"I'm Touya Todoroki. And I'm here for my brother. You want to tell him about our dear old dad Shouto?!"

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Sometimes, when things fall apart, it's insidious. Sometimes, it's exponential. Sometimes, once it starts, it seems like the hits never stop. That no matter how many pieces of tape are put over the leak, it keeps growing.

After months of quiet following All-might's retirement, the league interrupts the 2A festival and normalcy falls to the past.

The three words Izuku had planned to say at the festival never come.

A different three words shake the arena, shattering Shouto's world, sending everything he held behind thick walls to spill out into the open.

Dominos fall in rows, drowning young heroes in their consequences. Black and white fade to murky grey.

Fledgling heroes are forced to take flight, supporting the weight of a crumbling profession on their developing spines.

Shouto finds the journey back to "normal" is a lot longer than its fall. Finds that destruction tells you what bonds will weather blood, sweat and tears. Which ones are coal waiting to
press into diamonds.
And that just maybe... in the end... deviating from his normal has its merits.

Notes

Thanks to that_one_fran_fan for betaing this story, they have been absolutely wonderful and super quick about getting chapters back to me.

See the end of the work for more notes.
“Everyone is still talking about that idiot All-might. What about us?! Even retired that bastard is bothering me.”

“Shigaraki, I think we should look towards our future plans,” Kurogiri says. Their new hideout is dank and small. Nothing like the serenity of the bar they had held previously. The windows didn’t open and had enough gunk caked on that even in daylight the sun barely made it through. The floorboards creaked and there was a near constant drip that echoed from the bathroom.

“Plans? You want to talk about plans when master has been taken?”

“Isn’t that what he would want?”

“We have no nomu. It’s just us now.” Shigaraki says, taking up scratching his neck with his blood-caked nails. His neurotic compulsion relentless since their loss, since he was forced away from One for all.

“The symbol of peace has fallen. The public is already shaken. We just continue to chip away at their hierarchy until there’s nothing left to hide behind.”

“We’ll continue to take down these self-proclaimed and false heroes! Starting with their new number one!” Spinner says.

“Oh shut up,” Shigaraki growls. “I don’t want to fight Endeavor, and I don’t have a nomu for him.”

“I have an idea,” Dabi says from his spot in the corner. His blue eyes are glinting dangerously, his scarred skin pulling where it joins as his lips quirk up. “To take down Endeavor.”

“I wasn’t even talking to you,” Shigaraki grumbles. Even through their battles and schemes, those drawn towards the league by Stain’s ideology still didn’t have a place in Shigaraki’s eyes.

“Without Master, I think you will find it beneficial to take full advantage of your comrades.”

“If you don’t shut up you’ll be dust by morning, Kurogiri.” His threat falls empty, both of them knowing the warp gate is an irreplaceable and crucial part of any plan. He’s the only way they can bypass most hero defenses and escape when things look poor. Shigaraki doesn’t say anything more, but his single red eye is soloed in on Dabi, expectant.

“We don’t kill him,” Dabi starts, and Shigaraki is already seething, his fist clenched in his lap, his other hand twitching for his neck. “We do something worse than show a gap in skill.”

“What do you propose?” Kurogiri’s glowing eyes are narrowing, his sweeping slowed by his piqued interest.

“All Might’s loss has already shaken their faith in their so-called saviors’ powers and invincibility. Now we shake down their faith in their character. Something we couldn’t do with the prior number one hero.”

“I’m sure the public is already aware Endeavor has a foul aura and poor people skills. There’s no lack of discord on the hero’s manners.”

“Believe me. I’ve got more on him that poor people skills,” Dabi says, standing and walking towards
the two co-leaders of the league, his hand in his pocket, his steps light. He looks to Shigaraki. “I told you when we met, I’d tell you my name when the time was right. Well, we’re almost there.”

“Instead of breaking these heroes, we break society’s faith in their ‘heroes.’ Thread by thread we can unravel this blindfold people have over their eyes.” Kurogiri murmurs, contemplative.

“Believe me, I know just where we can start with their new number one hero,” Dabi says, his smile incongruent with the sneer he says his words with, the light glinting like a camera flash off the staples in his skin. “How will they fare losing two number one heroes so soon. How will they feel safe without their beloved protectors?”

“I’m interested.” The scratching has stopped, leaving an eerie silence behind.

They are two trials down. Izuku is brimming with adrenaline, his veins pumping endorphins. This never should have been possible for him, but here he is. He's neck in neck in the top three leaders for the sports festival. Present Mic’s voice is echoing around the arena, chatting about the prior events and the students, ribbing with Aizawa, though that’s more one-sided than anything, and Toshinori putting in his two cents every now and then. He's surrounded by friends, Uraraka rambling happily by his side, giving herself a pep talk to make it farther than she had last year. It’s so much different than he thought it would be. It's so wonderful. The warm post Summer breeze is blowing through his wild hair and tickling his nose, the roar of the audience a pleasant buzz in the background. The stadium is practically vibrating with excitement.

Present Mic starts introducing the current event.

“And we’re back in the studio with those rematches we’ve been itching to see since we saw these wild kids in the sports festival last year. Our top competitors this year are no surprise given their efforts in their first year. Leading the ranks are these absurdly strong students! All might’s newly named successor, Izuku Midoriya! It’s no wonder either, their quirks are so similar they could practically be related!”

“Stop it.”

“Not far behind the boy who used to break his bones for his quirk, the son of the current number one hero, Shoto Todoroki! And the boy we couldn’t possibly forget after his behavior at last years awards ceremony, the explosive Katsuki Bakugo!” Izuku is sure Bakugo is seething at being the last to be introduced, though now his irritations are much quieter, his support more freely given.

“All three are also leading the public with their work utilizing their provisional licenses.”

“Thanks, Eraserhead! Now, the bracket! Our first match of the first round, our early front-runner Shoto Todoroki.” Izuku looks to the screen where his enemy-turned-best friend is climbing the arena stairs.

"Good luck Todoroki!” He yells, and he's sure there's no way Todoroki could have possibly heard his individual shout of encouragement, but his heart flutters at the small upward twitch of his lips that follows.

"Deku and Todo sitting in a tree-” Uraraka sings before Izuku turns on her, hand clapping firmly over her mouth.

"Uraraka!” He whines.
"Of course you and icy-hot would have a thing," Bakugo grumbles. "I'm going to put you and your boyfriend in the ground, Deku."

"Yeah, okay," Izuku says. Bakugo's threats don't contain half the heat that they used to, more violently phrased healthy competitiveness than anything. It's a far cry from the way their relationship had been before UA. A smile plays at his lips thinking about how far Kacchan has come. He completely misses the introduction of the other competitor, only pulled back to attention by Present Mic shouting.

"Whoa, what the hell is that?!"

Izuku catches a glimpse of black mist before the arena erupts into blue flame. He hears the echo of glass shattering as Eraserhead leaps from the observation deck and down into the arena, his capture weapon readied in his clenched fists. The flame dies down, revealing the two figures standing alone in the ring Cementoss had finished mere minutes ago. Midnight, once again acting as the ref for their class given the explosive power of their students and lack of demonstrated restraint, has her costume pulled tight in her grasp, ready to tear it at a moments notice. It's a little too late though. A familiar figure stands behind Todoroki, twisting the student's right arm behind his back with one hand, the other poised at the boy's throat with a wicked blade.

The once warm breeze felt sweltering, and the buzz of the audience left a ringing in his ears in its absence.

"Who are you?" Aizawl growls, his voice echoing around the stadium, his gaze unblinking as he stares down the intruder.

Dabi looks to the screen broadcasting the events across the globe, a small smirk on his patchwork face before he utters three words that will change the way people view the hero society for many years.

"I'm Touya Todoroki."

Todoroki's expression goes from one of contempt and anger to a deathly white, his eyes wide like he's seen a ghost. His voice is barely a whisper as he repeats the name Dabi had uttered. The stricken expression on his face only seems to fuel Dabi, his staples pulling tight as he grins broadly.

"And I'm here for my brother."

There's silence around the arena, baited breath as they all wait, shocked into silence.

"You all know Endeavor, the number one hero. If you can call him that!" Dabi, Touya, sneers. "You want to tell them about our dear old dad, Shoto?"

Todoroki's face is ashen, and his hand trembles where it tries to pry the marred one holding the knife against his neck away. "No? You don't want to talk about how dad let me disfigure myself, so desperate for an inkling of his attention? You don't want to talk about him beating our mother, Shoto?"

Izuku watches in horror. At some point he got to his feet, grasping at the rails separating him from his friend. Todoroki's eyes are shining.

"Do you want to talk about your scar?"
We get older by the hour

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

6 months ago:

“In light of the recent licensing exam results we are holding a special parent-teacher conference next week. At least one parent or guardian must attend. See me after class if you have special circumstances. That’s all.” Aizawa had started zipping up his sleeping bag before he’d even finished talking. Izuku couldn’t say he was particularly excited about his mother meeting more of his teachers. She hadn’t been at all easy on All-might a few weeks ago and he wasn’t even at the camp where he’d gotten the worst of his injuries.

There were others who seemed to share his inclinations and some who seemed quite excited to boast about their progress. Kacchan was indifferent, though that was generally his attitude towards anything that didn’t involve his quirk or fighting. He happens to glance back towards Todoroki, knowing what he does about his friend’s situation, he can surmise he isn’t excited about this prospect. When his eyes fall on his friend though, he is surprised.

His face is calm, but carefully so, the kind that is manufactured and crafted, placed precisely but its holdings were fracturing around the edges. He can see the tightness around his eyes, the tremor at the edge of his lips. It was a ghost of the permanent expression he’d word in the first weeks of school, not quite as strong, or maybe Izuku can just see around it better now, can see it for what it is. A façade. A barrier. A wall.

Like breaking glass, the trance his friend seemed to be in broke, and mismatched eyes met his, before turning sharply away. He and Todoroki hadn’t spoken of the confession before the festival. It feels like it’s been an eternity, a different lifetime since then. Izuku was always too uncertain to bring it up himself, and Todoroki never breached the subject again.

“Deku, come on,” Uraraka urges from beside him.

“Right,” he mumbles, haphazardly tossing things in his bag. He’s usually more careful, not wanting to damage the hero analysis notebook that’s in a precarious state. He’d thought about transferring its information to a fresh notebook, one that isn’t partially charred and water damaged, but in the end, blank pages open and a pen poised, he couldn’t seem to do it. There’s something in it, something about the memories of his last days clinging to what his subconscious knew was a futile hope that lingers in those pages, his last days of cowering under Kacchan’s fury. Feelings lodged in it that are almost as important to him as the information itself.

He follows his friends to their lockers, picking up umbrellas to brave the falling rain. He’s looking around without meaning to, his green eyes searching for red and white hair, wanting to, if nothing else, reassure Todoroki he wasn’t in this alone. He was never an Endeavor fanatic, not the way he supports the other heroes, but since his face-to-face encounter with the man, he’s left a bad taste in Izuku’s mouth. Not to mention the, mostly, unspoken problems between Endeavor and his son. Endeavor isn’t one for subtlety.

Todoroki had never said outright that his father had done anything to him and there are things, instances, that keep Izuku from asking. Things like working for his father on their internship. Things like the way Todoroki isn’t hesitant to talk back to his father or to openly defy him. Other things though pull at his brain, almost begging him to make a puzzle piece fit. All-might once told him to
trust his instincts, to believe in his hunches, and that may be the only reason he hasn’t discarded this
one.

He clings to a rather fragile thought: that if Endeavor is so invested in his son beating All-might, in
surpassing his own legacy, that he wouldn’t risk that by hurting him.

Finally, he sees that tell-tale coloring and excuses himself from his non-participation in Uraraka and
Iida’s discussion to chase Todoroki out of the front of the school. He runs out, yelping when he’s hit
by rain, snapping open his umbrella quickly to shield himself.

“Todoroki!” He calls, and for a moment he thinks he wasn’t heard over the rain. Todoroki turns,
hand in his pocket, posture trying to be laid back but there’s a tenseness in it that prevents him from
looking as unaffected as he wants to.

“Izuku.” Todoroki greets him. “What are you doing?”

“Well, I just wanted to see if you were okay?” Todoroki is looking at him and it’s hard not to wither
under the intensity of his gaze. His friend softens slightly and Izuku feels some of that weight ease
up.

“I’m fine.”

“Is your dad going to come to the conferences?” He blurs.

“It is mandatory.”

“I know that I mean, isn’t there someone else who could be there for you?” He knows his friend is
still embarrassed about his behavior with Inasa; knows Todoroki’s pride is still recovering from
failing the exam and he wants there to be someone there who will be supportive, who will tell him
it’s okay and that he can move on from it. He knows enough about Endeavor to know that’s not
anything he’ll say. He’ll be too fixated on how his own image is affected. His last concern will be
how his son feels.

“You know there’s not. My mom is still hospitalized.”

“What about your sister?”

“Why are you so worried about it?” His voice isn’t quite harsh, but Izuku can tell he’s getting close
to pushing too hard, to making his friend take two steps back from the one they took forward.

“I just… I know things between you guys aren’t great. He’s not… like other parents.” Around them,
the rain falls harder, its sporadic plinks against their umbrellas becoming more frequent, deeper.
Thunder rolls over his last words as if nature itself disagrees with his phrasing.

“No. He isn’t.” Todoroki’s eyes are harsh, as they tend to become when his family is broached. He
shakes his head, white and red strands sticking to his forehead despite the action, glued there by the
humidity even an umbrella can’t save you from. “But it’ll be fine. It's one day. Maybe an hour. If he
does decides not to send a placeholder and come himself, keep an eye on All-might. The old bastard
might just try and off him. He’s been exceptionally pissed since All-might’s retirement.”

“That’s… concerning.”

“I’m kidding. He’s not that stupid.”

“Oh, okay. Um, are you visiting your mom today?” Todoroki nods.
“That is why I’m on this side of the school.”

“Right,” Izuku mumbles. Stupid question. It’s Thursday, their one afternoon allowed off campus and Todoroki only ever goes to see his mom. Aside from that, he’s in his room or in the courtyard working on his quirkless combat. “See you tomorrow then!” He says, turning to walk back into the school. He tries to put as much cheer in his voice as he can, but to him, it just rings false. He hopes it sounds more earnest to Todoroki, but that feeling, that tugging, is becoming more insistent but his neurons just can’t make the jumps yet. He can’t seem to even articulate what that overhanging dread is beyond concern for his friend.

Todoroki is fine.

The rain is soaking into his shoes and catching on his pants as he runs back in, the smile he gives his friends painfully fake and plastic when he joins them to head back as a trio to their dorms.

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“No, Mom. I’m not in trouble,” Izuku says for probably the umpteenth time. “Literally everyone is having one of these. It’s probably just talking about our licenses.” He carefully leaves out the part about how they may be going over the potential risks of involving themselves in stopping villainous behavior. He doesn’t need to stress his mother out worse than she already is.

“Well, I wouldn’t mind getting a chance to talk to your homeroom teacher. He was the one at that press conference wasn’t he?”

“He was one of them yeah. Mr. Aizawa.”

An hour later his mom has changed at least three outfits, each time complaining about something. This one is too bright, this one doesn’t have shoes that match, this one just doesn’t look like I’m the mother of a future hero.

“I just want to look nice,” his mom complains as he’s slipping his phone into his pocket.

“All-might saw you in your everyday clothes, I think anything else will be fine.”

“Don’t sass your mother, Izuku!” He shakes his head, walking down the hall he peeks in on his mostly empty childhood bedroom. He’d taken most of his things to the dorm with him, so the space left behind is pretty barren, but it’s still nostalgic. He wanders back out into the living room while his mom finishes dressing and his eyes linger on the computer he’d spent so much time watching videos on in his youth.

There are so many good memories here. More so than anywhere else. School had been miserable, even the playground was sorrowful. He’s pretty sure the tears left in the wake of Kacchan’s outbursts could have sustained the greenery alone.

He’d never really told on Kacchan at school, but that didn’t mean it didn’t hurt every time a teacher did notice and chose to do nothing. It always left him feeling like he was lesser. Like he wasn’t
worth protecting since he was quirkless.

Things are better between them now. A lot of the air cleared. He won’t be running to Kacchan for advice anytime soon, but they’re… good.

His mom finally comes out and he can’t help but smile. Through good and bad, she’s been there for him, making home a safe, well-loved place. She may not have told him what he needed to hear all those years ago, but she’s always, always, always done her best for him. He’s never really longed for his dad because she loved him enough for both of them. Loved her boy even when he was quirkless, when no one else even liked him.

“You look great mom.” She smiles back and he realizes just how much he’s missed her in these weeks. He can’t imagine waking up one day and not having her; it would shatter his whole world. She always stood as a barrier between him and life, a cushion between him and the pain.

It hits him like a sledgehammer to the solar plexus that this scenario, this tragedy he’s imagining, is Todoroki’s life. He’s been alone since he was a child, barely more than a toddler. While Izuku had been playing All-might with his mother, going to sleep with a kiss to his curls and “I love you” uttered lovingly before dreams, Todoroki had no one. It’s obnoxious how hard it is to school his features and walk to school with his mother when his heart feels like an anvil.

When they arrive at the school there are several groups already there.

“Deku! Hi!” Uraraka calls, her parents trailing behind her. His mom looks at him worriedly when he hears that name.

“Hey Uraraka,” he says, waving at her.

“Is this your mom?” She's bouncing on the balls of her feet, looking between them eagerly.

“Yeah, mom this is Uraraka. She was basically my first friend here.”

“You’re just saying that because I kept you off your face walking in!”

“No really! I mean it!” She laughs, a bubbly soft thing that makes him smile. She looks a lot like her mother, though he isn’t much of one to talk.

The parents exchange quiet greetings as the students rib each other. When they’re banter falls off, Uraraka turns to Inko, her face earnest.

“Your son rescued me during the entrance exam, you should be very proud!” Uraraka careens. Izuku chances a glance at his mom and is unsurprised to see her already close to tears. Before she has a chance to say anything, blessedly, another familiar face for both him and his mother is there as well.

“Oi, Deku,” Kacchan calls. His own mother looks ready to pull him back by the ear were he within reach. “Do you know what they want to talk about?”

“Not really. I have my guesses but that’s all,” he says. He looks to Uraraka but she shakes her head. “Maybe Iida or Yaoyorozu knows.”

“I’m surprised Iida isn’t here directing traffic,” Izuku jokes.

“Get back here Katsuki,” Bakugo’s mother calls. “Hello, Inko!” She hollers over her shoulder after corralling Kacchan back towards his father. Nothing seems to be happening yet, just students arriving with family in groups of two or three.
They are in a hall he doesn’t visit often, reserved mostly for faculty and meetings. Windows line the hall, letting in the warm glow of sunset. His friends are scattered about, all boring smiles, exchanging introductions, intertwining the two parts of their lives.

“As-Tsuyu!” He calls, spotting the froglike girl amongst a family of rather equally froglike people. Well, at least her appearance hadn’t been shocking to them.

“Izu—” she says. Despite them being on a first name basis, they aren’t particularly close. More and more of his classmates arrive. Iida is followed by his now wheelchair-bound brother, and holy shit it’s Ingenium. Despite him passing on the name, Iida’s brother will always be the hero Ingenium to Izuku; a hero who didn’t deserve the ending he got. His father walks in thereafter, all three of them looking remarkably similar. He’s about to say hi when a heat wave moves in, sucking the moisture out of the air and he turns in time to see Endeavor’s hulking form just before he passes Izuku, his teal eyes side-eyeing him with a poorly concealed threat before turning back forward.

“Todoroki…” Izuku says as his friend walks by. Todoroki says nothing and Izuku purses his lips.

“Izuku?” His mom says. “Isn’t that the number new one hero?”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t you want to say hi or something?” Izuku can’t fault his mother for thinking that. He’s gone wild fanboy for heroes far less popular and infinitely less well known. But…

“I have nothing I can say to him,” Izuku mutters. His mom shoots him a look but he’s saved from a question he can’t answer when Aizawa, All-might and Midnight open the door to the main office space and beckon everyone in. There are three tables on the edges of the room, a couple of chairs to each one. “Let’s go.”

He sees Todoroki’s father head for Aizawa’s table and then he’s swept up by Kirishima and Kaminari.

“You seen Bakugo, Midoriya?” Kirishima asks.

“A few minutes ago,” he says, looking around.

“You think this is about him and Todoroki failing?”

“I don’t think so. If it was, it’d make more sense just to meet with them individually. It may be about our licenses or overall performance the first semester.” Kirishima nods along.

“Yeah, you’re right.”

“It’s crazy though. Our strongest students failed. I mean, I kinda get Bakugo. He yelled at two of the rescuees…” Kaminari says, shaking his wild blonde hair.

“He’s not known for his tact, huh Midoriya,” Kirishima smiles wide, his jagged teeth on full display.

“Hey, weren’t you around the rescue center with Todoroki?” Kaminari asks. Unfortunately, it’s at that moment Sero wanders over as well.

