucous and full of joy and something deeper than affection and friendship.

“I-I think we might be perfect for each other,” Izuku said breathlessly after their laughter had subsided.

The smile on her face was tender as she tried to pour all the warmth she felt in her chest into her expression and voice as she replied, “I think you’re right.” She lifted her chin playfully. “Y’know, actually, I’m actually glad your alarm clock was broken. Or we’d have never met.”

“Then it was worth it, just for that.” Izuku’s smile echoed back to her exactly what she felt inside, and his green eyes sparkled like they were still full of the starlight from the café. “Thank you for a perfect evening- and for the new alarm clock,” he added.

Ochako felt a pang at realising this was him beginning to say goodnight. It was getting late. They needed to part at some point, even though she’d had such a great evening that she didn’t want to end. She struggled to remember that she’d started the morning in the countryside, travelled across the country, and she was here with Izuku now, in her apartment, having told him the truth and it was
okay. She felt silly for ever thinking it would put a wedge between them. He’d felt bad, sure, but so had she. And ultimately, the way it worked out had been for the best in the end. So, what was there to feel bad about?

Ochako closed her eyes and shook her head slightly at her own thoughts, a smile still on her face.

Suddenly she felt a hand slip under her chin and angle her head up. Her heart skipped as his face inched closer to her own – she could feel his breath on her lips. They were so close, and her pulse was so loud in her head, that she barely registered the sound of the alarm clock falling from his hand to the carpet with a soft thud-

**BEEP BEEP BEEP**

They both yelped and sprang apart, scrambling down to the floor to turn it off – at the same time. Their heads bumped together and Ochako squeaked.

**BEEP BEEP BEEP**

She leaned back with an apology while Izuku slammed a hand on the Captain America shield on the top of the alarm, turning it off. They both sighed in their places on the carpet.

Izuku gave a weak, nervous laugh in the silence. “W-Well, at least we know it works, and it’s not too loud at all. Sorry, you okay?”

She stood straight and patted her chest. “Mm, fine, just my poor heart racing from the surprise. I don’t think Doctor Todoroki would have been impressed if I’d turned up at the hospital again with another concussion.” She held out a hand for him and he took it.

“Trying to come up with an explanation for that one would have been funny,” Izuku acknowledged with a smile, as she helped him up. He was clutching the alarm clock firmly in his other hand. “Just remember, if it really has knocked you about, please do go to the hospital. You did have a nasty head wound not too long ago, okay.”

Ochako nodded solemnly, amused at how quickly his professional side could emerge. “Don’t worry, if I need it, my down-door neighbour has these magic bags of frozen peas I can use as an ice-pack…”

Izuku gasped dramatically and groaned while Ochako chuckled.

There was a tiny moment of silence where Ochako wondered if he was going to try and kiss her again. She held her breath, about to move forward and capture his lips with her own anyway, when he mumbled about how it was getting late. She agreed with a small smile, despite the stab of disappointment ringing through her bones, and let him out of her door, following him into the corridor.

“Thank you again for this evening Izuku. It’s been… so special.” It was hard to sum up everything that had happened into a word, and even ‘special’ didn’t feel like it was enough. But it would have to do.

Izuku paused again, uncertainty shining from his eyes. “It’s been a… r-really amazing evening. I can’t wait to see you tomorrow. Let’s go somewhere nice, you pick!”

“Definitely!”

They both hesitated, then he scratched a cheek and began to walk away from her door, moving
backwards so he could still see her as he went down the corridor. “Goodnight Ochako,” he called softly.

“Goodnight, Izuku- see you tomorrow!” Ochako waved energetically. She was reminded strongly of the first time they’d met, though that had been in the corridor below them.

She continued to wave until he’d disappeared through the door into the stairwell.

Ochako inhaled and exhaled the biggest breath she could fit into her lungs. She didn’t even know how to unpack what she was feeling. Her smile hurt her cheeks and her chest felt so overwhelmed by emotion she wondered how she could possibly contain it all. She felt giddy. Her hands went to her cheeks and she laughed to nobody.

Her door closed behind her with a click as she returned to her apartment and she leant her back against it.

*What a day…*

Ochako was about to retrieve her phone from her coat pocket and text Izuku to thank him again, when a knock right behind her made her jump. Was that her door?

Had Izuku forgotten something?

Ochako reopened her door to see Izuku standing with one hand braced on her doorframe, gasping for breath. He no longer had his alarm clock.

“Ah- Izuku? Are you okay?”

Without saying a word, he reached both hands to her and threaded them through her hair, closed the distance between them and pressed his lips to hers. He was already out of breath so he kissed her hungrily, as if he could steal hers. (He did.) Their mouths moved together in a clumsy, inexperienced rhythm, but it was frenetic and charged and passionate and it didn’t matter. She tilted her head without thinking, so that they could press their bodies even closer, and wound her arms around the back of his neck. His body was so warm and firm. She pushed her fingertips into his messy hair at the base of his skull and he sucked in a sharp breath that she felt between their kisses.

Finally losing his battle over the need for oxygen, Izuku tilted her head higher with a gentle hand and kissed the soft skin between her neck and her shoulder before he rested his forehead there, breathing heavily.

Despite not running anywhere she was just as breathless.

“F-Forgot something,” he whispered into her skin.

Her whole body shivered.

“G-Glad you came back for it then,” she whispered back boldly, even though her cheeks and nose were warmer than she’d ever felt them, heat pulsed low in her stomach and her heart was hammering in her chest.

“I’m really going this time,” he said with a smile, peeling away from her slowly, reluctantly. “Get some rest, goodnight Ochako.”

(Cute that he thought she’d be getting much rest after *that.*)
His eyes were bright and so so green as he looked at her, pink almost obscured the freckles on his cheeks, and she could see pink on the tips of his ears. She nearly grabbed him back to her. Instead she swallowed, smiled, and said, “You too. Goodnight.”

By the time she’d waved him off again and gone back into her room she threw herself onto her couch with wobbly legs and screeched into a pillow, hoping none of the neighbours would be able to hear.

He was the most amazing person she’d ever met.

And she owed it all to that infuriating broken alarm clock.

She had a new future that she was working towards now, and she knew she wouldn’t be doing it alone. But she’d be there for him too, cheering him on. They’d be a team. Together.

She couldn’t wait for their lunch date.

She supposed they’d maybe done their passionate kiss a little too soon if they hadn’t even gone on an official date yet… She blushed strongly at the memory of his lips on hers and the feel of his body pressed tightly to her.

Though she had to admit, despite not being on an ‘official date’ he had seen her in various states of undress, she’d cooked him dinner, he’d cradled her bruised, unconscious body and he’d given her the literal stars as a gift before they’d ‘stargazed’ together.

Ochako huffed in amusement and hugged the pillow to her chest. It felt like a weight had been lifted from her shoulders in so many ways, and now she was full to the brim with an optimistic energy; something that felt like life and love.

She hoped Izuku liked his new alarm clock - she’d have to ask him over lunch. The thought made her smile.

Maybe she’d even sleep in a little tomorrow.

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