“Dude. Do you know what happened?” They’re all looking at him intently and he kind of wishes he had more to tell them because honestly, he doesn’t know. He hadn’t really had a chance to talk to Todoroki about the exam since it happened.
“He fought with the Shiketsu first year, but I don’t really know what started it.”

“Aw, I thought we moved past ‘I’ll defeat you all-Roki,” Sero says.

“I don’t think that’s what it was about,” Izuku admits.

“Oh hey, my parents are here, come on Kaminari!” Kirishima says, dragging the blonde by his elbow. “Later Midoriya!”

He and Sero chat a moment more before he’s beckoned over by Iida.

“Mrs. Midoriya, Tenya Iida – class 1-A representative. It is wonderful to meet you,” Iida says, his voice loud as he bows to his mom.

“Oh, you’re so polite.”

“Midoriya, this is my brother Tensei, and our father.”

“It’s great to meet you both, I’m a big fan of both of you! You were amazing pros,” Izuku gushes.

“Thank you, I’ve heard great things about you as well,” Ing- no, Tensei says. Izuku’s face is beet red and he’s pretty sure he’s having heart palpitations.

“Yes. Mrs. Midoriya your son is unparalleled. His analyses are beyond his years! He’s an irreplaceable asset and he teaches me things every day!”

“Iida!” Izuku whines.

“I speak nothing but the truth!”

“Izuku, you have such wonderful friends,” his mother weeps. “I’m so glad. Thank you for being there for my son!” Inko says, wiping tears from her eyes. They’ve been here ten minutes and she’s already in tears. He can’t say he doesn’t get it honestly.

“Mom, are you going to do that to all my friends?” Izuku protests.

“I just might!” Iida laughs beside and Izuku sends him a wounded look.

It’s then he hears Endeavor’s booming voice and sees him and Todoroki feet away at Aizawa’s station.

Izuku finds himself letting his mother and Iida’s conversation fade into the background, his attention focused on eavesdropping on the two pros instead.

“Eraserhead,” Endeavor says, though his voice is more of a growl than anything.

“Endeavor,” Aizawa is cool, collected, though there’s a tiny tick in his eye on the right side. “Sit.” Izuku is a little impressed at his teacher’s authority in the face of Endeavor, though he supposes he hadn’t been very influenced by All-might’s position in the beginning either. He hadn’t shown respect for the hero until he’d felt he’d earned it at the school.

“Make this quick. I’m a busy man.” Todoroki is beside him, but his eyes are off to the side, not paying attention. “If you aren’t going to focus why are we here?” Endeavor snaps. Todoroki hesitates, but then he gives in, turning to face Aizawa.

“As you are aware, Todoroki made it through the first round of the licensing exam, but failed during
the second.” For a brief moment, the flames surrounding the hero flare, harsh in the otherwise fading light, and Todoroki sinks into his seat further. He looks… resigned. “Since he passed the first part, they are offering a remedial course where he will be offered the chance to rectify the poor score.”

“He will be participating.”

“Of course. Todoroki seemed motivated to improve. I wanted to address the issue that made him fail in the first place. In class, Todoroki is very level headed and does well. It’s hard to grasp why he would compromise progress by deciding to start a fight during a crucial examination.”

“Perhaps it was the other student’s issue.”

“I think they both instigated, and neither chose to back down and focus. However, the other student is not one of mine. Todoroki, however, is, and they will be in the remedial course together. I don’t want to waste my time with a remedial course if we are going to get the same results.”

“I’ll deal with it.” Izuku isn’t sure if he’s talking about the situation… or his son in general.

“You are not his teacher, Endeavor. I am.”

“My, they are both intense,” his mother whispers beside him. Apparently, at some point, Iida had bid farewell, and his mother had followed his line of attention.

Izuku thinks he responds but he’s not sure, he’s too busy watching this unfold, waiting to see if something implodes.

“I am more than capable of ensuring he passes,” Endeavor has his massive arms crossed over his chest, now standing to his full height, but their homeroom teacher looks unfazed from his seated position, elbows on the table, chin resting on laced fingers.

“Then you know what caused the fight?”

“I don’t need to know.”

“You don’t care?”

“It’s not important. He will pass; he will learn to mind his temper.”

“Not from you, obviously,” Aizawa says. Endeavor looks about ready to throttle the other pro and it’s starting to attract attention. Izuku doesn’t get why his teacher seems to be provoking Endeavor but, once more, he finds himself acting without thinking, launching himself in front of Endeavor and gesturing wildly to his teacher.

“Mr. Aizawa!” Izuku says, “My mom really needs to talk to you!” Endeavor tsks, but thankfully, walks away without issue. Todoroki’s eyes are on his friend, his body fixed to his seat, looking at Izuku like he’s just done some great deed, as if he’d pulled him from churning waters, pulled him up where he could breathe again. Izuku doesn’t much like that metaphor.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa says, and Izuku winces, knowing the disapproving tone all too well. “Introduce us.” His mother is behind him now, looking worried.

“Mom, this is my homeroom teacher Mr. Aizawa. He was one of the teachers escorting the training camp over break.”

“Nice to meet you,” his mother says, but Izuku sees the storm brewing in her eyes. Aizawa isn’t the
only one that isn’t afraid of standing up to people stronger than him. His mother is a force to be reckoned with. He tiptoes away, letting her get her qualms off her chest. Aizawa can handle himself, he reasons, looking around for Todoroki again. Of course, it isn’t hard to find the hulking figure that is literally on fire. What’s surprising is that Todoroki isn’t behind him. Endeavor is alone waiting to talk to Midnight.

He spies Uraraka giving him a concerned glance, no doubt having heard his overexcited outburst earlier. He gives her a thumbs up before walking briskly out into the hall. He spies Todoroki leaning against a wall, his expression dark.

“Hey, Todoroki.” He greets, waving his hand awkwardly. By the time Todoroki looks at him the shadow has laxed some. “Getting some air?” Todoroki exhales, blowing frost between his lips.

“Can only take so much of that bastard at a time. Acting like a fool.”

“Yeah, it was a bit much.”

“I already know I screwed up. The last thing I need is for everyone to think I lost it because I have my father’s shitty temper.”

“I don’t think anyone thinks that Todoroki. I don’t. I was frustrated, but I’m sure you had your reasons. You both did. I’m just glad you still have a chance to make it up. Then we can all be heroes.” Todoroki smiles softly.

“You have more faith in me than I deserve.” Before he has a chance to respond Todoroki pushes off the wall and heads back in.

Izuku sighs and follows his friend. Todoroki stops briefly before he walks in, taking a deep breath before crossing the threshold. Izuku frowns.

He spots his mother still standing before Aizawa’s table. He walks up to her in time to hear the last little bit of her sentence.

“… I just worry about him.”

“Thanks for rejoining us, Midoriya,” Aizawa says. Izuku tries to look sheepish.

“Sorry, had to check on something.”

“Ah, Izuku, Aizawa wanted to say something to both of us.”

“Mrs. Midoriya, as I said, I understand your concerns and we have taken measures to ensure things aren’t repeated. Now, as for Midoriya, he’s one of our most motivated and brightest students. He’s grown exponentially from when he first arrived at UA. He has grown from a student that I did not feel belonged in my class to one I am anticipating great things from.”

Izuku is gaping, flat out gaping because that’s as close to praise as it gets from Aizawa, and his mother is holding back waterworks for the second time this evening. “I do have to say though, he has issues asking for help. Consistently his judgment outside of class leaves much to be desired.” Aizawa pointedly looks at Izuku for a moment before continuing; he knows his teacher is calling him back to Stain. Todoroki was the one who had enough common sense to call for back-up. All he’d done was disobey Gran Torino’s instructions and almost get all four of them killed. It was luck that they all survived. “I understand you may have had an issue in the past getting help from your teachers but if you tell us we will do everything we can to protect you.”
Izuku purses his lips. Sometimes Aizawa notices a little too much.

“What is he talking about, Izuku?” He winces.

“Uh… Well, Todoroki, Kirishima and I kind of did something we shouldn’t have done after I was in the hospital. We should have trusted our teachers to have a plan, but we acted on our own anyway.”

“And?” Aizawa prompts. Izuku shoots him a look, but it withers immediately. These are his own actions, he should be held accountable.

“And I fought with Kacchan and kind of destroyed a lot of one of the training grounds.”

“Why were you fighting Katsuki?” His mom asks.

“I think you have some talking you need to do,” Aizawa says. “For my part, Midoriya is doing well, and we, as teachers, will do what we can to improve the areas he is still lacking. Your son will make a great hero one day if he can keep from getting expelled first.” Izuku fights the urge to roll his eyes. The expelling card was starting to get old, his mother though looks vaguely mortified. He’ll have to tell her that’s Eraserhead’s idea of a joke later.

“Thank you for your time, and for taking care of my son,” Inko says, giving him a slight bow. They walk on, letting the pro get on with the next parent-student pair. It doesn’t take long for his mother to get back to the point he’d just escaped from.

“So, you fought Katsuki?” She prods.

“Neither of us got really hurt.” He adds quickly. “He was just… in a bad place after failing the exam, after what happened to All-might. He felt like it was his fault and Kacchan only knows how to get his feelings out by fighting, so… we did. I should have left but I didn’t.”

“You’re kind to a fault, Izuku,” his mother says fondly. “Todoroki… you talk about him quite a bit.” He does. They talked fairly extensively after the sports festival. After he’d mangled himself in his fight with Todoroki. At first, his mom hadn’t liked the other boy. She’d said he was overly rough with Sero and a lot of choice things about him and Izuku.

He’d gotten her off Todoroki’s back when he said he’d been goading the boy the entire match.

“Yeah,” Izuku says slowly.

“And?” His mom says. Izuku doesn’t want to meet her eyes because he knows that tone.

“He’s my friend…”

“What happened to his face?” Izuku winces. It had been harder to see on TV, plus she’d been more concerned with her own child’s safety. He’s not surprised she’d ask, he just doesn’t really know what to tell her.

“He doesn’t talk about it,” Izuku responds. It’s not a total lie because Todoroki doesn’t talk about it. Still, as always, lying to his mom leaves a sour taste in his mouth, but it’s not his story to share. He hopes she understands that…

“Do you want to talk to me about what you did before you left?”

“I just, I don’t know. His dad was being a jerk and Aizawa was kind of making it worse, so I just… moved.”
“His father doesn’t seem very friendly,” she muses. “I’ve seen him on TV though. He does good work.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Izuku mutters. He’s not really in the mood to sing praises about Endeavor. All-might catches his eye from the other side of the room, and he waves. He sees Todoroki and his father leave Midnight’s line and head over to All-might, so he decides to lead his mom that way too. Joking or not, Izuku feels like Todoroki’s comment about those two together wasn’t far off.

“All-might,” Endeavor says.

“Endeavor. Good to see you again.” Todoroki is standing a pace behind and for all he loves his mother, she has Izuku’s same problem of sticking her nose places it probably shouldn’t be.

“Todoroki?” She says, and he sees his friend tense slightly before turning around, meeting Inko’s gaze.

“Hello,” Todoroki says, his eyes turning towards Izuku. “Midoriya.”

“Hey, Todoroki.”

“You’re Izuku’s friend aren’t you?” His mother asks. Oh god, where is this going?

Todoroki glances back to his father who is still talking to All-might, not quite amicably, but as pleasant as Endeavor gets. “I am.”

“Then I’d like to thank you.” Todoroki is taken aback by that. Izuku is just embarrassed. He didn’t think she was serious.

“Mom…” he tries, hoping she’ll catch his tone and just stop.

“You never talked about any of your classmates in middle school, Izuku. You never had friends over; I was worried. But now, you’re here and you seem so much happier. It makes me so happy to know you have friends now. Though I hate to see you getting hurt and I wish you weren’t getting in trouble together,” she says, pinching Izuku’s cheek slightly.

“I’m sorry,” Todoroki says, eyes downcast. “That was my fault. It was my idea.”

“It’s not like you made me go, Todoroki,” Izuku argues.

“Regardless, thank you, Todoroki. All I’ve ever wanted is for Izuku to find his place.”

“You raised him well,” Todoroki says. “He’s helped me a great deal. I’m grateful to have him as a friend.”

Endeavor tsks, and Todoroki looks at his father.

“I didn’t send you here to make friends and play games, boy.”

“Endeavor,” All-might speaks up. “I think you’ll find cooperation an important aspect to heroics. Forming friendships and alliances can only help in the future.”

“You weren’t one for working with people, All-might.”

“Times are changing. Villains are aligning, it’s only right that we should too. It’s why they felt the need to alter the structure of the licensing exams. Now, back to young Todoroki.”
“I’ve heard enough. Come on, child. We’re going home. You still have training to do. We’ve wasted enough time here.” Endeavor walks on, not bothering to see if Todoroki is following. Izuku looks frantically between the two of them before settling on his friend.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Todoroki,” Izuku says finally.

“Shouto!” Endeavor calls.

“I’m coming,” Todoroki grumbles. “Goodbye Midoriya, it was nice to meet you Ma’am.” Todoroki moves to walk by. Some impulse compels Izuku to grasp his hand, the coolness bites sharply against his own fingers.

“You’ve got my number if you want to talk,” Izuku says. Todoroki is looking at his hand like it’s got ten fingers on it, or some other abnormal growth before giving a slow, careful nod. Reluctantly, he lets go and watches forlornly as Todoroki approaches his dad and they exit.

Izuku groans and ruffles his hair, raising his eyes finally to see the bewildered expression of his mother, and his teacher.

“Young Midoriya!” All-might calls, breaking the weird tension that was left behind in the Todoroki’s wake.

Once again, his mother is brought to tears by his teacher’s praise. It’s still surreal that his childhood idol is sitting in front of him, talking about how well he’s doing. Acting like he’s something special when for eleven years of his life he felt like wasn’t much above dirt, now he has the former, and still current in Izuku’s eyes, number one hero singing his praises and he just feels like maybe he should pinch himself and make sure this isn’t all some elaborate dream. That he’s not going to wake up and be quirkless again, struggling beneath the sole of Bakugo’s foot.

His mother continues to embarrass him each time one of his friends come by to chat. Though he’s flustered and feels awkward as hell, he can’t bring himself to really discourage her. After all, he doesn’t know that he’s ever seen his mom this happy.

Eventually, the evening dies down, Inko is invited out with some of the other parents to have drinks, which Izuku encourages her to do. His mom hasn’t had friends in a long time. She’d been too concerned about being home for her son to go out for anything besides her job; now that he was flourishing, she guessed it was okay. Plus, he was practically pushing her to follow the other departing parents. It didn’t feel like a dismissal though, not like he didn’t want to see her anymore. It felt like reassurance.

About five of the students walk back to the dorms together. Naturally, Uraraka and Iida are with him, accompanied my Ashido and Tsuyu. Tsuyu and Uraraka end up breaking off because Tsuyu mentions she has some family pictures and Uraraka is apparently dying to see Tsuyu as a child. Iida, as tomorrow is a school night, dutifully departs for bed with a strong recommendation that Midroiya and Ashido follow suit soon.

They don’t.

They end up making quite a mess in the kitchen baking sweets, which draws several more people through to pick at the delicacies. It’s easy chatter between him and Ashido. It’s gotten simpler for him to find ways to talk to people. It probably helps that no one has told him to jump off the roof since arriving at UA. They pass the cooking times talking strategy; he mentions a couple of ways she might be able to use her quirk that she hasn’t thought about yet and eventually, he offers to clean up by himself after he sees her yawn for the third time.
It’s past midnight and he’s putting away the last dish when the doors to the dorm open again. Izuku double-checks the time. It feels later than it is, but technically it’s still a bit past curfew. He’s reaching for the light switch when he hears a body flop against the couch, and he peeks out to see it’s Todoroki.

His gaze is to the ceiling, his hair falling over his eyes. His uniform jacket is absent, leaving only his white button up which is no longer tucked into his slacks.

Izuku pulls his lip, debating between sneaking upstairs to his room and talking to Todoroki.

In the end, his feet carry him towards the common room. He bumps into an end table in the relative darkness, and Todoroki starts, sitting up straight.

“Hey, Todoroki,” Izuku says, his voice wobbly from embarrassment. He’d been trying not to scare his classmate, and ended up doing it anyway because he’s a big klutz. His knee is throbbing where the table had impacted it; his scarred hand draws towards it to try and rub out the pain.

“Why are you up?” His friend asks, his voice raspy and strained; it sounds painful. He also notices Todoroki’s shirt is damp.

“Why are you?” Izuku counters. Todoroki sighs and then stands.

“I’m not. I’m going to bed,” he turns and there’s just enough light for Izuku to catch the coloring on Todoroki’s jaw; he feels his own clench, his teeth grinding against each other. Izuku walks around the couch to get in front of Todoroki but his friend turns away, keeping the right side of his face in the darkness.

“What happened.” It’s not a question. He doesn’t phrase it as one and he doesn’t intend it as one.

“It’s nothing, Midoriya.”

“Did your dad hit you?” Todoroki freezes. Literally freezes. Frost creeps up his arm and onto the ground from his foot, the strands of his hair stiffening. It’s the question that’s been plaguing Izuku for months, and now it’s been tossed gracelessly out into the open. “Todoroki,” he says softly. “Did your dad do that?”

Slowly, and he’s not sure if it’s trepidation or stiffness from cold, he turns mismatched eyes to face Izuku, and they’re brimming with so many emotions chasing themselves around in circles in the colors. Confusion, hurt, and a faint, fleeting glint of hope. Izuku gestures back to the couch, and Todoroki follows, his foot leaving icy tracks as he goes, shadows playing over the darkening bruise on Todoroki’s formerly unblemished cheek, the stain leaking down to the edge of his jaw, the spot Izuku had initially noticed.

They sit on the smaller couch, leaving their backs to anyone that might wander down in the night.

“He’s… he’s never done that before.” Todoroki says finally.

“Never hit you?”

“Not like that.”

“Not like what?” Izuku feels like his throat is tied in a knot, every swallow and every word having to be forcibly pulled past it, leaving an ache behind.

“When he’s angry.”
“But he’s hit you other times?”

“Not outside of training.”

‘Hit him hard. His fight with you will be a testament to how much training he has left.’

No wonder those words had felt so weighted, like an ultimatum being dropped, though he hadn’t really grasped the choices at the time. Even now, he’s not sure there’s anything that could have been done differently.

“Not when I didn’t deserve it.” Those words sink like lead in Izuku’s veins. Todoroki can be a lot of things, he can be flippant and blasé, he can be blunt and kind of crass, he can be rough around the edges, but at the base, he’s kind and caring and in no way deserving of the treatment it’s beginning to sound like is the norm around his house.

“What changed tonight?” He decides to put aside the other information for the moment, filing it for later, for another day when his friend isn’t so hurt and stricken beside him.

“We fought… He doesn’t want me to be around you. Says it isn’t good for my progress.”

“And he hit you… for being friends with me?”

“No. He did it because I told him no…”

“You… told him no?”

“I like being your friend… I like having choices and having someone that looks at me and sees something besides that man’s son. It was selfish… but I like having someone who thinks something I do is good enough.”

Light glistens on the tear streaking its way down Todoroki’s face and this is not fair. Todoroki is strong, he’s arguably the strongest kid in their class, and he’s crying.

“Todoroki,” Izuku whispers, but even that sounds too loud in the dark. “You’ll always have me as a friend.”

A sob breaks free of Todoroki’s lips and Izuku can’t take it anymore. He reaches forward and wraps his arms around Todoroki’s shoulders. He resists the urge to flinch at the cold against his bare skin.

“What are you doing?” Todoroki asks his voice wavering, catching as he fights the tears.

“When I was upset, my mom would always pick me up and hug me until it didn’t seem so bad anymore. I thought… maybe you needed that.”

The dam that had been holding before breaks, leaving Todoroki shaking and heaving against him, broken sobs muffled by his shoulder, tears dampening his All-might nightshirt.

He combs fingers through Todoroki’s hair, the other rubbing up and down the chilled skin, trying to draw up some semblance of warmth, his mind flashing to a trembling Todoroki, to a time in fading light he’d explained overusing his ice can give him frostbite. He wishes for a blanket, for something dry to wrap his cold, damp friend in.

Todoroki’s fingers twist around the soft cotton of Izuku’s shirt, grasping at the fabric around his back. He doesn’t think he’s ever felt hatred like this. Not for Kacchan. Not even for Shigaraki.

He feels it now, and it lights a terrible scorch under his skin. Something dark and tainted and he hates
it. Anger drives stupid things. It doesn’t drive heroes. It shouldn’t anyway.

He hates the bitterness of anger, but he can’t stop it. He can’t slow it down as it races through his body, through his thoughts.

No one should make his friend break down like this. No one.

Chapter End Notes

This took longer than I had originally planned because I decided to pretty much scrap my original starting point. I felt like there needed to be a bit more build up before everything drops, so I took it back farther. The original chapter 1 started 3 weeks before the sports festival scene in the prologue, but I just felt like I didn’t have enough time to develop what I wanted to develop before Dabi drops in.

This is going to be a very Todoroki centric fic but we’ll have a lot of interactions with other characters besides Midoriya.

I’ll be on a Wednesday update schedule from here on out, I just had to get my bearings. (I really need to plan more of my story before I post, but I just get so damn excited to share that I don’t).

You can come talk to/yell at me @ protect-baby-shoto@tumblr.com
Watch the changes from afar

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It takes a while for Todoroki to calm against him. Luckily, no one comes near the kitchen during that time. That, or anyone who tries to approach thinks better of it when they hear the unabashed sobbing.

Todoroki does a lot of things gracefully. His fighting is something to behold. His appearance certainly is attractive. His crying? Not so much. He imagines Todoroki has held it back so long, has gone so far past the breaking point, that now he can't control it. It's the desperate, ragged, throat stripping, headache-inducing, grit-your-teeth-through-it kind of crying. The kind you see when a loved one’s lost, when hope is shattered. The kind you see when illusions are broken.

It's the kind that leaves you exhausted and rung out, that after it's over, you're not sure if you feel better or worse. It’s the kind that resembles a dam steadily cracking under the pressure of overflowing waters until it breaks, everything good and bad coming out in a rush. It's nothing like the quiet river that Izuku so often displays.

He wonders when Todoroki last let himself cry.

If there’s anyone there to hold him at home?

His sister?

Eventually, the sobs die down and the heaving breaths fade into quiet tremors. Izuku's fingers are numb from his attempts to brush away the forming frost, and he feels like his teeth would be chattering without the warm tears soaking his shirt.

"I'm sorry," Todoroki rasps. His voice is hoarse from the tears and it's so worn he barely recognizes it.

"Don't," Izuku says. His voice is calm but forceful. He's still pissed. But not at the boy, the child, he's holding. Never at him. He's angry at the man who got him to this point. Who drove him to this point. Who hurt a child as severely as Todoroki has been hurt. Who hurts his family like they aren’t people. Like they don’t have breaking points even after his wife so obviously showed him that they do, continuing on the way he does as if he doesn't care either way. He’s angry that a child has spent more of his life scarred and scared than not. "I think that was long overdue." A mirthless laugh breaks out of the other boy. "Do you want to see recovery girl in the morning?"

"I don't think so. It's not a big deal." Izuku forces himself to swallow the words on his tongue because it is a big deal. Everything about this situation is a big deal. But it's one he's helpless in. "It doesn't really even hurt. I was just... shocked." Izuku finally lets go of Todoroki, and his friend keeps his head down as he wipes fervently at his eyes.

It's futile really. His cheeks are still splotchy, his eyes still red-rimmed. Just because the tears themselves are gone doesn't mean the evidence of them is gone. Or the turmoil that caused them.

"If you change your mind. I'll go with you." Izuku offers. He looks down then and frowns. "Where are your shoes?"

"I left them at the house."
"Did you walk here?" Izuku asks.

"No."

"Oh."

"I ran."

"You-you ran," Izuku sputters.

"I didn't know what to do. He was angry and Fuyumi was panicking. She's never seen him do that. She's heard I'm sure, and she's helped me clean up, but she's never had to watch. I couldn't make her watch more if he wasn't done."

"She helps you?"

"Sometimes. When he lets her. The ice comes in handy for bruises. I still can't beat him." Todoroki is slurring now. Izuku glances at the clock and sees it getting close to two am. He bites his lip, considering. He figures Todoroki has a looser tongue right now than any other time they've spoken, but he feels wrong pressing any more. If it's not something Todoroki would tell fully aware, then he shouldn't push. But... If he knows... Maybe he can help. Somehow. Even if it's not what he'd like to do. Even if it's not knocking Endeavor's teeth out or sending every one of UA's teachers to that front door. If he knows... He can do something right?

"What happens during training?" Todoroki pauses, deliberating maybe. After a moment, his head falls to rest against Izuku's shoulder.

"We spar." That doesn't sound... too terrible. "And he makes me work on my quirk. I'm still too weak. Can't," a yawn, "keep up. He's a bastard. But he's strong. I always end up on the floor."

"Does he stop?"

"When I'm too tired to get up. He gets disappointed. He'll yell for one of his staff or Fuyumi."

"Have you been to the hospital after training?"

"No need." Thank god. "If I do really bad, Mrs. Okumura fixes it."

“Todoroki, what happened to your face?” Aizawa asks the morning after dismissing class. It’s just Todoroki, Uraraka, Iida and Izuku left, the latter three chatting about study group. Uraraka and Iida exchange a worried glance, and Izuku looks to their teacher, watches the stiffness creep up Todoroki’s spine where his back is to Izuku. Aizawa’s eyes are narrowed, harsh words hanging on his tongue and Izuku decides to do something very stupid.

“We were sparring.” He blurs. It’s a good thing he’s behind Todoroki, so Aizawa doesn’t see the wide-eyed expression his friend gives him when he turns. “He’s been helping me with my quirkless combat and I got carried away.”

He can practically see the gears turning in his teacher’s head and for a moment, it looks like he’s going to call bullshit on the bluff, his gaze alternating between the two students before he lets out an annoyed grunt.

“Be more careful next time.” He says. “I mean it. Do you need to see recovery girl?” Todoroki
shakes his head. “Come here.”

Izuku gives a quick look to Uraraka and Iida, hoping to convey that everything’s fine, and the two leave, albeit slowly. Aizawa is prodding the bones in Todoroki’s face, and his friend is standing there, his face carefully blank. If it hurts, he’s not showing it.

He determines Todoroki is fine to let it heal naturally, and they move to leave.

"A word, Midoriya," Aizawa says.

“I’m going to be late-” he tries to protest.

“A word,” Aizawa repeats, his tone leaving no room for argument. Todoroki looks at him, his eyes unreadable before walking out. Izuku stands meekly before Aizawa’s desk, trying desperately not to show how nervous he is.

“Sparring. Are you sure that’s what happened?” It’s an out. It’s a chance to drop the stupid lie, to tell him what really happened. But there’s something holding his tongue, keeping the truth back. Todoroki trusts him. If he does this now, he may never trust him again. He may not have someone to turn to the next time his father loses his temper.

“Yes.” Technically, that’s not a full lie.

“With you.” Aizawa presses, and now it’s a full lie.

“Yes.” His teacher looks at him and Izuku refuses to break eye contact.

“Fine. Get out.” He does his best not to run, not to show how eager he is to be out of that situation. He’s not sure he succeeds.

Todoroki is outside the door, within earshot, his eyes to the ground. They take a few steps before Todoroki speaks.

“I never asked you to lie for me.”

“I didn’t think you’d tell the truth.”

“I wasn’t going to.”

"Why?" Izuku asks. It's apparently the wrong question because Todoroki thins his lips, his fingers twitching at his sides, and says nothing. Izuku frowns. He hears Aizawa’s door click shut back down the hall, and he’s not sure if he's hoping his teacher didn't hear their conversation, or if he’s hoping that he did.

Luckily, the times Todoroki has to go home are few and far between throughout the semester. They are still being kept on campus, trips off campus requiring special permission and more often than not, they have some sort of training on the weekend occupying their time. Then after the licensing exam, they’re either busy with internships, or remedial courses. That doesn’t stop Endeavor from making his presence known. He calls more frequently than anyone would like, leaving Todoroki in a generally foul mood and occasionally he shows up on campus to see his son, though he rarely uses that word.

In tandem to the relative quiet of incidents in the Todoroki house, somewhat remarkably, villain
activity has also been pretty low considering the symbol of peace was no more. There were no large-scale, organized crimes, and barely any indicators that any kind of activity stemmed from the League. But still, there was more than enough petty crime to go around and no shortage in singular activity.

Fortunately, it keeps Endeavor pretty busy. Unfortunately, it means his conquests are broadcasted *all the fucking time*. Izuku can only find so many excuses as to why the usually hero obsessed ‘fanboy’ - as he’s been dubbed by Kirishima- avoids the news surrounding the new number one hero like the plague. Or why he turns into a spastic monkey whenever it’s on and Todoroki enters the room.

Regardless, he supposes it is good news. Everyone had been prepared for the League to unleash itself, for the underground to become known again, but so far, it just hadn’t.

Not only that, but there were also no more targeted attacks on UA.

Some people are changing their opinions on Endeavor’s qualifications as the number one hero, citing the continued decrease as evidence his power is dissuading attacks. Izuku scoffs at those people. If villains are quiet, it’s because they want to be. A higher capture rate is hardly more impressive than All-might’s power to them.

Which is why Izuku isn’t sure if he should feel relieved, or if the apprehension that had been hanging over him like a dark rain cloud was justified.

The heavens begin to open when just before winter break Nedzu announces the change in dormitory status from ‘mandatory’ to ‘elective.’

Most of the class chooses to stay. It’s convenient after all, and they’ve kind of gotten used to living together. They’ve gotten used to group study sessions and weekend movie parties. They’ve gotten used to chatting over breakfast and groggily brushing teeth next to a friend. They’ve even gotten used to Iida’s directions and attempts at reducing the tomfoolery.

Eighteen of the twenty remain on campus but deign to utilize some of their weekend time to visit family.

Two of the twenty no longer live with them.

One of the twenty because they’ve been dropped from class 1-A altogether, and chose to pursue a transfer to another school.

One of the twenty is Todoroki.

Izuku *hates* it.

The only spot of light, the only solace from the downpour in this situation is that half of the winter break will be taken up by another off-campus training camp. And it *is* mandatory.

Izuku is sitting on Todoroki’s futon as his friend packs, scrolling through hero news on his phone. There’s a crime spree in the western sector of the country that heroes have thus far been unable to quell.

"Maybe your dad will get pulled out of town for a while," Izuku muses as Todoroki zips his duffel.

"Wouldn't be the first time," Todoroki says. Izuku frowns. He’s been even quieter than usual since the announcement.

“Are you okay?” Izuku asks, setting his phone aside. Todoroki opens his mouth, prepared to utter the
same response he’s been giving everybody that’s asked, the same meaningless platitudes he’s responded with seventeen other times when his classmates had lamented that he wouldn’t be staying the winter with them. Holding back that it wouldn’t just be the winter break but that he wasn’t coming back at all.

“I just… got used to it is all.” Todoroki says, his eyes on the duffel that really no longer needs as much attention as it’s getting. “It’ll be fine. I’ve dealt with him most of my life. A few months reprieve doesn’t really change anything.” It’s the most he’s said in hours, but Izuku can’t find it in himself to be very happy about it. He sounds so… resigned, which he kind of gets. Izuku feels the same.

Without doing something that Todoroki would be mad at him for, there’s nothing they can do. Endeavor said he wants him home, and since he’s the father, Todoroki has to go. Because nobody else knows what a poor excuse for a father he actually is. No one knows what he’s put Todoroki through all these years. Hell, Izuku doesn’t even fully know. He’s got more of a picture than he used to have, but it’s still pretty blurry. The blur is enough for him to be concerned for his friend without feeling silly about it.

"If he does go away for a while, you’re welcome to hang out with me. I'll be visiting my mom some, over break. She loved you at the parent-teacher conference, and Uraraka and Iida have already been to my house." Izuku says, trying to be nonchalant about it, but also making it seem like a good option.

“Oh…” Todoroki looks sad now, and Izuku’s heart pulls. “I guess with him around more I won’t get to see her as much over the break.” The words are quiet, and Izuku isn’t sure if they were meant for him to hear at all.

“He doesn’t like you seeing your mom?” Todoroki shakes his head. “But she’s your mom.”

“He says I’m too much like her, and that she’s still unstable. Her doctors won’t really tell me anything, but she seems better. Happy even. Of course, I didn’t notice she wasn’t okay the first time until it was too late.”

“This sucks.”

“No shit.”

Winter break lasts four weeks. The first two they are free to do whatever they want to do as long as they stay within a ten-hour vicinity. The second two will be another intensive training camp.

Izuku keeps repeating to himself that it’s just two weeks.

He spends the first couple of days vegging out with the others in the dorms, but slowly, more and more of them pack up and head off to see family. Iida is one of the first, promising to send updates on his brother’s physical therapy. He’ll never walk again, but that doesn’t mean there isn’t work to be done. Most of the girls leave early in the first couple of days, planning trips and workout sessions. Izuku subtly mentions Dagobah beach as a good spot since not as many people know it's cleaned up.

It’s day four and he’s sitting at the kitchen table, looking over a winter assignment while his mom flips through TV channels, when his phone rings. He’s only a little embarrassed at how quickly he answers. Granted, it’s been four days of utter silence, so on that thought, maybe he isn’t actually embarrassed at all. He is, however, immensely relieved.

“Hello?”
"Midoriya?"

"Hey, Todoroki." He barely bites back the ‘are you okay’ wanting to lurch its way off his tongue.

"Does your offer still stand?"

"My- oh. Yeah of course."

"Dad got pulled away on a trip. I wasn’t going to call – but,” he doesn’t even get a chance to feel relieved when he’s swept up by a new speaker.

"Hello?"

"Um. Hi?” Izuku is confused at the new female voice. It’s not at all familiar, and he can hear Todoroki protesting in the background.

“What’s your address? I’m sending him over now.”

"Who is this?” Izuku asks.

"His sister. Shouto, go pack something. If you aren’t ready I’ll send you with what you have on and nothing else.” He hears what might be an explicative, and then silence.

“It’s nice to meet you I guess?” Izuku sees his mom turn towards him, a question on her face. He holds up a finger, letting her know that he’ll tell her as soon as he himself knows what in the hell is going on.

"Sorry. He mentioned in passing that he had a friend he could see and I think it would be good for him."

"Is he okay?” Izuku asks and then bites on his tongue. It hurts and he tastes copper, grimacing at the metallic taste. Fuyumi, he thinks that’s her name, doesn’t speak for what feels like forever. He even looks down at the phone to make sure they’re still connected.

"I think maybe we should talk later,” she says finally, and her voice is no longer giving off the air of authority it had when she'd ordered off her brother. Now it sounds almost childlike, small and quiet, almost meek. “Dad will be gone a couple of days, minimum. I have a remedial class so I won’t be here and he… he doesn’t need to be here by himself.”

She could easily just mean that it would be boring, or that he would be alone, but there’s something hanging there unspoken, something foreboding. Izuku had thought the only problem with Todoroki going home was his father, but it’s sounding like that may not be the case.

He glances at his mom. He hadn’t actually asked her if Todoroki could stay, but he doesn’t think she’ll have a problem. She wasn’t overly thrilled with Endeavor’s behavior at the parent-teacher conference, and Izuku had heard an earful of complaints about the man and his quote-unquote parenting style.

Oh, he wishes he could tell her, but at least she wasn’t praising the man anymore. It tests him more than it should every time he does hear someone talking positively about the hero and it shouldn’t. Objectively, he is a good hero. Even Todoroki can acknowledge that. It shouldn’t make his mouth want to twist up like he’s eaten something horribly sour anytime the news mentions he stopped a crime or did something a hero is supposed to do.

“Okay.” He tells her the address, trying and failing to ignore his mother’s rather self-satisfied look.
In the end, he doesn’t end up getting to talk to Todoroki again over the phone. His sister hangs up pretty promptly with the promise that Todoroki will be dropping by within the hour.

He looks across the room to his mother who is trying and failing to act like she is watching the TV and not waiting for the absolute minimum amount of time before launching into her interrogation.

"Um, so, is it okay if a friend comes over for a couple days?" He asks. It's a poor way to start because apparently said friend is either already on his way, or about to be very soon.

“I’m not sure there’s a point in me pretending to say no,” she says, a sly smile on her face. “I don’t mind, Izuku. Like I said when we met your teachers. I’m just… really glad to see you so happy. To see you with so many friends.” She says, and her voice is shaking as she puts up a valiant effort against the waterworks.

Throughout his primary school, he’d tried to keep to himself the struggles he was facing. It had made his mom so sad when they’d found out he was quirkless, the last thing she needed was to know that not only were his dreams crushed but that he was getting bullied for it as well. Not to mention Kacchan. Sure, Kacchan was mean and pushed him down a lot, but if he told his mom, she would make him stop hanging out with him and Izuku didn’t want that. He still wanted to see all the great things Kacchan could do, the things he couldn’t, and at the time had thought he wouldn’t ever be able to do.

He supposes, with the way his mom has been since school started at UA, he hadn’t been as good at hiding it as he had thought.

“Yeah… It’s different, huh.” He offers. It’s not a lie, and it’s not even an understatement. For the first time in years, he’s felt like he belongs somewhere. He has people supporting him, teachers looking out for him, and he has friends. He has people that want to hang out with him, who value what he has to say.

"Which friend is it?" His mom asks.

“It’s Todoroki,” he says, not meeting her gaze, and hoping the heat on his face isn’t as noticeable as it feels. So maybe he has a tiny crush on his classmate. That’s to be expected. They’re teenagers after all. By this time next year, half the dorm will probably be banging.

“Todoroki. The-” Izuku can hear it coming, ‘the flame hero’s son’ or ‘the top hero’s son.’

“The one I lost to at the sports festival,” Izuku interrupts. “We talked to him at the conference.” His mom looks momentarily taken aback, and to be fair, Izuku’s tone had been on the side of snappish. He can’t help it. He knows Todoroki can’t stand that the only reason anyone recognizes him is his father; that he’s always mentioned in relation to his father, like it’s the only thing worth knowing about him.

“I was going to say the one you like.” Oh. That might be worse. “He seemed sad.” She says. It’s nonchalant, and she’s already got the remote again, trying to find something to watch, but somehow it makes him feel warm. He remembers thinking that, about Todoroki. Mere hours after he’d been told he was going to be beaten by the boy, that was all he could think. Staring down the immense power he was about to be feet away from, his only thoughts were that he looked so sad.

“He and his dad… aren’t exactly on good terms,” Izuku says, and damn if that isn’t an understatement. More like, ‘picture dad of the year, now imagine the opposite of that, and then you
have Endeavor.’

She doesn’t know any more than Todoroki broadcasts. That he and his dad don’t get along. He’d said as much when he and his mom had gotten around to re-watching the festival.

“He’s definitely not a pleasant man,” his mother says, and it makes Izuku snort. “I don’t like the way he talks.” He doesn’t offer anything up to that, knowing if he says much more he’s going to give away more than he needs to. More than Todoroki wants him to.

They end up lapsing into a more pleasant conversation, Izuku's homework forgotten. There’s a special on about All-might that Izuku ends up watching as his mother goes to make snacks for when his friend gets here. The doorbell rings, and he thinks maybe he should have at least changed out of his athletic shorts and sleep shirt. Too late now.

His mom meets him at the door, and Izuku doesn’t mean to, but he finds himself on bated breath, wondering how much explaining what’s on the other side of the door will take.

When the door swings open, he’s met by two people, but only one set of eyes actually looking at him. Todoroki’s eyes are firmly set on the doormat, his head down and to the side, his hand clutching the strap of a bag slung over his shoulder. Fuyumi is looking between them both, nervous energy practically seeping out of her. She reaches out to his mother first, shaking her hand and offering an introduction.

“Hello, I’m Fuyumi Todoroki, Shouto’s older sister. It’s very nice to meet you,” she says. Her voice has regained some of the maturity it had earlier in their phone conversation. “I believe you’ve met Shouto,” she says, looking back to her brother. “You could pretend to have manners you know,” she says to him, but her voice is gentler than her words would indicate.

“It’s nice to see you again Mrs. Midoriya,” he says quietly, dipping his head in a small bow. Fuyumi’s worried look doesn’t escape Izuku’s gaze, and by the furrow between his mother’s brows, he’s not sure it escaped hers either.

“I’m Inko Midoriya, Izuku’s mother. Would you like to come in for some tea?” Inko asks. Todoroki says nothing, and Izuku is seconds from dragging his friend into a hug.

“You know, that would be lovely. Let me go move the car,” she says turning, her bun twisted with stains of crimson bouncing as she goes down the stairs.

“Todoroki?” Izuku says when his friend makes no move to come in. He looks up then, eyes lined with shadows and a purpling bruise by his right eye, coloring the skin beside his bright scar. There’s a gash in the middle and Izuku can feel his mouth twisting, a mirror of the way his heart is straining in his chest. Izuku steps forward, grasping the sleeve of Todoroki’s jacket and tugging, not enough to actually make him move, but apparently enough to kick-start him into walking past the doorway.

He lets go when Todoroki bends to take off his shoes; not missing the knowing look Inko is giving him over Todoroki’s back. He makes the universal sign of ‘knock that shit off, mom,’ but doesn’t quite finish before Todoroki looks up, drawing a confused look.

“I’ll go get some tea started,” Inko says from behind them. Almost imperceptibly, Todoroki stiffens at the sound of her voice behind him.

“We’ll be in the living room,” Izuku says before urging Todoroki down the hall and towards his bedroom. It’s much less… decorated now that he’s living at the dorms. He’d taken most of his merchandise with him after all, leaving his furniture, back up bedding, and a couple of posters.
Todoroki stands in the doorway as Izuku mills about, tossing the few errant items into place. “You can set your bag down anywhere,” he says offhandedly. He’s tucking his sheet back in when he realizes Todoroki still hasn’t moved.

He walks back over and holds out his hand, his scarred hand, for the bag. Todoroki hands it over, and Izuku drops it on the bed. He shrugs his shoulders before heading back out into the hallway, towards the living room. He can hear, just barely, Todoroki shuffling behind him.

His mother is still busying herself in the kitchen as he leads, or rather herds, Todoroki onto the smaller couch beside him.

“How are you, Todoroki?” Izuku asks, setting free the words that have been burning on his tongue since he picked up the phone and heard his tired voice, the ones that have been searing his mouth since he’d opened up the door to him and his sister.

"I'm fine," Todoroki says. His head is tilted back, resting on the couch cushions, eyes shut.

“Are you? Cause you look like shit and you haven’t texted me since four am the night before you left for home.” Todoroki winces.

“He took my phone. Sorry.”

“And the other part?” He implores.

“Guess he figured he’d get called away. Kept me busy. I’m just tired.”

“And your face?” Izuku asks. Todoroki doesn’t bother opening his eyes.

“I got distracted and forgot to block. I told her to let me go see Mrs. Okumura before she brought me here.” Todoroki says, his voice betraying his irritation. Frankly, Izuku is a little pissed that of all things, he’s mad that his sister didn’t help him cover up what happened; he’s pissed that his friend’s frustration is misdirected, targeting the wrong things.

Izuku doesn’t get the chance to say anything in retort because his mother has run out of things to pretend to do, and is now setting tea and snacks down on the coffee table. There’s a tapping at the door, to which Inko calls out to just come in.

Fuyumi comes back in, stumbling slightly as she discards her shoes and walks, though it’s a little fast for a walk, her steps nearly as deceptively light as her brother’s.

“Still getting used to parking when there are people around. When I get to school the parking lot is a ghost land, so there’s nothing to hit,” Fuyumi says with a chuckle.

“I haven’t driven in years,” Inko says. “I’m not sure I could manage a straight line at this point.”

There’s some idle chatter. They talk about Fuyumi’s work and about Inko’s life, which devolves into talk about Izuku’s childhood.

“He was always wanting to play heroes as a kid. Running around in his little cape.”

“Is that so?” Fuyumi says, a gentle smile on her face.

“Oh I know I have pictures.”

"Mom!” Izuku protests, but it’s to no avail. She finds the albums and shows Todoroki’s sister.
"Such a cute child." His mom offers stories, anecdotes, all sorts of embarrassing information. Fuyumi has little to add. "I don’t really have pictures of Shouto,” Fuyumi says, though not really to anyone.

"Why?” His mother asks.

“He doesn’t like photos to be taken, and dad isn’t sentimental. I managed to wrangle him into one with me as a gift for our mom.”

“Oh, does she travel?”

"No, she's… sick. She's been in the hospital since Shouto was six.” Another page of pictures, another set of All-might onezies. "Really an All-might fan huh?” She asks as if it isn't obvious. "Shouto liked All-might a lot too when he was little.”

It's a Segway, carefully placed. It's similar enough that it doesn't jar the conversation but different enough that going back to what she said is awkward.

“Really? More than his father?” Izuku tries not to flinch. His mother is prying, he knows. She’s aware of the stress between those two; she’s trying to find out why. He's about to check on Todoroki when he feels a weight on his shoulder. He turns his head and his nose brushes soft hair, warm breath on his neck. Well, somebody is looking out for him. He's not sure Todoroki could have kept his chill if he’d heard what his mom had asked.

“Really has a certain… appeal that our dad lacks,” Fuyumi says. It’s a political answer. It lacks any kind of personal detail, any kind of emotion.

“So I’ve heard. He convinced me to let Izuku into the dorms after that catastrophic camping incident, though it was a two-on-one effort really,” she says, giving Izuku a look.

“I said I’d be fine either way,” Izuku says quietly, not wanting to disturb his sleeping leech.

“Yeah, Aizawa had his work cut out for him as well.”

“I can imagine. They’ve been through the ringer.”

“It was less that. Shouto came out of all of their debacles relatively unscathed. He just felt like they were encroaching on his territory. Telling him how to raise his son outside of school hours.”

“Well, My Izuku came out of every one of those with terrible injuries, most of which weren’t able to be repaired completely. Even at the sports festival where they were supervised!”

“It was definitely an intense year. I can’t say I particularly enjoyed watching any of those matches. The boy that won was frightening.”

"Your brother frightened me when he was facing my boy,” Inko says, and Izuku sighs.

"It's not easy being related to heroes, huh?” Fuyumi says, and though the words seem as if they're meant to be joking, there's a tightness to them that prevents any of them from laughing.

“No. It isn’t,” Inko says.

“I told you, most of that was my fault.” Izuku says, then, locking eyes with Fuyumi. “I think some heroes deliberately do things that make it harder on their families.” Sensing the impending awkwardness, he adds, “for better or for worse,” a smile loosely tacked on his face, the edges feeling
like they’re peeling back with each passing second. Fuyumi is blinking at him blankly, but then her eyes pass to his right, gaze going fond as she looks at her brother.

“You certainly did a number on him,” Fuyumi says, her eyes have shifted and are warm where they are locked onto Izuku. “He’s been happier since then. Though I swear, when we are able to talk it’s always Midoriya this or Midoriya that. Other classmates come up, but not nearly as much as you do. When he mentioned you had invited him over, well, I wasn’t going to let him say no.”

“I’m glad you didn’t,” Izuku says, his eyes sliding from Fuyumi’s softened gaze to the slumbering hero-to-be on his shoulder.

Fuyumi leaves shortly after, saying she has some prep to do before a meeting with students. She thanks Inko for her hospitality, and looks at her brother, still plastered against Izuku’s side, gives a mouthed thank you to Izuku himself, and then she’s gone, the door clicking shut behind her.

It’s twenty minutes later that Todoroki wakes, eyes bleary and confused, a red mark on his cheek where it’s been pressed to Izuku’s shoulder.

“Tired, huh?” Izuku asks, poking at the colored spot on Todoroki’s cheek.

Todoroki stretches, his shirt rising to reveal a strip of pale skin. Pale skin marred with an ugly bruise on his right side. Izuku’s blood boils at the sight and then promptly freezes when he hears his mother’s soft gasp from the hall, the mail in her hands gripped tightly between her fingers.

“Todoroki, you’re hurt,” she says, and he doesn’t know if he’s ever seen Todoroki move as fast as he does when he puts his arms down, his face red up to his ears.

“It’s nothing, I was sparring and I got distracted, missed a block that I shouldn’t have missed.” Izuku wants to gag, hearing that excuse. He looks to his mom, to her pensive face, the way she’s regarding the boy in front of her, the guest in her home.

“Am I to assume that’s also what happened to your face?” Shouto nods. “May I see?” She asks coolly. Todoroki’s head snaps up, his eyes meeting hers and he so closely resembles a deer caught in headlights. Inko is coming closer now, her steps slow and measured, but Todoroki is still subtly shrinking back into the couch. She stops in front of him, her fingers outstretched. Todoroki heaves a sigh and then meets her eyes. She tucks her fingers under his chin, holding him still while she looks at it. She does something similar to what Aizawa had done in class after Todoroki’s last injury, asking him periodically if there was any pain.

He never said there was.

“Well, it isn’t broken.”

“I know,” he says. “Fuyumi checked.”

"Oh. Would you like a dressing for the cut?’’ He seems prepared to decline but purses his lips and nods.

“I wouldn’t want it to re-open and stain something.” He’s looking at his hands, not looking at either one of the Midoriyas. He doesn’t see the way Inko’s mouth tightens as she walks away for the first aid kit.

When she comes back her eyes are determined, but her hands are gentle as she applies the bandage.

“Are you hurt anywhere else?”
He doesn’t answer.

“Would you let me see your side?”

“I’d rather not,” he mumbles.

“Will you let Izuku look? I want to make sure you didn’t damage anything.” Todoroki gives a slow nod.

"Come on," Izuku says, standing and walking down the hall to the bathroom across from his old bedroom. When the lock falls heavy behind them Todoroki lets out a shuddering sigh. "Let me see," Izuku says, his green eyes bright and determined in a way that's usually reserved for his quirk.

“You don’t have to,” he tries to argue, but Izuku refuses to relent.

“It’s not as bad as it looks,” he tries again. Izuku just looks at him. “Fine,” he huffs. He shrugs off the zip-up hoodie, setting it on the counter, and tugs the v-neck shirt over his head.

There’s the bruise across his lower abdomen, the one his mother had mistakenly seen, and there’s a burn across his ribcage, both injuries on his right side.

“Turn around,” Izuku says, his voice a carefully constructed simmer. Todoroki hesitates and Izuku walks around him instead. There’s another burn on his left arm, this one brighter and angrier than the one on the right. His right shoulder is also marred, and there’s a bruise on his lower back.

Todoroki is quiet while Izuku looks.

“Wait here,” Izuku says before opening the door, hating the frightened look in Todoroki’s eyes. He’d been so relaxed, so calm, so happy back at the dorms. “Where’s the burn cream?” He asks when he sees his mom cleaning up the remainders of the tea.

Her eyes widen slightly before she opens a drawer, pulling it out and handing him the meager first aid kit they’d had before heroics entered Izuku’s life.

“That wasn’t the only one then?” She asks.

“No,” Izuku mutters and walks away.

When he opens the door again, Todoroki is sitting on the toilet seat, his head in his hands.

“Is there more?” He asks, his voice sounding stronger than he feels. Todoroki nods. “What happened?”

“It’s nothing, I’m slow with my left side and I was distracted.”

“This isn’t nothing, Todoroki,” Izuku hisses.

“You don’t get it.”

“Then explain it to me.”

“This is what happens in hero families. It’s just worse because he can burn me. Mrs. Okumura was at work last night or she would have fixed it.”

“Turn around,” Izuku says, his tone careful not to betray his growing frustration. He’s angry, but it isn’t for his friend, and the last thing he wants is for his friend to think he’s mad at him.
Todoroki complies silently, straddling the toilet seat, letting his arms rest on the back and dropping his head to them. Izuku spreads some of the ointment on his fingers, rubbing it into the burn on his shoulder gently. “He does this often?”

“It’s training,” Todoroki grits out, though he’s not sure if it’s pain or irritation.

“This is not training.” Izuku bites. “This is too far for training.”

“And what Bakugo has done to you isn’t too far?”

“It was!” Izuku exclaims, squirting ointment onto the floor when his fist clenches involuntarily. “It was. He did a lot of things that were excessive. He was a big bully most of the time I knew him. I know his behavior was wrong, you don’t seem to get that this is bad.”

“You don’t seem to get that this is normal. It’s how heroes are trained.”

“No, it isn’t!” Izuku is losing his temper fast. He really needs to put a lid on it. He takes a deep breath, counts to ten, and releases. He does it twice more while he’s dressing the first burn. “Is that what he told you?”

“It’s not different from what we do at UA.” Todoroki mumbles.

“How long?”

“What?”

“How long. When did this start?” Todoroki hesitates, and that’s Izuku’s first hint.

“I was five.”

“You don’t think it’s wrong to burn a five-year-old?”

“He didn’t burn me then,” Todoroki argues. “He just… made me work on my reflexes. He wasn’t kind, and it sucked, but it’s the only reason I’m strong. It’s how you get better.”

“How often did he encourage you? Did he tell you what you were doing was good?”

“I don’t know.”

“What happened after the festival? When you got second. Was he proud?”

“Of course not,” Todoroki snaps. “I was there to show I was ready to take on All-might and I couldn’t even beat Bakugo. If you hadn’t yelled at me half our match you would have beaten me too. He was pissed and he was right.”

“My mom was proud of me. Uraraka’s parents were proud of her. Tsuyu’s family was proud and she didn’t even make the third round.”

“It’s not the same.”

“Because our parents aren’t heroes?” Izuku asks. “Talk to Iida sometime then. Ask him how excited he was to tell Ingenium he was tied for third. Ask him about his childhood.”

“Fine.” Todoroki bites out.

“Turn,” Izuku says once more. Todoroki does, and Izuku tries not to blush. It’s harder this time, face-
to-face like this as he rubs the salve into his burns.

“Thank you,” Todoroki says, his voice quiet.

“I don’t know what you’re thanking me for.”

“For being you. Apart from the stubbornness. You could take that down a notch.”

“So could you.”

They re-emerge and Izuku leads them into his room, drawing back the covers from his bed again.

"Lie down a minute. I'm going to see what mom is planning for dinner." He turns to leave but is stopped in his tracks by cool fingers around his wrist.

“Don’t tell her. Please,” Todoroki says. His voice is smaller than he’s ever heard it, and he doesn’t know if something Izuku said earlier is getting to him, or if it’s something else, but he reluctantly nods anyway, not quite able to relish in the relieved sigh that escapes his friend’s lips.

“You have to tell someone,” Izuku mutters.

“I told you.” Izuku leaves before he has a chance to respond to that.

_Telling me is kind of the problem, _Izuku thinks.

His mom is peeling potatoes in the kitchen, and he silently takes up the knife and starts cutting the carrots beside her. He knew she was going to single him out at some point, might as well get it over with.

“Did that happen at school?” His mother asks, not looking up from her task.

“It was hero training. It got a little out of hand.”

“But not at school?” Izuku hesitates.

"No," he says because he can’t flat out lie to his mom. He just can’t. It's hard enough to fabricate about One for all, he doesn't want to lie about this too. Especially not when she could help.

“Is he alright?” Izuku bites his tongue. If he isn’t careful, he’s going to swallow the damn thing or choke on blood one of these days.

“He’s fine.” The words drip like acid.

“You know you can talk to me, right?” She says, setting down both potato and peeler.

“I know, mom,” he says, and oh he wishes he could tell her. Tell anyone. He wishes he could have told All-might before Kamino. Let him show up at Endeavor’s doorstep and put an end to this bullshit.

He wishes he could tell Aizawa and let him drag the bastard into a police cruiser by his scarf.

He wishes he could tell _anyone_ who has more power to fix this than he does. He’s sixteen, what the hell is he able to do. He’s sixteen. He has no influence, no power, no sway. He has nothing but comfort to offer. That’s going to be real damn helpful if Endeavor decides to beat Todoroki to death
one day. Realistically, he knows that’s unlikely. He spent too much time ‘training’ Todoroki to kill him.

Though, that was almost the same reasoning that he’d used to say he wouldn’t hit Todoroki either and he’d been wrong.

“I don’t like his father,” she says suddenly, and Izuku narrowly avoids cutting his finger. “Do you know how long he’s had that scar? Todoroki?”

“A long time. Almost ten years,” Izuku says, remembering Fuyumi’s words. He’d known what happened, he hadn’t known the timeline of it though. Hadn’t known his mother had hurt him when he was young, barely of grade school age, barely more than a toddler. That he’s been walking around with that reminder on his face for ten years. “Most people don’t ask about it.”

“There was a press conference about that time, with him and I believe All-might was there. I think it was about your friend.”

“What do you mean?”

“He said something about ‘clearing the waters’ about rumors. I didn’t think much of it when it happened, partially because it was so far removed from us. Heroes are like celebrities, they seem like abstract things rather than people. I never imagine you’d be going to school with that boy.”

“He talked about Todoroki?”

“I think so. About his injury. I don’t remember much, I only saw it the once and I didn’t want you to watch it. It wasn’t the best interview.”

"All-might mentioned he and Endeavor hadn't spoken in ten years." Inko shrugs but takes the knife from Izuku.

“Go be with your friend.” She says. He knows she isn’t done with this topic, that it’s going to stew in her head until more of the information makes sense, the same way it does him. Like mother like son after all.

When he makes it back to his own room Todoroki is curled up on his bed, under an All-might blanket, sleeping.

He grabs his headphones and his phone and sits at his desk, a quick Google search pulling up what he believes he’s looking for.

Chapter End Notes

Well, that’s another chapter that got kind of out of hand in length. (My updates generally run like 3-4k. Not 6-7 :P)

Next week will probably be either a really short or skipped update because I am getting
married that weekend and we are going to be pretty busy, so we'll see! After that, we'll be back to the update schedule.
Anyway, love to hear from you guys, you can find me at protect-baby-shoto@tumblr.com
Hope you all enjoyed (I have reasons for doing things the way I'm doing them :P)
(I just saw the movie FYI and I am LIVING).
Until next time,

Cassie
Earlier this evening, we had an alarming call-in to the hero rescue line. An anonymous caller requested aid to the household of number two pro hero Endeavor. All-might, in town for an extended stay following hero con, responded to the call.

It is unclear the nature of the visit, only that it surrounded Endeavor’s youngest son.

Izuku looks down at the cursor, showing several minutes still remaining. The video transitions to another news broadcast.

We are here at Shizuoka General Hospital where six-year-old Shouto Todoroki is currently hospitalized. After the emergency call several days ago, we are finally told the call had been in response to severe injury to the youngest of Endeavor’s children.

Endeavor had been away in Shibuya during the time of the incident and All-might had been the one to arrive on scene. Of the five household members, only Shouto had any injuries.

He is currently receiving the highest medical care Japan can provide. More tonight at 11.

Izuku looks up, taking in Todoroki’s peaceful face. His lips are parted, his left cheek burrowed in the pillow on Izuku’s bed, obscuring his most recent injury. The video continues, and he turns his attention back to it, where, much like the UA panel following the training camp incident, several heroes and people Izuku doesn’t recognize are lined up at a table. Among them are All-might and Endeavor.

“All-might, can you tell us what happened when you arrived at the Todoroki household on Friday night?” There are camera flashes going off in every direction, sound bites and microphones littering the crowd, each waiting like sharks on a beach for information.

“There wasn’t much of a situation left by the time I arrived. Young Todoroki was in his room with his sister soothing the wound. His elder brothers were in the kitchen with their mother.”

“Endeavor, is it true your wife has been admitted to psychiatric care?” Endeavor looks as unfriendly as he ever has, arms crossed, his ever-present flames burning on his face.

“It is.”

“Our reports indicate that you checked her in there? Care to comment why?” The man to
Endeavor’s left leans in to say something, his hand blocking his mouth as he speaks into the hero’s ear.

Must be a publicity agent or something from the agency, Izuku muses. He’s giving advice on what to and what not to say to these people.

“I did admit her there. She presented as a danger to her children in her current state.”

“Enji,” All-might says from beside him, but Endeavor doesn’t even look his way.

“The boy is fine, luckily. She will stay under their care until the child’s safety can be guaranteed.”

It doesn’t go unnoticed by Izuku that Endeavor says child singularly when he has four. He knows enough about Todoroki and his father to know Endeavor didn’t really care about any of his other children. They’d been fleeting thoughts at the most, though perhaps in this case, that was better than having his undivided attention.

“Can you tell us the gravity of his injuries?”

“She burned him.” Another reporter pipes up, a woman this time, her voice sharp when she speaks.

“Do you have a response for those who may claim it seems unlikely your wife, a notarized ice quirk user, happened to burn a child? A comment for those who may argue the parent with the fire quirk is more likely to be responsible.” Endeavor’s flames flash brighter a moment, but it’s All-might who responds.

“As it’s been stated, Endeavor was in a different prefecture on business. Not to mention that he is a reputable hero and would never conceive of laying harm to his children. What happened was a regrettable instance of fragile mental health befalling harm and those involved are getting proper care and will make full recoveries. You will do well not to try and slander heroes where it is unnecessary.”

Izuku winces. Of course All-might would want to believe that. It’s probably inconceivable to the man that someone that high in the heroic hierarchy could be a deplorable human being.

Endeavor is seething, his blue eyes burning with hate brighter and hotter than the flames that accentuate his costume.

“Come here, Shouto,” Endeavor growls, and from the corner, previously unseen, is a very small, very blank-faced Todoroki. The features that are predominantly Endeavor’s are covered by white gauze. Covering his eye down below his cheek and wrapping around, obscuring most of his scarlet hair.

He walks, small, tiny, footsteps towards his father, who is now standing and walking around to the front of the tables.

He’s just so little… So young to be so traumatized… Izuku can’t help the tears that well up, though he’s not sure if they’re sadness or anger. Sadness for his friend, anger at his situation, at the man who created it and refuses to let him out of it.

“The boy is fine. He is healing from the burn his mother caused. You’ll see this child become a hero yet, and this small injury will not hold him back.” Endeavor spits those words like a threat, wields them like a weapon, sharp and dangerous. All-might looks concerned in the background, downright twitching to come forward and comfort the small boy. In the end, he does.
“I’ll let you finish up, Enji. Come on,” he says, extending a massive hand to Todoroki, who takes it gingerly. He looks at his father, but the expression is obscured by the camera’s angle. All-might leads him off stage, picking him up under the arms when they reach the stairs, the last look he gets at Todoroki is of a startled grey eye looking up at All-might like he’s seen the sun itself.

“I think this should suffice. Any further questions can be directed towards the police, I have done my part.”

The crowd of reporters goes uproarious, but the hero turns a scathing eye to them and continuous on his path.

The video cuts out, showing snapshots of sightings of Todoroki around town with his father, always as far away as he can manage from the man, even when the hero has him by the wrist not so delicately.

The first few depict him much the same as he seemed at the press conference, wrapped in gauze and very, very sad.

As they go on, and the wrappings diminish until it’s barely more than an eyepatch, and then, it’s nothing at all. Just the bright red blistering he’s gotten so used to seeing on an older Todoroki and makes him nauseous to see on a child that size.

Todoroki stands on Endeavor’s left in most of these, keeping him within his field of vision. This doesn’t change even once the wrappings are gone and he can see out of both eyes again.

Eyes that seem to get dimmer with each passing snapshot.

“Theory time with Kurosaki!” A voice says, showing a chipper female in a button up shirt. “This time, I’d like to talk about the Todoroki family. As most of you know, several months ago, quite a scandal hit the number two hero’s radar. This incident has been swept majorly under the rug since, but I’d like to talk about it for just a minute.

“Can we take a moment to appreciate the irony that somehow, the child ends up with a burn covering most of the left side of his face, from a mother who wields ice? Like, seriously. There is a good part of the internet, myself included, who think this was a not so clever framing of the Todo-mom.

“Anyone who knows Endeavor knows he has little patience for reporters or even fans, and we are well acquainted with his poor temper. Who’s to say poor little Shouto Todoroki didn’t incite his father’s wrath? He then uses his connections to fabricate an alibi and coerce an inpatient psychiatric stay.

“Sources say the hospital the Todoroki matriarch is staying at received a sizeable donation from Endeavor’s hero agency. A payment out of thanks, or the continued measures of a bribe? We may never really know.”

The video cuts out then, showing instead another news clip.

“Once more, we find trouble in the Todoroki household. Police have released an APB on the oldest son of number two hero Endeavor: Touya Todoroki. The child is sixteen, average height, slender build, turquoise eyes and white hair last seen at the Todoroki manor on the weekend. If anyone has information on this missing person, please, call the police or the hero emergency hotline.”

Another transition.
“We are back in Theory time with Kurosaki once again discussing the ever growing family troubles in the Todoroki house. Several years ago, the youngest was very harshly burned and we were offered a pretty flimsy excuse. Now, we are notified that the eldest, also a son, Touya, is missing. He’s been missing for three months now, and beyond the courtesy alert we all saw on the news, what else is being done to bring the missing Todoroki home?

“The answer to that, it seems, is nothing. Endeavor has not slowed on any of his patrols, nor allocated any time to search for his missing child. Also, quite surprisingly in a situation this high profile, he has not offered a reward for the safe return of his eldest. Seems pretty fishy to me.”

Izuku pauses it when the blankets rustle on the bed in front of him, a sleepy Todoroki peeking back up, revealing once more the ugly bruise blooming around the small bandage on the side of his face. Izuku locks the phone and slides it away, tugging the earphones free from his ears.

“You’re going to rot your brain watching those,” Todoroki mumbles and Izuku clams up for a moment, thinking Todoroki knows what he was watching. That he watched a crummy conspiracy nut rant about his family, but rational thought hits him before he incriminates himself, knowing Todoroki probably just thinks he’s watching or reading hero news as he does eleven hours of every day.

“Have to stay informed,” he says, bumping the phone against his skull, though a little rougher than he meant.

“How long did I sleep?” he asks, kicking back the covers and standing, his shirt twisted and rumpled.

“Maybe an hour.”

“Is your mom upset?” Todoroki asks quietly.

“No. Why would she be?”

“I don’t think she thought I was being honest. It’s disrespectful to lie in someone else’s home.”

“I mean she doesn’t like lying, but she’s more concerned about you.” Izuku says. Todoroki doesn’t say anything, and when Izuku looks at him he’s got his hands in his lap and is looking down at them.

“I apologize. I should have insisted I not come until I was well enough.”

“Fuyumi seemed pretty worried about you.” Izuku needs to get her cell number apparently. He hates going around Todoroki, but his friend needs help and if that’s the only way he’s going to figure out what kind of help he needs then, well, he’s going to do it.

“She worries too much,” Todoroki finally says.

“Maybe you worry too little.” He means it as nonchalant, but he feels it comes out accusatory, instead. Bright eyes dart up to meet his, defiance lingering in them.

“Maybe you both worry too much,” he bites out.

“Geeze, sorry that when your sister is telling me something is wrong and you look like shit twice warmed over I give a damn,” he says. The words themselves are harsh, but his tone is more desperate than anything.

“It’s literally nothing I haven’t been through a hundred times, Midoriya.”
“You see, that literally made it worse,” Izuku laments, turning in his desk chair and dropping his head harshly to the wood surface.

“I don’t understand why it bothers you so much.”

“Because you’ve convinced yourself that this isn’t a big deal, or that it’s normal just because it’s your normal. I’m worried because you don’t care. You don’t have any semblance of self-preservation. As long as it’s you, it’s fine, right?”

“I can take it. I’m training to be able to take it.”

“You’re training to be a hero not a punching bag.”

“I think you’re misunderstanding, Midoriya,” Todoroki all but growls. His tone is dangerous, his finger-tips shining with ice crystals.

“What I understand is your dad goes one-hundred percent on you in your house and doesn’t stop when you get knocked down. I understand that he has been doing this to you since you were what four? Five? Do you know the definition of using excessive force on a child?” Izuku asks.

“Midoriya, don’t. Please,” he says, all trace of that bravado moments ago gone, left behind a desperate pleading look.

“It’s abuse, Todoroki.” Todoroki looks like his world was just upended on him, though Izuku is sure by the next morning at the latest he’ll again be in the mindset that Izuku doesn’t know what he’s talking about. “Kacchan beat on me all through school, scrawny, helpless, unpresented quirk me. What do you call that?” Todoroki doesn’t answer. “Abuse. Do you think it changes just cause he’s a hero?”

“I can’t think about this anymore,” Todoroki says. “I need- I need time to process.” Izuku stands and Todoroki shrinks away, as if Izuku is going to lash out at him for needing a moment. As if that’s some unreasonable request to make.

“I’m sorry. I pushed too hard,” Izuku says. He’s approaching slowly, like he would a frightened cat. Keeping his hands within Todoroki’s sight, moving slow enough that he could easily stop him if he wanted to.

He puts his knee up on the bed and pulls himself up beside his friend.

“I just want you to be safe,” he says wrapping his arms around Todoroki’s shoulders.

They stay that way for a while, until a jaw-breaking yawn comes from Todoroki.

“Come on, you look like you could sleep for a week,” Izuku says, pulling him to lay down.

“Or a month,” he mumbles. They lie down facing each other, Todoroki’s cold foot brushes Izuku’s bare leg and he yelps. “Sorry.” Izuku smiles at him and nudges the iced limb back towards himself, warming it on his own calf. He takes his other hand and laces his fingers through Todoroki’s warm ones, hoping the blush on his cheeks isn’t as prominent as it feels.

He might be imagining it, but he feels like there’s a pink tint to Todoroki’s cheeks as well.

He wakes up not knowing what time it is and feeling like he’s slept too close to one of those space heaters they had to put in their apartment when the main heating just couldn’t keep up. The puff of air on the back of his neck makes him realize it is not a space heater, instead it's Todoroki, who’s
There’s a soft knock at the door and he resists the urge to jump away from Todoroki. His mom peeks in, eyes going wide before softening at them. Izuku makes a motion for her to stay quiet, but it’s useless. Todoroki stirs beside him, sitting up, his hair all tangled, the two colors mingling more than he’s ever seen them in his part.

“Midoriya,” he grumbles and then he notices their company. “Oh burn me alive,” he mutters before flopping back down and pulling the blanket over his head.

Inko chuckles from the doorway before speaking. “I have some dinner ready if you boys are hungry.”

“Thanks mom,” Izuku calls.

“Thank you, Mrs. Midoriya,” Todoroki’s muffled voice sounds from under the blanket. When the door clicks shut behind his mother Todoroki shows his face again, which is definitely red with blush.

“Oops,” Izuku says unabashed. Todoroki just glares. He’d meant for them to take a nap. Not sleep for sixteen hours.

“Wait. What time is it?!?” Todoroki asks, flipping back the covers to stare at Izuku, who’s green eyes avert sheepishly.

“I guess we were both tired,” Izuku offers, rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly. Sure enough, it’s dusk outside, the sun setting behind the towers of the complex.

“I shouldn’t have slept that long,” Todoroki says. His words are spoken in quick succession and he’s already stumbling out of bed, his expression harried.

“Todoroki, it’s okay.”

“It’s not okay. I wasted a whole day. My joints feel like they’re made of lead. I can’t feel my arm and my head is heavy. And- and”

“You’re healing. And you’re rested. And it’s fine. My mom doesn’t care. I don’t care. You needed it.” There’s a pregnant pause before words are whispered. Todoroki isn’t looking at him when he says it, rifling through the bedsheets for his other sock instead.

“Thank you.”

Dinner is quiet. Todoroki somehow still looks like he needs to sleep for about thirteen days and Izuku doesn’t feel like pushing him anymore right now.

He and his mom make idle talk that occasionally tries to include Todoroki, asking about the semester, school, their work study stuff. She’s not asking what she wants to ask the same way Izuku isn’t.

After the third time Todoroki poorly stifles a yawn Izuku decides enough is enough and goes to put the other boy to bed. Because he’s a good guest, and because he’s too lazy to actually set up the spare futon tonight, he sets up Todoroki in his bed and prepares to take the couch.

“You should sleep in your own bed,” Todoroki argues.

“Nah. You’re my guest. You get dibs.”
“We could share again.” That gives Izuku palpitations. Because he wants to. God does he want to.

“Just- take the bed,” he insists. Hopefully Todoroki won’t comment on his suffered refusal.

“I’m perfectly fine on the couch. It’s far from the worst I’ve slept on.”

“Can we not fight right now, please?” Izuku asks, his tone quiet. “I just want you to be comfortable.”

“Okay.” He gets Todoroki wrapped up in the blankets and pulls a spare out of his closet just in case before he leaves. “Thank you for letting me stay, Midoriya.”

“Any time. I mean it.” Izuku says and he does. He would let Todoroki move in if it meant he never had to come back to school with bruises.

The couch isn’t particularly comfortable and he sets a mental reminder to set up the spare bed tomorrow so he doesn’t have to do this again. He leaves the TV on for a little while, watching reruns on the hero network until it starts talking about their new number one hero. He chuckles with some of the comments the reporter that seems to not like Endeavor quips.

After a while though, the person defending him just pisses him off and sets off a headache, so he flips the channel to some mindless action movie. He pulls out his phone, noting several texts he has, including one from an unknown number.

_Unknown:_ Hey, it’s Fuyumi. How is he?

_Izuku:_ Stubborn. Sleeping.

_Unknown:_ Thank you again for letting him stay.

_Izuku:_ Of course. He’s my friend.

_But_

_Why was it so urgent? I thought Endeavor was gone_

_Unknown:_ He just gets in a weird headspace after time with dad.

_He comes back from school fine_

_So I thought maybe being around a classmate would help_

_Izuku… How much do you know?_

_Izuku:_ Enough.

_Unknown:_ I see…

_I don’t really have a right to ask._

_but_

_Look out for him for me…?_

_Izuku:_ Always.

_Unknown:_ I’m glad he has a friend like you
Izuku sighs. This whole family needs therapy. He texts Uraraka and Kaminari while he formulates a plan for dealing with Todoroki.

He’s not sure exactly when he falls asleep.

——

Izuku likes having Todoroki around. It’s easy to be near him. Mostly. As long as he avoids the difficult topics. As long as he doesn’t push about the burns. Or the bruises. Or the fact that he looked like he hadn’t slept for days before he showed up.

He tries. Because he’s Izuku. But Todoroki always shuts down. He’s already circled back to acting like it’s not a big deal. They go running that morning because even though it’s a break, they’re training to be heroes and Todoroki is still wound up about sleeping most of the day. He’s skirt of right. They can’t afford to be lazy.

*We can afford to be healthy,* Izuku mentally argues, still more than a bit miffed at the state Todoroki had been in when he’d arrived. He thought someone like Endeavor would know training past exhaustion does more harm than good. Or maybe he knows and doesn’t care. Maybe he knows, and the point isn’t training, it’s just cruelty.

They’re rounding their third lap, passing by Dagobah when they pause to catch their breath. Well, more so Izuku can catch his breath.

“Ugh. Should have brought water,” Izuku complains as he dry swallows. His mouth feels like cotton in the chilled air. He looks over to Todoroki. “That is so not fair.” He complains. Todoroki has a chunk of ice in his left hand that he’s melting into a stream of water that’s trickling into his open mouth. Briefly, beyond being impressed by the trick, he’s struck by Todoroki’s profile against the rising sun.

“It’s a useful trick. Figured it out years ago. Here. Tilt your head.” Todoroki says it likes its nothing and Izuku struggles to find a reason to say no, but he can’t find one that’s not just word salad about having a crush on his friend that makes this feel really really weird.

In his indecision, Todoroki puts his finger under Izuku’s chin and tilts it for him.

The water is still cool when it hits his tongue. His face on the other hand feels like it’s on fire.

“Well I guess we better get going, run and all.” Izuku nervously but Todoroki makes no move to follow him, his eyes off to the side, looking at the waves crashing on shore.

“Maybe we could spar here instead?” He offers, turning to face Izuku.

“Spar? You’re covered in bruises already?!” Izuku sputters.

“And?” Fucking fine then.

“No quirks.” Izuku says.

“Of course.”

“I’m not prepared to lose this time,” Izuku says, the familiar feeling of a smile breaking out on his face. These steps with Todoroki are so easy to fall back into, so easy and mundane and... well. Something he could definitely get used to.
He and Todoroki had taken up quirkless sparring a while ago. Izuku for his general lack of combat training and Todoroki to try and lessen his reliance on brute force.

They take up their stances, Izuku’s clawed crouch and Todoroki’s martial artist stance (it’s much improved from the awkward hunch he’d started with earlier in the year).

“Ready?” Izuku asks. Todoroki nods. “Go.” Even without a quirk Izuku is quick and he knows it. He’s not gotten much taller, but he’s built muscle. He charges Todoroki and makes a move to sweep the other’s feet out from under him, which is subsequently dodged by a graceful leap and shove to Izuku’s broadening shoulders.

Todoroki has a smug smirk on his face when he lunges for Izuku and if it replaces that dejected depression that’s been hanging around him, then Izuku can take a couple hits.

The next time Todoroki comes for him he slips his arms out of his jacket and winds one sleeve around Todoroki’s outstretched wrist.

Todoroki looks at the garment like it’s burned him and likes he’s contemplating burning it in return before he kicks up sand at Izuku, causing him to sputter and drop the other side in lieu of unblinding himself.

“That was dirty,” Izuku pants when he can see again.

“So was yours.”

“Not really. I’ve gotten used to using other things to my advantage. You know my quirk hasn’t always been something I’ve been able to rely on.”

“Like your backpack?” Todoroki asks.

“My- how did you know about that?”

“I looked you up after the festival. Happened to catch the video of you and Bakugo. You were skinnier then.”

“I had a pretty intense summer.” Todoroki’s eyes darken.

“I see.”

“Not like that, Todoroki.”

“Sure.”

“All-might wouldn’t do what he’s done.”

“What does - All-might trained you?”

“You asked what our connection was. Apparently I inspired him trying to help Kacchan. All the pros were standing around, but I was the one who ran in. I was stupid, but he liked my spirit.”

“You weren’t stupid.” Izuku scoffs. “You’ll make a good hero... Deku. Now. If you want to be number one, come beat me.”

“All right. Shouto.” Todoroki’s eyes widen and Izuku chuckles. “You should maybe work on your hero name.”
“Shouto is fine. It’s just... different coming from you.”

Izuku lunges back in with a feint to Todoroki’s right and then an actual hook to his left and is surprised when only the former is dodged, the latter making solid contact on his temple. Todoroki stumbles briefly before squaring up a challenge on his face, but it’s a mask. He can tell. It’s covering something else, he just can’t quite read what.

“Nice shot,” Todoroki says, his tone careful. Despite their regulations, he can see frost glinting in the morning sun. He feels his own smile falter. This definitely wasn’t a good idea.

He doesn’t get a chance to call it off when Todoroki pushes into his space, cold fingers wrapping around his wrist and a burning one on his shoulder, pinning the arm behind his back.

Izuku thinks about it only briefly before throwing his head back, raising on his tiptoes so he hits something besides Todoroki’s chin and twists free when the others grip slackens slightly. He tries to flip Todoroki while he’s recovering from the head butt, but he isn’t quick enough and gets dodged by a smooth sidestep and another playful shove to the back.

“You’re not trying very hard,” Todoroki says, shedding his zip up.

“You expect me to go all out when you look like that?” Izuku asks. Todoroki’s face twitches but he says nothing else. “I take it he doesn’t take it easy on you even if you’re still hurt?” Izuku presses.

“Don’t ask stupid questions.”

“Then don’t act stupid!” Izuku calls out, his words still washing out against the crash of the sea.

He can tell Todoroki’s angry. His shoulders are squared off, drawing him up to his full height instead of the lop sided slouch he prefers and his mouth is in a pale line. His eyes look like a hurricane. Like lightning and thunder ready to demolish everything.

Todoroki strikes again but it’s predictable and easy to dodge without the weight of his quirk behind it. Izuku parries, dropping Todoroki to his knees with a well-placed kick. Izuku spars with a lot of people. Iida helps him with legwork. Uraraka teaches him what she learns from Gunhead. Ojiro helps him with footwork. Kirishima does hand to hand with him. Sparring with Todoroki is usually Izuku’s favorite. Not today though.

Today it’s frustrating. It’s frustrating to see him hurt and still pushing. It’s irritating to hear him make excuses for his dad. It’s enraging for Izuku to call him names hoping to get something out of the other boy.

His next kick Todoroki catches by the ankle and pulls, sweeping his arm beneath Izuku’s armpit and throwing him on his back in the sand.

It doesn’t hurt, the sand is softer than the cement they often have classes on, and has more give than the dirt he and Todoroki usually fall in. He rolls back to his feet and spits, trying to get the grit from his mouth. Fucking sand. He landed on his back, how is it in his mouth.

They have a couple more exchanges that get them nowhere. Izuku kicks again, aiming for Todoroki’s middle, trying to knock him off balance. Todoroki turns to avoid a straight on hit, but it glances off his side, off his burn, and he bites back against the curse that wants to break free.

“Todoroki-” Izuku starts, the word stop forming on his lips. He knew this was a bad idea from the beginning and now he was certain this wasn’t going to make anything better.
Todoroki is on him before the word leaves his mouth. Izuku doesn’t block in time and Todoroki’s cold fingers lock around his wrist, his other shoving hard against his chest, his leg moving to sweep Izuku’s out from under him.

Izuku hits the ground even softer than before, gets a brief second to wonder if Todoroki had controlled his fall and then his friend’s weight is over him, pressing on his thighs, his shoulders, and heat is radiating against his neck.

“You pulled your punches,” Todoroki says.

“You didn’t,” Izuku groans, rubbing at his wrist when Todoroki lets him sit up.

“Yes I did,” Todoroki says, frowning. “Did I hurt you?” His eyes are wide before darting down to Izuku’s wrist. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to,” he says quickly, pulling Izuku gently by his forearm, icy fingers prodding at the sore bones.

“It’s okay Todoroki. I was mostly joking. I’ve definitely had worse,” he jokes, smile wide, but the attempt falls flat. Todoroki’s eyes are down, his fringe obscuring his expression.

“It’s not seriously hurt,” Todoroki mumbles. Izuku looks up, watching the sky continue to brighten with the morning.

“Your hand feels good there,” Izuku says before his throat closes up realizing what he said. Todoroki doesn’t comment, but he does activate his quirk, forming a thin shield of ice, soothing the pain and providing stability.

“We should go. You need to take care of this properly.”

“Todoroki,” Izuku says. Todoroki is already standing, dusting the sand off his track pants.

When they get back to the house Inko is making lunch. Izuku drags Todoroki to his room, stopping in the bathroom to pick up the first aid kit they had used the night before.

“Help me, will you?” Izuku asks. For one, it’s on his dominant hand which will make wrapping it hard and two, letting Todoroki sit in the corner and sulk isn’t going to help anyone.

“Sure.” He doesn’t meet Izuku’s eyes. Todoroki’s hands are gentle and his touch is measured, as if he’s trying to minimize the amount of contact their hands have. “It’s the same hand,” he eventually mutters.

“Huh?”

“Nothing.”

“Are you still on about that hand curse?”

“… no.”

“As far as I can tell, we’re pretty even. I got your head pretty good there didn’t I?”

“It wasn’t bad.” Izuku frowns. It had been pretty solid contact, enough to have Todoroki stagger. Todoroki had barely done that much after he’d hit him with One for all back in their first sports festival.

“Accidents happen.”
“So accidents happen between us. But when it’s at home you act like it’s so much worse.” Todoroki bites out.

“It’s different, Todoroki.” Izuku says, but is met with a small scoff. He decides to pull back, not wanting to deal with pissed off Todoroki for the rest of the day. “You wanna meet my neighbors’ cat?”

Lunch is awesome. Todoroki had relaxed during their cat visit. Izuku had been a little pissed when the cat decided she liked Todoroki more than him, but who could blame her, really.

He’s at his childhood home with his mom and Todoroki eating carefully prepared food. His mom side eyes his wrapped wrist but chooses to do nothing but shake her head at him fondly. Really. It couldn’t get much better than this. He and his mom talk easily; Todoroki doesn’t participate in conversation all that much, mostly watching the exchanges with sometimes almost comically wide eyes.

“How is the rest of your family doing, Todoroki?” Inko asks him about halfway through the meal. “Fuyumi is a lovely girl.”

“She is,” he says, his expression fond. “She’s really the only one I had a chance to get close to growing up.” Todoroki purses his lips and Izuku knows he’s choosing his words carefully. Todoroki always tries to tell the truth as much as he can, without getting too close to the actual truth. “My father is… busy with hero work. Natsu is in college and… well. I don’t know about Touya.”

“Who’s Touya?” Izuku asks because he’s never mentioned someone named Touya before. He can see the moment Todoroki’s jaw locks and Izuku knows he should have asked this after dinner, when they were alone, if he wanted an answer.

“He’s the eldest. He… left home a long time ago and hasn’t spoken to us since, and mama- she’s been in the hospital most of my life.” Izuku wants to wrap his arms around his friend; feel his odd temperature difference against his chest, feel his hair tickle his nose and just… be there for him. Be there like it sounds no one has been in a long time.

His mom does it in his place. She walks over to the other side of the table, her food abandoned to wrap her arms gently around the teenager who’s eyes betray far more age than they should. Todoroki tenses slightly under her touch, but relaxes soon after. Izuku can see his eyes over his mother’s small shoulders, the way they glisten before closing, his hand coming up with uncertainty, hesitantly touching her between the shoulder blades.

“I’m sorry your mother isn’t well. Has she improved since you were young?” She pulls back, her hands still on his shoulders, rubbing small circles into them.

“I think so. She’s… stronger than she was,” he looks down at his lap. “They won’t ever actually tell me what’s going on. Father told them not to.”

“He won’t let you ask about your mom?” Izuku blurts and apparently he’s standing now, one hand on the table top, the other itching to make a fist in his irritation, One for All begging to let loose through his veins.

“He says it would distract me. Same reason I wasn’t close with my siblings. Excuse me,” Todoroki pushes away from the table and walks out. Izuku longs to follow him, but between the look he’s
certain his mother is giving him and the fact that he probably needs at least a minute to compose himself. Todoroki cried on him once but he knows he’s prideful and that he hates to feel weak.

He hates feeling like he needs other people because his dad told him he didn’t need anyone else. He’s still coming around to accepting that. The same way Izuku is still working on accepting that it’s okay for heroes to cry and it’s okay to be weary of Bakugo even though he’s changing. That it’s okay not to forgive someone the moment they extend an olive branch.

“Go on,” his mom says. “He needs you.”

“He doesn’t share much about his family, he’s just overwhelmed.” Inko looks at him with narrowed eyes. “His dad kinda sucks,” Izuku offers.

“Sounds like it.” Izuku resists the urge to use his quirk to speed down the hall, quickening his pace on his own instead. He really hates Endeavor and he thinks it wouldn’t be bad for his mom to be on their side. She’s not particularly strong with her quirk, but she’s fiercely protective. She stood her ground in front of All-might himself. He’s not sure Endeavor in all his flaming wrath would get past her if she really wanted to stop him.

He prays though that his mother is never forced to take that confrontation.

Izuku on the other hand… would love a reason to knock a few of his teeth out.

“Todoroki?” Izuku calls before opening the door all the way. Todoroki is sitting on the bed, watching his hands, his brow creased as snowflakes dance between the fingers of his right.

“I shouldn’t have said that.” His voice is quiet. “There’s just… so much I haven’t talked about in so long.”

“Talk to me about it,” Izuku blurts out.

“What?”

“You already told me about your mom. And about your dad. I haven’t told anyone else. I-I want to help you, Todoroki. And sometimes it helps to… to talk about this kind of stuff.”

“Does it help for you to talk about your relationship with Bakugo?”

“Please don’t phrase it like that.”

“Like what?”

“Never mind. It kind of did… I mean, it helped me reclaim the name he used to call me, and it made me feel kind of validated when you didn’t like his behavior either. It also- I don’t know, it just lets some of it ebb off. Like it’s no longer just bubbling up inside you, festering if you give it a chance to get out. It doesn’t fix everything, but sometimes it helps a little to have someone else who knows what you’re going through.”

“I see…”

“Everyone lies. Everyone has secrets. You just have to make sure you aren’t straining yourself too much by keeping them all. I lie. Iida lies. Kirishima lies. Hell even All-might lies. You have to find people you’re okay with knowing what the lies are hiding. I… I knew All-might’s secret a long time before Kamino. That’s part of the connection we had.”
“Is the other part that you are actually secretly related?”

“I wish,” Izuku laughs. “I don’t even know my dad. He’s been away since I was too young to remember him. I never cared, but I think mom still gets lonely sometimes.”

“Kind of makes me feel bad. At least mine is around.”

“Hey, no. If mine was anything like yours I wouldn’t want him around either. You’re deflecting though.”

“I don’t know where to start.”

“Can I ask you something then? That you’ll answer honestly?” Izuku asks. Todoroki nods. “Why don’t you tell anyone? About your dad I mean. Get away from him.”

“Who would believe me?” Todoroki’s voice breaks on the last word, the snowflakes turn to solid ice and then drop to the floor.

“I did,” Izuku says, putting all the earnestness he can into those words.

“And you trust too easy. He’s powerful. He’s influential. He could bury anything I said, pay off anyone who dared get involved.” Todoroki’s not looking at him. His fingers are twitching before he laces them together, trying to make them steady.

“That’s not it though. Is it?” Todoroki’s lip trembles before he speaks again.

“He could hurt mama again. When I first got my quirk and he started training me, mama tried to help. She kept Fuyumi and the others out in the yard while we trained and she’d get between us when he got too rough. He wouldn’t stop though. He’d just hit her instead and I… I couldn’t do anything.

“After a while he started getting me up before she was awake and he’d tell me to stay quiet so she wouldn’t get in his way and I tried. I tried so hard… but I just… I was young.

“And then he sent her away and it didn’t matter anymore. Sometimes when he’s really angry he’ll threaten to take it out on her but he never has. He just knows it’s where I’m weak and heroes shouldn’t be weak.

“She’s… she’s finally doing better, but I know even seeing him would frighten her. She won’t touch me. Not even now. She doesn’t trust herself. It’s been nine years and she won’t touch me. She scrutinizes me every time I walk through the door, like she’s trying to decipher if it’s me or him.”

“She was the only one who was there for you, wasn’t she?” Todoroki nods. “Your dad isolated you from your siblings?”

“It’s not like they really tried. I think at first Natsu resented me. I was the only one he paid any attention to. Most of the time I just wished I could be like them or just… not be there at all. Especially after mama left.”

There is so much wrong with this Izuku isn’t even sure where to start, but he decides since he has Todoroki talking, he’ll let him vent. They can tackle all the issues another day. Or week.

Neither of them notice the headline that pops up on Izuku’s screen saying the villain Endeavor left town to take care of had been neutralized.
They’re in the floor in the living room when there’s a knock at the door.

“I’ll get it,” his mom calls from the laundry room. Izuku goes to stand anyway but she beats him to it. Izuku’s friends stopping by during break isn’t uncommon. She doesn’t bother looking through the peephole. “Oh. Can I help you?”

“Hello, Inko.” Izuku shoots up.

“All-might!” He runs through the hall, launching himself at their teachers middle and into a bone crushing hug. Todoroki is only a little surprised that there’s no blood spew accompanying a hug of that magnitude.

“Hello young Midoriya,” All-might says, ruffling wild green curls fondly. Shadowed blue eyes look into the apartment, catching glimpse of Todoroki’s distinct features. “And Young Todoroki as well.” His voice is more severe now, much less excited. Todoroki tries not to take it to heart, tries not to be hurt by the obvious difference in enthusiasm, in preference. He’s pretty used to it.

No one has been happy to see him in a long time. Always instinctually attaching him to his father’s behaviors. Always assume he’ll be the same firey headache and flaming rage. The only one who’s been excited for him… for Shouto. For something beyond the Todoroki part… is Midoriya. When he was just Endeavor’s son to Midoriya, he was the same as any other classmate. When he wasn’t just a classmate anymore, he called him on his shit, helped him without trying, and became the first friend Shouto has ever had.

“Endeavor was just at the school requesting your address,” All-might says to Midoriya, though his eyes remain on Shouto. “I didn’t give it to him. Not allowed to. But I know that if he wants it, he’ll get it somehow.”

“I thought he was out of the area,” Shouto says, his voice quiet. Small. He sounds like a child to his own ears.

“He returned this morning. Was unhappy to find Young Todoroki not at home and his temporary guardian unreachable. He came to the school to check the dorms.”

“Why does he assume you’re with me?” Midoriya asks, walking towards Shouto, beckoning All-might further into the apartment.

“I don’t know. Maybe he thinks I’m doing it to spite him. He likes you least of all of my classmates.” Midoriya doesn’t even blink at that information.

“Yeah well he’s my least favorite of my friend’s parents so we’re even,” he quips before wincing and looking to his mother and All-might who both look mildly confused. He shrugs at them both before bulldozing on. “I guess we should get you home then.” He says, but Shouto can tell it’s not something he actually wants to do.

“I’ll go.” Shouto says.

“That’s not what I meant,” Midoriya says but Shouto puts his hand up.

“What happened to your face, Young Todoroki?” All-might asks.
So. I hate most of this chapter. I didn’t like the news presentation at ALL, but I wanted to convey that part of the story. Every since All-might mentioned they conveniently haven’t spoken since a press conference that happened to be around the same time Shouto got hurt I decided the two could be related and I ran with it.

Next week may or may not have a chapter, depending on if I can find time and motivation amongst the last minute wedding stuff. I really hope you are all enjoying it, I’m definitely enjoying writing it (except that first bit because it’s still cringeworthy to me)
(by the next update I'll be a Mrs. 0.0)

Updating this with an infant on my lap (he's enraptured lol) <3

Cassie
"What happened to your face, young Todoroki?"

“Sparring got out of hand,” Izuku says, his hand once again instinctively going up to run fingers through the hair at the back of his neck, face scrunching up when he feels the sand tangled in his hair. He catches the look his mom throws him and looks away, unable to hold her gaze.

It had temporarily slipped his mind that she had been there when Todoroki arrived, that she knew he came to their house with those bruises. That there was no way he’d gotten them sparring with Izuku.

Fuck.

This is why he shouldn’t lie. For whatever reason, Inko doesn’t say anything. She eyes him carefully, he’s not looking at her, but he can feel her emerald eyes studying him, until finally, that stress melts away and he looks up to find her meandering to their meager kitchen to prepare drinks and snacks for the unexpected visitor.

They don’t get much farther before there’s a louder, much more aggressive sounding knock. Izuku doesn’t miss the way Todoroki flinches away from the sound. All-might was chatting with Izuku about break and he’s pretty sure the former pro didn’t notice Todoroki’s reaction.

“I’ve got it, mom,” Izuku calls, jumping up towards the door. Todoroki is a statue on his couch.

He opens the door to a man almost as tall as All-might and twice as broad. He’s looking down his nose at Izuku with those ice cold eyes -ironic- with his thick arms crossed over his puffed out chest. He’s not all that different from when Izuku had encountered him at the festival, apart from the fact that now he isn’t wearing his hero uniform and his customary facial flames are absent. He’s no less intimidating this way.

“I’m looking for the boy,” he growls. Izuku crosses his own arms over his chest. It’s a meager display of resistance, but the twitch at the corner of Endeavor’s eye makes it damn worth it.

“At my house? Why ever would you look here?” Izuku asks. He can hear his mother’s kitchen scramblings cease, hear her gentle steps as she approaches the living room, taking up a space where she can see the doorway.

“Don’t be smart with me child. You’d do well not to make enemies of people with influence.”

“I don’t care to make friends with people who use their influence like you do.”

“Don’t talk like you know anything, you brat.” His eyes aren’t looking at Izuku anymore and he wants to curse because he knows the moment he sees Todoroki. Can see something harden and ignite in his eyes.

He and Todoroki may share the same color and shape in their eyes, but that’s where the similarities end. Where Todoroki’s are creased with laugh lines, and soften when Izuku does
something silly or Iida scolds them or Kaminari gets stupid, Endeavor’s are lined with folds from scowling, angry lines that mar his face.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Endeavor says, entering the apartment despite Izuku’s apparent reluctance to let him in. At the very least, he has the decency to remove the dress shoes he has on before stalking down the hallway.

It’s surreal to see such a larger than life hero in his childhood home. Just a year ago he’d be flipping his shit at the idea of Endeavor in his home. He wasn’t his favorite hero by any means, but that didn’t mean Izuku didn’t bear a great respect and admiration towards him. Until he found out what a shitty person he was.

Izuku lost all respect for him after what Todoroki shared with him. Having a powerful quirk isn’t important to Izuku. That’s not what’s so interesting to him about heroes. What fascinates and enraptures him about heroes is what they do with it. The ways they help people. That’s why he loves All-might. Throughout his career he risked life and limb to help as many people as he could. He always put them first. Always put their needs first.

He put their needs above his secret. He protected them even though it ended his career. He fought past his breaking point for those in danger. He broke down half of what he’d stood for his entire life, tarnished his beloved image as the symbol of peace so he could help people.

All-might is just about everything Endeavor is not. More than once it’s occurred to Izuku how easily the boy trying so hard to appear nonchalant on his couch could have turned out villainous. Could have ended up on a very different path. Could have decided his father had forever tarnished the name of hero the way Shigaraki seemed to have.

Shigaraki’s hatred for heroes, from what he knows of the man-child and from what Torino and All-might shared with him after Kamino, stemmed from a poor childhood that they never rescued him from. A childhood that All for one did rescue him from.

Todoroki easily could have decided heroes had failed him. Could easily have been swayed by the ideas Stain had thrown about.

Yet here he was, fighting tooth and nail with the rest of them trying to be a hero. Trying to embrace everything his father isn’t. Trying to move past the part in his life that was dark and painful, that still is harsh and violent.

“I decided to hang out with a friend. Fuyumi tried to-”

“Spare me your excuses. I finally got a hold of that girl and she already told me she sent you here,” Todoroki’s eyes widen. “It’s time to come home,” Endeavor says and Izuku bristles at the obvious threat in his words. The undertones that say ‘come easily or I’ll just take it out on her instead.’

Izuku’s chest burns with the truth, with words that could likely end this whole confrontation. All-might has as much or more sway than Endeavor, if he could get him to believe them then…

Todoroki is standing, brushing past Izuku and Izuku can feel the chill radiating off of him.

“Todoroki,” he starts but Todoroki looks at him. His face is blank, that careful mask slipped back over his features.

“It’s okay, Midoriya,” he says, pausing to put on his shoes. “I’ll keep in touch.”
“Like hell,” Endeavor growls, but Izuku is almost positive he’s the only one who hears that.

“Endeavor,” All-might calls from behind him. Endeavor, Enji, turns back, annoyance written plainly on his features. “I think you and I should get together sometime very soon.” Todoroki’s mask cracks, revealing thinly veiled panic as he looks up at his father, judging how the man is taking those words.

“I’m a busy man thanks to you,” Enji says, putting his shoes back on.

“Yes, I wouldn’t want to have to call another parent teacher conference in order to meet with you.”

“All-might,” Izuku starts because he feels like this is bad. He feels like this is leading to an outcome that really, really isn’t good.

“Phone my assistant if you must,” Enji bites out. The door rattles on its hinges when it shuts behind the departing duo. Air seeps out of Izuku’s lungs unbidden and he feels like his legs are going to give out beneath him.

“Izuku. A moment,” his mom says, beckoning him into the kitchen.

‘I can’t catch a break today.’ Izuku thinks.

“Do you want to tell me what just happened?” His mother asks as soon as they are in the kitchen, relatively out of earshot of the lingering hero in their living room.

“His dad is an ass. We didn’t know he’d be back so soon.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about, though I have some words besides ‘ass’ for that man. Why did you lie to All-might?”

“Because…” and he can’t think of anything. He can’t think of one single excuse that explains why he did what he did without giving away facts that he just can’t say.

“Because? Now, I know I didn’t teach you that that is an appropriate response to a question, young man.”

“Because I can’t talk about what actually happened, ok?!” His voice is louder than he means and shrill. It’s not really yelling at his mom, but yelling to her. It’s venting the frustration he’s been feeling for months that’s only gotten exponentially worse in recent weeks.

It’s a plea for her to understand without getting too much. For her to help somehow because he just doesn’t know what to do. He doesn’t know what’s right anymore. He doesn’t know what’s helping his friend and what’s ultimately going to end up hurting him. He’s just sixteen, these things are way out of his zone of ‘things I can confidently handle.’

His mom nods solemnly at him before pulling him into a soft hug. He embraces her back, squeezing her tightly, hoping to convey how much her gentle support means to him.

The look on All-might’s face when he re-enters the living room tells him he’s not done explaining yet. He’s not done lying yet.

Chapter End Notes
A little late this time, sorry.

I got married on Sunday (yay). Been busy with that so this chapter is shorter. We’ve been on our honeymoon since, and then yesterday my 7 month old fell off a table at the restaurant onto his head. I honestly wrote this chapter as a distraction and it is definitely not my best work so I apologize there. I hope to be on time next week.

As always, hope you are enjoying the fic.

Cassie.
Is who we are

Chapter Notes

Just a warning, this chapter is a bit more violent and dark than the previous ones have been. Heed the tags and you'll be fine. (It's not outside the realm of canon violence I just like to be safe).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Their trip home is silent. It’s almost worse than if he were actually saying something. He just sits there in the back seat seething.

Shouto tries not to give anything away. Tries not to let his anxiety shake his leg or fiddle his fingers. Tries not to let his quirk get out of control.

“Let’s go.” Endeavor is climbing out of the car; Shouto looks out the window, wondering when they got back to the house. Wondering when they’d made it. He remembers focusing, remembers the colors blurring, the brilliant fire on his father fading to grey and mixing with the background into something indistinct.

He doesn’t remember the other twenty minutes through town.

His hand slips on the handle as he gets out. His body feels heavy and distanced, as if he’s floating next to it rather than in it.

Seeing his sister watching with trepidation from the doorway snaps him back to himself, wipes any emotion from his face as he strides up the walkway, past his father who was waiting impatiently for him to catch up.

He looks up to the sky; it’s not possibly late enough for her to be home, is it?

When he turns back she’s gone, the door closed.

He tries to hide the falter in his steps.

When the door closes behind them, it’s awfully reminiscent of a death sentence, of the bars closing on a prison cell.

It’s stupid and he knows it. This door isn’t locked from the inside. He could turn around and leave. He could. Maybe if he were less a coward he would…

“Quit slacking. I don’t have all day.”

He knew this was coming. He doesn’t know why it still makes his stomach drop to see his father open those doors.

There’s a reason he trained outside when he was home.

He hates that room.
His legs are on autopilot, carrying him down the hall and through the door with much more strength and composure than he really feels.

He doesn’t know why he’s so shaken right now. This isn’t new. It’s not unusual. It’s been his normal for eleven years.

“Just because it’s your normal doesn’t mean it’s ok.

It’s abuse Todoroki!”

He shakes his head. This is so stupid. He squares up, stretching out his shoulders as his father tossed his coat and tie in the corner.

“I’m going to have to keep a closer eye on you while I’m away.”

“There’s no need. I won’t leave again.”

“I’ll ensure it. Maybe it’s time to get your sister out of here as well. Putting ideas in your head.”

“She didn’t. It was my idea.”

“We’ll see. She’ll tell me when she gets home.”

“I thought-” he starts but Endeavor cuts him off, his voice harsh.

“You thought she tried to cover for you the way you’re doing for her?” Endeavor sneers. “She’d never risk her ass for yours. Don’t you get it? You aren’t worth that. She doesn’t care about you.”

“You’re lying.”

“Am I? Why didn’t she ever do anything while you cried then?”

“You wouldn’t let her!”

“Are you sure that isn’t just what she told you? Even your own mother couldn’t stand you. Wanted away from you. Why would she be any different. Come on now. Fight me.”

Shouto says nothing. Feels nothing. There’s blood rushing through his ears and his vision is blurred. Well, more than it normally is. His fingers tingle and his legs are numb. He feels like he’s been hit by a metaphorical bus. One that attacked his nerves directly.

He barely is able to throw up ice when his father’s first hit comes at him.

He doesn’t block the next. His dress shoe collides with his still healing face, sending stars flashing behind his eyes.

“When are you going to adjust for that weakness? Or are you just pretending to be damaged?”

Another blow of heat is coming at him, instinctively he throws up a wall of ice that barely hold against the flame, and fails against the fist that plows through it.

Shouto barely twists out of its path in time, can feel the burn as the flaming limb rushes by.

Eventually, his body falls into a rhythm. It’s not the push and pull of a fight with Midoriya or another classmate. It’s pressing for another minute of consciousness. He’s on his hands and knees on the ground, choking down bile because he knows it only gets worse if he throws up.
“Get up. You’re pitiful. Has that school taught you nothing?” A bruising hit to his kidney. “Maybe I should pull you out.”

‘No. No. I can’t go back here. I can’t stay here.’

He makes his way to his feet, feeling light-headed. He presses his left hand to his right shoulder, lighting a small flame beneath his fingertips, a sharp singe to force the fog away.

His eyes clear, sharpness bringing back the other pains, the aches, the burn.

“Shouto.”

He can hear his name. But it’s like he’s underwater. It’s like breathing from underneath a heavy blanket. Everything is muffled. Distant.

Until it’s not.

Searing pain light up his right forearm, bringing the world soaring back in. The light burns his eyes, the sound is deafening, the smell is worse. Worse than burning clothes, than burning popcorn.

He looks up, to where his arm is above his head, where his shoulder is screaming at the fact it’s supporting his weight at his father’s burning hand suspending him above the floor.

God the smell is him. It’s his arm.

He’s dropped unceremoniously to the floor, his head jarring against the hard wood. His voice sounds foreign to his own ears, hoarse and desperate and pained.

“Pathetic. You’re never going to get anywhere like this.” Heavy footsteps echo the empty room and the door slams, leaving only Shouto.

He’s screaming himself hoarse. In pain and in frustration. In anger and sadness. In loneliness.

“Momma- help me.”

He’s alone. He’s burning and he’s alone.

The next time he burns it’s on purpose. His father is above him. His head hurts and he’s exhausted and the fog is creeping in but he can’t let it.

He knows his father is more cruel when he lets it. Knows his father won’t let him out of his room when he’s weak.

He singes his palm, trying to focus the world. Trying to buy himself more minutes of awareness. More minutes to stand up and fight.
“Focus brat. You think a villain will wait for you to daydream? You think they won’t knock you on your ass and kill you? Or worse?”

Shouto still won’t use his flames against his father. Still can’t. It still feels so fundamentally wrong. Too close to being like him. He throws up ice but it shatters. Letting Endeavor stomp right up to him, grasp his hair and pull.

The world fades again.

All he can hear is screaming.

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There’s screaming. It’s his. And it’s not his. His face is on fire like he’s never felt before and his mom…

His mom that held him when dad hurt him. That comforted him and soothed his bruises with gentle cool touches has her fingers tangled in his hair, holding his head back, his chin up; he’s staring down the spout of the kettle that had been screaming until it had woken him, bleary eyed to hear his mother saying terrible things.

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“Momma stop.” He’d whimpered. She didn’t look like his momma in that moment. She’d looked at him the way she’d looked at his father when he’d loom over them.

“Not again,” she’d whispered and then the water had fallen.

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He’s screaming. He can hear his brothers yelling. He can’t tell what they’re saying. He’s in too much pain.

Cold fingers touch his skin by his eye and he flinches away. He can hear Fuyumi’s frantic voice, can hear the way her breath hitches on sobs.

“Shouto, oh my god, what happened?! Touya, call somebody! Shouto come on, talk to me. Come on Shouto.”

There’s screaming.

______________

“When are you going to get over this. You’re fine. God. Useless,” he says, throwing Shouto to the floor. His mouth tastes like copper. His limbs feel like they’re under cinder blocks. He can’t breathe.

“Clean him up,” he hears Endeavor growl and then the door slams.

He’s alone.

Again.
Mrs. Okumura comes shortly after. Her lips are pursed and her dark blue hair wound up in a messy bun. She still got on scrubs from her shift. He wonders why she even has a normal job. He’s sure his dad pays her enough to be at his beck and call.

“Where does it hurt?” She asks.

‘Where doesn’t it hurt.’ He thinks but doesn’t answer. He continues to choke on the air. He turns on his side, spitting out fowl liquid.

She lays her hands on him and it feels like fire is burning through his veins instead of blood. Every time they do this it’s excruciating. He can feel his skin melding back together, pushing out scabs and sealing over. Can feel his rib re-aligning itself, scraping across his insides in its path, then those injuries searing their way closed.

It feels like an eternity, though he knows from experience it’s only been a few minutes. It’s not even completely faded when his eyes skip closed and the world fades away.

When he wakes up he’s in his room. He doesn’t have to try the handle to know it’s locked.

He is surprised to see his cell on his nightstand.

Several messages blink at him from the screen. Classmates checking in.

The most recent is from Midoriya.

Midoriya: Please tell me you’re alright? :( 

He stares at it for several minutes, fingers hovering over the keys, tapping it periodically to keep it from going black.

He starts several responses.

“I’m fine.

I’ll be ok.

No. I’m not ok.”

In the end, he clicks the screen lock button and turns over.

“You do still want to be a hero. Don’t you?”

There are days he’s not sure he wants to be anybody.

There are days he almost wishes the things his father warns him about could happen.

“This is going to get you killed, Shouto. These pathetic weaknesses will kill you long before you even make it as a ranked hero.”

Maybe… that wouldn’t be so bad.

Maybe he doesn’t want to be a hero.

The phone buzzes.
Midoriya: please tell me he didn’t hurt you too bad

Todoroki: I’m alright. He just yelled.

Midoriya: thank god. I was really worried. I wish you could have stayed.

Midoriya: I’ll see you at training camp in a couple days :)

Todoroki closes his phone again. His body still aches. On the surface, and for all intents and purposes, he’s healed. The bone deep pains linger. Her quirk isn’t perfect after all.

‘Two more days here.’

His eyelids flutter with exhaustion.

‘It wouldn’t be so bad… not to wake up.’

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it's a little bit late.
I struggled for awhile about where to cut off this chapter and while it's a little shorter, I thought it fit well to end there.
I hope everyone is still enjoying it.
Thanks for the continued support and I love reading all your lovely comments. (feel free to yell at me)
Until next time,
You know where to find me ;)
Cassie
I struggle to recall

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

His body is heavy and there’s sunlight streaming in. He squints at the brightness. He’s usually up before it’s this bright. Usually dragged from the comfort of his bed to train until he can barely stand.

His stomach rumbles.

He doesn’t feel like he actually wants to eat anything, though. The thought of food brings nausea and acid crawling up his throat. He swallows it down and walks forward, reaching out tentatively to check the door.

Just before his fingers reach it the knob twists and swings forward. His quirk leaps to the surface of his skin, his breath quickening and heart pounding. All responses that have been trained into him at this house.

He’s met with soft grey eyes and a round face.

“Fuyumi,” he breathes, consciously returning himself to normal temperature: the frost ebbing away, the scorch fading.

“I made breakfast,” she says. Their conversations are always so stilted. It’s to be expected. Besides the fact that up until this year Shouto has never had friends or social interactions, the two of them are practically strangers. They care about each other because they have to, because you look after family. He could say he loves her, but how can you love someone you don’t know?

He could say she’s a good teacher, that she’s good at what she does, but he doesn’t know. They don’t talk about their lives. They don’t talk about what happens behind closed doors.

"Okay," he says, shuffling forward and out of his room, out of his cell. His muscles still ache and some of the freshly healed burns itch. Mrs. Okumura's quirk isn't as refined as Recovery girl's; it isn't as neat. It leaves behind the bone-deep ache and the soreness and the itch. Or maybe that's just him. Maybe he's just fucked up. Maybe no else feels bugs crawling beneath their skin when they think about home.

He picks at his food, pushing it around the plate Fuyumi had set for him. He wishes he had brought his phone with him, it would’ve given him an excuse to look at something, to be distracted, to feign business and not sit there and contemplate how he’s supposed to talk to his sister.

“I’m sorry I got you in trouble,” Fuyumi says.

“It’s fine.”

“I tried to tell him I told you to go.”

“It’s fine, Fuyumi. I’m fine.” He’s not fine.

“Have you talked to him?”

“Who?”

“That boy. Izuku.”
“He checked in last night.” Shouto puts his fork down. Why bother. He’s not going to eat. Fuyumi seems to sense that, frowning at his nearly full plate.

“He seems to care about you.”

“More than he should.”

“Why do you say that?” He purses his lips. He feels like this is a test. Like she’s looking for something. He can’t fathom what it might be though.

“I’m just a pain for him. And everyone else.”

"No, you’re not." Shouto grinds his teeth.

“I hurt my friends. I made that other kid fail the exam because I can’t control my fucking temper. No one knows how to talk to me and Midoriya is always, always watching me. He’s supposed to be a great hero, he doesn’t need to bother with babysitting me!” He’s yelling now. He doesn’t know why he’s yelling. He doesn’t even really get why he’s angry. Fuyumi is talking about things she doesn’t understand, but people do that with him all the time. He doesn’t let anyone understand.

Fuyumi doesn’t say anything. Now she doesn’t know how to talk to him either. This is the longest conversation they’ve probably ever had. He cleans off his plate and goes back to his room.

“Lock that back before he gets home,” Shouto says when he closes the door. He knows Endeavor didn’t want him out and he really doesn’t have the energy to deal with another one of his tantrums.

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Fuyumi frowns at Shouto’s retreating back. She didn’t miss how he didn’t eat. She hadn’t been deaf to the ruckus last night.

She hasn’t been ignorant of what goes on in this house for a long time.

She’s stayed, wanting to be there for Shouto, wanting to be someone he felt was on his side. She knows she hasn’t done a great job of it; she’s never had the courage to get between Shouto and their father; isn’t even convinced Shouto would want her to.

He’s protective to a fault.

She looks after him, wishing things could be different.

She knows more about him than he thinks but far less than she would like to.

She just wants them to be a family… With their father, or without… She just wants to see him happy.

At least- at least he has someone at school looking out for him. Shouto did something with that boy he’d never done with her. He’d told him something. Izuku Midoriya knew.

Maybe he’d be able to do something else she’d never been able to do.

Help him.

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All-might has his elbows on his knees, his fingers folded under his chin. His hollowed cheeks and dark-rimmed eyes watching Izuku.

He's calmed a little bit since his outburst with his mom, but that doesn't mean he wants to be doing this. He loves All-might and usually, he'd be happy to have a conversation with his mentor. Just not right now.

“Young Midoriya, I’d like to ask you something.” Izuku swallows hard and nods. His fingers are lacing and unlacing, twitching nervously. His phone buzzes in his back pocket. “Do you know something about Endeavor that I should be aware of?”

All-might isn’t stupid. He wouldn't have been the number one hero if he was. Izuku thinks about his friend. About his friend who is kind and passionate and awkward and so undeserving of the treatment he gets.

He thinks.

Todoroki would never confide in him again if he told someone his secrets. He knows this. The real question is: is losing his trust worth possibly ensuring his safety. What he knows is appalling, for sure, but it's also difficult to prove. It's the same reason Todoroki has kept quiet all these years. He doesn't seem to recognize that what he's going through is wrong too, but he does know the things between his father and mother were fucked up.

He’s deduced the same things Izuku has.

"No. I don't." Izuku concedes. All-might looks at him for a while, his fingers covering whatever expression his mouth is making.

“If you do find something, do let me know. I want to help. I may not have one for all anymore, but I’m not useless yet.”

Izuku laughs nervously.

He hates lying.

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Izuku: Is he okay?

Unknown: I just got home.

Sounds like they’re training.

Izuku: Call me if you need me. Anytime.

Unknown: Thank you.

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Izuku can hardly control his relief when he sees Todoroki in front of the doors for the bus pickup.

He's filled with something much sourer when the other boy tenses and hisses when Izuku hugs him. There are no outward signs of injury, not like when he'd showed up to Izuku's doorstep, but the look in his eyes tells him Izuku isn't the only one who's lying.

Izuku is lying for Todoroki and Todoroki is lying to Izuku.
They sit next to each other on the bus and Izuku whips his phone out as soon as Aizawa and Iida quit reciting courtesy rules and where they’re going.

What happened? Izuku points the phone at Todoroki, his expression determined.

“Nothing.”

Bullshit. Todoroki sighs. He takes the phone between his hands, deftly typing out a response before handing it back over.

He was mad, ok? We sparred. I’m sore.

Sore? Izuku quirks an eyebrow at the other boy. Todoroki meets his gaze for a beat, for two, then looks away. Please talk to me. If no one else, at least me. I’ll quit pushing, but you don’t have to do this yourself. He has to nudge Todoroki to get him to acknowledge the phone again.

“Thank you,” he says.

“Shut the fuck up you two!” Bakugo yells from two rows back. “So fucking gay.” He mutters. Kirishima shushes him, drawing the blonde’s attention to some handheld device in his hand, holding out an earphone, the companion to the one already in the redhead’s ear.

Izuku rolls his eyes. If he thought anyone would take Kacchan seriously he might be embarrassed about the exclamation, but everyone tends to just write him off as an angry hothead.

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Training that day is grueling. Every muscle he has aches. He wasn’t even aware he could hurt some places that pinched every time he even thought about moving. If he didn’t feel like his stomach was literally eating itself he’d go on to bathe and sleep.

But food seems pretty necessary right now.

Todoroki has stuck to him pretty closely throughout the first day. Though, close for Todoroki isn’t terribly close by anyone else's standards. He’d nodded through conversations with Iida and Uraraka. He’d glared at Kacchan anytime he’d yelled in Izuku's direction and once, not so subtly, frozen the other's shoe to the ground.

When Bakugo had flipped his shit, all Todoroki had to say was “oops. I slipped.”

Kacchan had responded with, “how do you fucking slip when you wear cleats you jackass.” He’d then blown off the ice, leaving the smell of burnt rubber to float around the training area for the next several hours.

Izuku wished he’d had a camera to capture the little smile Todoroki had when Bakugo had walked away in his charred boot.

The energy at dinner is low, everyone half asleep, or in Kaminari’s case, fully asleep and with rice in his hair.

Izuku falls asleep easy.

He doesn’t stay asleep.

They're bunked up two to per room. He and Todoroki had decided to room together, Iida making it his own priority to monitor the more delinquent in the class.
He feels like he's only had his eyes shut a few seconds when he blinks them back open groggily, his teeth chattering and his toes numb. His blankets are skewed, one foot protruding out from the cocoon of warmth but that isn't enough to account for how cold he is.

He turns over and sighs. That makes sense.

There’s ice from floor to ceiling on the far side of the room, sharp jagged pieces. Todoroki isn’t moving apart from a tremble to his lips.

Izuku walks closer, carefully. The jagged spikes are something he really doesn't want to become acquainted with. He's also a little concerned about approaching from Todoroki's left. Beyond that, he doesn't want to leave his friend like that. Both for his sanity, and Izuku's lack of desire to die of frostbite.

He glances down to Todoroki’s limbs, noting the fine tremor. Yeah, he definitely can’t leave him like that. He’ll lose a hand if he doesn’t wake him up before morning.

“Todoroki,” he says. He’s on the other’s left, crimson hair spilling over the pillow in front of him. “It’s okay, Todoroki.”

Todoroki moans and then Izuku realizes his lips aren’t trembling, he’s talking. They’re broken pleases cut up and fractured by hitched breaths and cold chills.

“Don’t… leave me here,” he gasps out. Izuku takes a deep breath and holds it, taking his scarred hand and brushing Todoroki’s cheek.

He's got an idea. Sort of. He's going off of the assumption that this won't be seen as threatening.

Going off of the assumption that Todoroki doesn't have much experience with this kind of touch, with touch that's non-threatening. He's hoping this won't trigger a volatile reaction, that it won't be linked to painful memories. He's assuming it won't be linked to memories of any sort. Todoroki’s life seems to be sad in that way.

Todoroki stirs but there’s no attack. Izuku tries his name again but it doesn’t break his sleep.

It's another touch that has brilliant eyes startling open in the dark, his left near glowing in its intensity.

"Hey, Todoroki," Izuku says softly, letting his fingers linger. He's not sure which one of them it's supposed to benefit right now.

“Midoriya,” he grumbles, voice rough with sleep and distress. “You’re shaking,” he observes, eyes raking over Izuku’s form, then traveling around the room, his eyes darkening at the mass of ice to his right. “Fuck, I-”

“It’s okay. It’s okay, I can break my bones, I think I can handle a little cold,” the words are meant to be a joke, but it’s thrown a little bit by the way his teeth chatter on its delivery.

“Come here,” Todoroki says, throwing back the covers, his rumpled sleep pants and goofy mismatched socks exposed to the chill. Izuku looks on with wide eyes. Todoroki’s brain takes a second to catch up, his cheeks flushing as the realization of what he’s suggesting setting in. “You’re cold. I can be warm,” he mutters, his eyes cast away now.

"Okay," Izuku murmurs. His legs feel like jelly as he climbs in, fighting the urge to nuzzle into Todoroki's side and hum contentedly as his friend tucks the blanket around them. As it is, he still cuddles in, his toes finding the small part of skin between Todoroki's pants and his socks. Todoroki runs his hand down his back and over his shoulder, it's heat leaving a trail of fire in its wake, making
him shiver against the other boy.

This could be awkward. It could be weird. But it’s not. Izuku flushes and blunders at just about everything and Todoroki wouldn’t know a normal social interaction if it bit him in the ass, but this fits. It just does.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Izuku says, proud that his teeth are no longer clacking together. Todoroki sighs deeply.

“After mamma left, he didn’t want me around my siblings. He thought they were distracting, that their uselessness would rub off on me. Or that they would make me soft the way mamma had. But he wasn’t always home, or he was angry that I was weak, so he’d lock my door. The attendants brought me food so I was never hungry… it didn’t hurt… but it was…”

“Awful?” Todoroki shrugs.

“I had training manuals, hero law, I wasn’t even terribly bored. But it was still almost worse than when training went poorly. It hurt my chest and now… I don’t like confinement.”

“Did your siblings know?” Izuku asks.

"I don't know. They probably just thought I was being a brat and didn't want to come out. Fuyumi knocked every now and then until she'd get ushered away by someone or Natsu would tell her to stop wasting her time."

"You know that's not right, don't you?" Izuku says, looking up at Todoroki, catching the shine in his eye, the conflicting emotions that flitter and twitch across his face.

“I don’t know,” his voice cracks.

“It’s okay. It’s okay,” Izuku shushes.

It’s not okay.

It’s not okay that he can’t do anything.

It’s not okay that he knows when they get back, this will just continue.

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The rest of the training camp had been uneventful. It had been strenuous and frustrating. Lots of teambuilding with people who didn't want to team build, namely Bakugo with anyone, and anytime they had interactions with class B.

The last day Shiketsu and Ms. Joke’s class had shown up and it had been a whirlwind of energy.

Not all of it good.

Izuku knew Todoroki and Yoarashi has somewhat made-up over their remedial course, but he could tell the Shiketsu student’s presence still irked Todoroki. Still set him on edge. His jaw was locked through their practice, his fire wild and burning brighter than usual, the center almost white with heat, his ice attacks overshooting and overwhelming.

Todoroki was volatile and dangerous, powerful and intimidating, beautiful and captivating. He was so many things.
The boy only seemed to see the bad in himself.

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They get a couple days off before school starts to lick their wounds. Then, all of a sudden, they’re class 2-A.

It’s their second year, and there are times Izuku still can’t believe that he’s here, that he’s come so far from the quirkless boy that followed Kacchan around and cried at the drop of a pin.

Of course, he still cries a lot, he’s not sure that’s ever really going to change.

The rest of the world has changed so much. All-might is still teaching, but is no longer an active hero, having retired after the catastrophic battle with All-for-one.

They lost a classmate, dropped down to hero course B, and they gained a classmate. Shinso, just as he’d declared at a similar time last year, is officially in the hero course.

Their seating arrangements had changed this year as well, and Uraraka, Iida, and Izuzku had chosen to cluster together. Kirishima, Bakugo, and Kaminari had also formed a trifecta, much to Bakugo's apparent dismay, though Izuku knows if he didn't really want them around, they wouldn't be. Todoroki sits behind Izuku and Momo beside him. Shinso is hiding out in the back, still avoiding people and not making friends. Despite that declaration, he and Tokoyami are chatting rather amicably, the shorter of the two leaning on a nearby desk. Iida is quietly seething beside him, but the taller male had made a resolution to be less controlling of his classmates' behavior this year. Izuku and Uraraka had shared a well-meaning eye-roll. They gave it a month max.

The dorms are still in place, though the mandatory restriction had been taken off after an uneventful Summer and the defeat of who they believed to be the brains behind the league of villains. Almost all the students stayed regardless, enjoying the camaraderie and closeness to school, the ease of study sessions and the access to training facilities.

Izuku glances at Todoroki, who looks exhausted as hell and is staring down at his almost spotless desk. Mismatched eyes slipping closed for longer periods between breaths. Izuku frowns. Todoroki is the only one who didn't come back to the dorms this year. For some reason, the administration had held his room anyway, perhaps in the case of an emergency threat like the one that made it necessary for the dorms to be constructed in the first place.

They had been allowed to leave over Winter break, once again with the condition that they not leave the immediate area. Because of this, some students stayed- their parents were away and they didn't want to be in empty homes alone. Izuku himself went home to his mother. Iida had gone back to his family and reported that his brother's rehabilitation was going well. Uraraka stayed around for most of the break, working with Gunhead on a special elongated internship. Shouto was a pretty constant shadow behind Endeavor over the break. When Endeavor was in the country anyway. His friend never did look happy about it. Izuku himself had done some work with interning as well, utilizing his provisional license.

If he was going to become the number one hero, he had to start making a name for himself. Preferably one better than the gross impression he'd made at the sports festival last year. He grimaces at the memory of how out of control his quirk had been. His mouth curls into a wiggly line, he's looking forward to showing off his new skills, and seeing how far his classmates have improved as well.

Bakugo had his own fill of hero work and some small TV appearances. The blonde male, more than
working up and boasting his power, was working on his public image which was less than ideal as he had found out in his internship with Best Jeanist at the end of the first semester. He was slowly improving that. Izuku was proud of his friend. All of his friends who were working so hard to achieve their dreams, however different they may be, however, varied their individual paths, they were all doing their best.

A couple of minutes later had all of the students in their respective desks, notebooks open and pencils poised.

Aizawa looked no more rested than he had the previous year. Absently, Izuku wondered if that had any relevance to his quirk, or if it was an individual thing. Maybe an insomnia thing or a 'my roommate is loud and obnoxious at all hours and that's why I nap after passing out assignments' thing.

High school was so much different than middle school for Izuku. Whereas middle school had been this dreadful obligation, this weight over his head, this underlying tormentor, high school was invigorating, exciting, titillating.

He looked forward to every day, to every class, to all the things he could learn. He looked forward to seeing his friends, another stark contrast from his lonely and isolated middle school years. He didn't spend a day alone anymore. Surrounded by pleasant company, by warm smiles and offers of support. Kacchan was still Kacchan, still abrupt and crass, but still a friend.

A blanket woven of strands of their own unique personalities, winding together and over to make this team that felt so unbreakable and impervious most of the time. It felt like they could tackle anything.

Aizawa started class with a pop-quiz.

Maybe he should rectify that statement with 'almost anything.' They finish class with a briefing on current amendments to hero law. It's not the most tantalizing topic, but it's important and it's relevant. It's like Tsuyu said, if you elect to not follow the law when it's not convenient for you, you aren't acting as a hero. The laws can be stifling and inconvenient, but they're there for a reason. Which is exactly the topic of a paper they have to write over the weekend?

The enthusiasm of the class sufficiently snuffed, Aizawa perks them back up with a reminder.

"The sports festival is in three weeks, I'm sure you've all been preparing."

Excited looks pass between students, gestures of challenge exchanged before Aizawa calls their attention back to him with annoyance.

"I wasn't finished," he says, his voice tight. "As such, we have also prepared a special class tomorrow afternoon. Endeavor has volunteered to participate in a special sparring course as last-minute prep. Look forward to it." There's dismissal in his tone, and Izuku can't be sure if it's there, or if it's imagined, but their homeroom teacher seems less then thrilled at the prospect of the number two, no, number one, hero participating.

He lets the thought pass, chalking it up to the same differences that put Aizawa and All-might at odds for the first while. Not only does Endeavor make sure his work is spotlighted, but his attitude also sucks. Still, there's something tickling the back of his mind. He shakes his head and packs up his stuff, zipping up his bag. This year they got to take some elective courses and that was where Izuku was headed next.
"I'll see you guys in the common room tonight, right?" Izuku asks Iida and Uraraka.

"Of course," Iida says, Uraraka nodding fiercely beside him.

"Study sesh Zuku?" Kirishima calls from across the room.

"Brainstorming for the paper."

"Cool! We'll be there!" He calls, elbowing Bakugo who mumbles something about 'not needing a nerd's help on a stupid fucking paper,' but Kirishima seems unfazed. Kaminari shoots a thumbs up before exiting with his explosive friend. Kirishima stays behind, trying to recruit more people.

"Todoroki?" His friend has his bag slung over his shoulder, his expression guarded. "Did you want to join us?" He keeps offering, for papers, exams, joint projects, but Todoroki continues to decline.

"I can't," Todoroki starts but then Kirishima's arm is roughly thrown around his neck, the other pulling at his bicep, forcing a 'tch' from the taller of the two.

"Come on, Todoroki, take a break! Live a little, man." Todoroki's expression is pinched, his body tense as he pulls Kirishima off of him not quite delicately.

"I have training to do," Todoroki grits out. He doesn't meet anyone's eyes as he leaves, and Kirishima actually looks thrown for once.

"What's with him?" Izuku doesn't say anything, choosing instead to watch his friend's back as he leaves. True, Todoroki has never been one to initiate touch between classmates, keeping a careful distance, but he's never reacted that way to someone else touching him before.

It's got an alarm pinging in the back of his head, one of those sixth sense kinds of inklings that All-might told him never to write off. He runs out of the room and down the hall in the direction Todoroki had gone, catching a glimpse of his red and white hair turning the corner. His mouth opens like he's going to say something, but for some reason, no words come out, and his feet refuse to continue his pursuit. At the last second, he sees the glint of frost catching sunlight over his arm where Kirishima had grabbed him.

"Deku?" Uraraka's voice is soft and concerned. He turns around, shooting her what he hopes is a reassuring smile before waving.

"Gotta get to my next class. See you tonight!" She looks mildly dubious for a moment, and for a second he curses his friends' perceptiveness, but really, it's just nice to be cared about.

He takes the steps quickly, almost stumbling down the last one when his toe catches. He rights himself before swinging into his classroom by the doorframe. Surprisingly, Todoroki isn't in there though they share the class and the bell is signaling it's almost time to be in your seat. He lingers in the doorway, his weight shifting from his toes to his heels, debating whether to go on and sit down or backtrack to find his friend.

"Midoriya." Todoroki's voice sounds from behind him.

"Oh! Hey, Todoroki," he says, a smile creeping its way on his face without him thinking about it. Dual-colored eyes regard him carefully.

"Is your new seat in the doorway?" Todoroki asks, his voice even, though his mouth is betraying the barest hint of a smile.
"Haha," Izuku jokes before moving himself, shifting towards their desks towards the back of the room, Todoroki's footsteps a pleasant constant behind him. Todoroki throws his bag down rather carelessly at the foot of his desk and slinks into it, his head hanging back. Izuku, much more gracefully, slips into his, worried eyes on his friend. Before he can voice any of his concerns, Midnight walks in, actually clothed for once, her dark hair pulled back into a wild ponytail, heels clicking on the tile.

"Good morning children, welcome back to psychology."

Izuku slumps in his chair. He enjoys Midnight's class, he really does, but right now he just wants to check in on his friend. "As you remember, last class we discussed trauma and you filled out those indexes. Now, I'd like to talk about how quirks have affected the results of these indexes in recent years..."

Izuku takes diligent notes, though he keeps stealing glances at Todoroki. His friend is stiff in his seat, his right arm lay across his lap, the side he'd thought he'd seen the ice on opposite Izuku, out of sight.

Izuku sighs, turning his attention back to Midnight.

"It's with the addition of quirks that we've seen a staggering increase in the need for mental health professionals. In a somewhat recent development, counseling services have also been implemented in correctional facilities. We've also seen many heroes making donations to mental health facilities. We do have an on-site counselor at UA, so you can take of your mental health along with your physical health."

Izuku pulls his tie away from his neck. It's so hot here. He looks over to Todoroki to see if he also thinks it's sweltering, but his friend looks unaffected.

Wait...

Izuku leans back, away from Todoroki, and feels the cool air blow across his face. The heat is coming off his friend.

"Todoroki," Izuku whispers. No response. He kicks Todoroki's shin with his foot. "Your left side."

Todoroki looks at him, albeit slowly, before recognition dawns in his eyes. All of a sudden, the heat is gone. Izuku knows Todoroki's flames sometimes act up with his emotions due to his inactivity with them for so many years. He's seen flames lick the ends of his hair when he gets angry, seen his sweat steam off when he's frustrated. He looks back to Midnight, having blanched on what she's said the past couple minutes, wondering what on earth could be triggering such a volatile reaction from his friend.

His phone buzzes in his pocket then. He glances up to see Midnight writing on the board and pulls his phone out.

'Have something to discuss with you after school,' - AM.

Izuku frowns. That was pretty vague for All-might. Sure, he'd been meeting his mentor plenty since the semester started, but it typically wasn't this last minute.

Midnight dismisses them, and this time Todoroki doesn't take off.

They usually walk out of school together, parting at the exit, Izuku bound for the dorms, Todoroki for home, or occasionally the hospital to visit his mother.

"Is your arm okay?" Izuku winces. That is definitely not how he had wanted to start this conversation.

"It's fine," Todoroki says. His mask is back in place, and Izuku can't describe how much he dislikes...
the look of it on his friend's face. He'd thought they were past that, past the blank looks and absent stares, past the carefully placed apathy. Before the winter, before the stupid change in rules, they'd shared movie nights as a class, each of them taking it upon themselves to help educate Todoroki on his movie knowledge deficit. His smiles were never very large, not like the cheek splitting grins Kirishima gives, or the hearty laughs of Iida, just the gentle quirk of his lips. They had gotten fairly regular, and Izuku missed them.

He's started to recognize patterns in Todoroki. He smiles more when it's just the two of them, and when he's not thinking about home or school. He tends to be more guarded after the weekend as if he's forgotten again how to interact with people.

Izuku hates it. He hated the look Todoroki had on his face when he'd told everyone he wasn't coming back to the dorms. He hated the way his friend apologized over things that didn't matter. He'd hated the way Todoroki had thanked them for their friendship, and ducked his head before turning down the street. He hated their goodbyes. He hated not knowing which Todoroki was going to show up to class, and in what state.

He hates that going home, that being around his dad, keeps backtracking the progress they had made that year.

"You're sure you can't make it tonight?" Izuku asks.

"I'm sorry." Those damn words again. Their conversation hasn't been this stilted in a long time, and Todoroki tames his silence as a queue to leave.

"Todoroki," Izuku whispers, but he's gone. Off to home. He feels like he’s been making some progress, that Todoroki might actually be starting to believe that what happens in his home isn’t normal, that it’s miles, eons from being okay.

He’s not really sure though. Todoroki flips flops so much on the matter, one day he’s listening to Izuku’s arguments, the next he’s shutting him down before he can open his mouth. He wonders if he ever talked to Iida like he’d suggested…

He wishes he could do something about it all. He wishes Todoroki would let him, or that he'd do something himself. He kind of gets it though… Endeavor has a private healer, or at least that's what it sounds like. There are no hospital records of any of the injuries Todoroki has had over the years and minimal scarring from anything aside from his face.

The only solid evidence he had would criminalize the parent Todoroki actually likes.

He sighs heavily. Shit. Ugh. Between All-might and Kacchan he’s going to end dropping curse words like smashes.

Todoroki continues on down the sidewalk, out of sight, but definitely not out of mind. Izuku fights the urge to stomp his foot, fights the stinging frustration brimming in his eyes. He turns, albeit reluctantly, to go and see his mentor. He takes the stairs up to the Pro’s offices, his steps dragging, his brain refusing to let go of the worrisome signs he’d seen in his friend. He finally makes it up and to just outside All-might’s door when he hears quiet voices already seeping from the room.

“I have some concerns about one of our students.” Izuku recognizes Midnight’s voice permeating the door.

“Oh?” That’s All-might.

"Do you have any reason to believe something may be amiss with Todoroki?" She asks. None of her
boisterous or inappropriate phrasing present, a seriousness, and maturity the pro is usually lacking making an appearance.

“What do you mean, Midnight?” Even in his normal form, All-might’s voice drops an octave, his tone taking on a graveness that keeps Izuku from making his presence known.

“You have concerns too, don’t you.” He wishes he could see their body language, wishes he could analyze what’s going on. They could easily be talking about cheating or misconduct, but it’s Todoroki, and he knows, because he has some of the same fears, that they are talking about something with far worse consequences.

“Has young Todoroki done something in your class?”

“You’re avoiding my question.”

“Yes. You will. I can take you in a fight now, remember that. I passed out some assessments in class for instructional purposes, but the trauma index on Todoroki’s is concerning me.”

“Trauma index?”

“It’s a questionnaire that assessed prior life traumas. Death of family members, chronic illness, mental illness prevalence, and forms of abuse.”

She pauses, and he bets she’s gauging All-mights reaction, seeing how he reacts to the information, reading how much of this he may already know, may already have inklings or suspicions towards.

“You seem less surprised than I’d expect.”

“I’ll admit, I’ve had some worries since I had a conversation with his father at the festival last year, furthered by a meeting at young Midoriya’s house.”

“And you didn’t feel like sharing that with anyone?”

“I’ve tried to approach young Todoroki on a couple of occasions and see if there’s anything he wants to tell us, but he says he’s fine. Aizawa and I both spoke to him before letting him leave the dorms when we removed the mandatory status. He says he’s fine at home.”

“Yes, and that’s my concern.” He hears a shuffling of papers. “This is his questionnaire.” He can hear papers shuffling.

“Mother suffers from mental illness. Yes, I am aware. That came up at the press conference years back.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about. Keep looking.”

“You could just tell me what you’re getting at Midnight.” There’s a pause, where Izuku supposes All-might gives in and continues flipping through the pages. “Have you ever been hit hard enough to break a bone?” A pause. “He’s a hero in training, it happens. You’ve seen young Midoriya’s training.”

“Keep going.”

“Has a family member ever hit you hard enough to break a bone or caused the need of a healing quirk or hospitalization? Again, that’s not really unusual, his father is Endeavor. He’s trained young Todoroki, you can tell. They’re fighting isn’t dissimilar.”
"He hesitated here. He circled no, and then erased it."

"Okay?"

"Alright. Yeah, maybe it’s nothing. He just had some pretty concerning answers about injuries in the household, but he does deny any history of physical or sexual abuse."

"I’ll keep an eye out, Midnight, and you’re more than welcome to talk to him, but I haven’t gotten anywhere with him. We can’t do anything unless he says something."

"I just wanted to see if you had any troubling signs in your class. Individually, no it isn’t much. Compounded with other instances it could add up to something."

"His father is an intense man, and hyper-fixated on young Todoroki’s goals, but Todoroki has insisted he's alright. We can't really do anything with an index that could be explained away." All-might's words may be dismissing, but his tone his hard, the words sharp.

He knows more than he’s letting on. Izuku could say something… All-might would believe them. He would. He knows he would.

But he can’t.

Not without Todoroki.

But how far is he willing to let this get? What happens when it’s more than bones or pride that’s bruised and broken?

What happens if they wait too long and he can’t be saved…

Izuku’s lip is between his fingers, recalling every tick, every injury he knows Todoroki didn’t get during class, every time he favored a side while walking. Endeavor is a hulking man. How easy would it be to kill a child? Not even on purpose, but as an accident. He hears footsteps and the door of the innermost part of All-might’s office.

He scramble away, trying to make it look like he was just now approaching.

"Oh, hi miss Midnight!" He calls out, hoping his cheeriness isn't overdone, that his smile isn't overly bright. Lord knows he feels like he’s trying too hard.

"Ah! Young Midoriya!" All-might calls, his spindly shoulders peeking out as he sends Midnight off. "It's good to see you."

"I saw you a few hours ago, All-might," Izuku says smiling. Midnight looks at the two of them over her shoulder, blue eyes sharp beneath the fray of her dark hair, and then she continues on. "What did you need to talk to me about?"

"Ah, yes. What was that about..?" He asks, looking around the room.

"You mean you don’t remember?!"

"I got a little sidetracked when Midnight visited," All-might admits, shrugging his angular body. "Well, you’re here anyway. Would you like some tea?"

Izuku nods and sits down. He contemplates what he’d overheard, and debates bringing it up with his mentor. He thinks back to Todoroki. He’s the only one Todoroki has confided that information to. The only one who might have a chance of pulling something else out of him. If he were to tell
someone else, it’s likely Todoroki would shut down completely.

When he looks up, All-might is staring at him. Oh shit. Was he mumbling?

“Midoriya?” All-might asks. Did he ask a question? Midoriya wonders, chasing his neurons for some hint as to what was said. “Are you all right, my boy?”

“Of course,” he reassures, though possibly a little too forcibly given the skepticism on his teachers face. “Well, I’m just a little worried is all.”

"Care to share?” He wants to, he really does. He wants so badly to take actual actions to help his friend. To do something to keep him from being hurt more. In the end, he keeps his mouth shut. He stays quiet, his mind telling him he'll ask Todoroki to consider telling All-might, to think about having an adult, a hero, a reputable one, on their side. He spills nonsense to fill the void, to cover up his thoughts before they spill out his mouth.

"Just worried about the sports festival. Hopefully, it will go better than last year."

“Of course it will!” All-might inflates, his voice booming in his next words. “I have every confidence in you young Midoriya!” He gives a thumbs up before puffing back down.

"You probably shouldn't waste energy like that, All-might," Izuku says, rubbing the back of his neck, his eyes lost in the swirls of the tea.

All-might watches him, but doesn’t press and for that Midoriya is thankful.

Their talk makes Izuku late for lunch…

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“Iida?” Shouto is sitting in front of their class rep, his fingers tangled in his lap. Uraraka is still in the line, and Midoriya is strangely late. It feels like the only time he may have the blue-haired boy alone to talk to.

“Yes, Todoroki,” he says, his chopsticks held pristinely between his fingers, halted in their motion to his mouth.

“Did you… spar with your family growing up?” Shouto asks, his tongue thick in his mouth as he forms the words.

"Of course! Tensei and I wanted to be heroes early on. Father taught us a lot. After all, he was a great hero himself. I wouldn't be half the person I am today without their influence."

“Did you guys ever get… get hurt?” He shouldn’t be asking this. This is too close to talking about it. It’s too close. He can’t.

“Of course not! Father and Tensei were both the epitome of restraint. After all, it’s a heroes’ job to cause minimal damage in the face of a threat!”

“I see..” He feels something like lead drop in his stomach, water filling his throat and threatening to drown him. His ears ring with white noise, everything around him blurring. Everything… Everything he’d thought he understood.

There’s a gentle hand on his shoulder, the smell of summer; he looks up to see Midoriya’s warm green eyes looking at him. The oceans part, cease in their efforts to pull him under.
"Hello, Midoriya!" Iida's voice booms. Uraraka joins them moments later, a tray full of food she'll never finish, items carefully being divided onto her friends' plates. A white chocolate strawberry deposited neatly on his own.

"It looks like you!" She'd joked. It was kind. All bubbly smile and soft laughter. It was fondness rather than an insult.

It was friendship.

With his friends around him, more scattered about the cafeteria, because they are his friends, he feels like maybe he can still tread water.

Chapter End Notes

Note: So, probably going to be a shorter chapter next week because of the way my work schedule is.
Baby boy is fine (yay!) besides the fact that he doesn’t sleep (not yay).
Mommy is very tired >.<
Hope everyone is still liking this. I love reading the comments people leave, it makes my day to have people excited about what I make.
As always, you can find me at protect-baby-shoto@tumblr.com
And thanks a million to that_one_fran_fan who is my lovely beta for this story.
The night had dragged on. Study session had gotten remarkably off track thanks to a dual effort from Kirishima and Kaminari with special appearances from Ashido. Izuku was yawning as he poured his cereal, scrolling through the messages of his friends who apparently don’t sleep.

Todoroki still hasn’t responded to his texts. Not the one from last night or the one he sent when he got up.

"Midoriyaaa," Kirishima calls, an arm roughly around his shoulder, his chest-thumping him roughly in the back. "You fessing up to Todo yet?"

“What?!” He just about drops his phone in his milk.

“You two are practically joined at the hip already. Plus Bakugo told me you were thirsty for icyhot’s di-”

“Nope. Do not finish that please and thank you!” Izuku yells. “What the hell does Kacchan think he knows anyway,” he grumbles, stabbing angrily at the milk. “Fucking nosy asshole.”

"Struck a chord there, nerd?” Bakugo leers, leaning against the wall of the kitchen.

“I thought Bakubro was full of shit when he told me, but you really are hot for him aren’t ya?”

“It’s not like that!”

“But it is something?” Kirishima presses.

“What’s something?” Now it’s Ashido coming in. Why, why is this the one day she gets up more than three minutes before class starts.

“Midoriya is crushing on Todoroki,” Kirishima blabs. Izuku wonders whether Delaware smashing his own face would be an acceptable way to get out of this.

“Whoa seriously? So first Kirishima with Bakugo and now you two!” She screeches, not noticing the way Kirishima’s tanned pallor melts away to ghostly pale.

“The fuck is she talking about shitty hair?” Izuku knows it’s cowardly and not going to fix any of his problems, but he uses the outburst to slink under the table and flees.

He is so screwed.

Ashido is going to blab to Todoroki, by accident or on purpose, it doesn’t matter, and he's going to lose his best friend. There's no way Todoroki feels the same way, besides the fact that the other boy definitely doesn't need a pathetic high school crush on his plate. He doesn't need to know Izuku is pining after him when he needs a hug or to be held; when he needs midnight comfort, he doesn't need to be thinking Izuku is waiting to jump him.

Why can't anyone mind their own business?

He rolls his eyes at the irony of his self-questioning.
It’s a remarkably ordinary start to the day.

Until breakfast passes and he’s seen no sign of Todoroki. Almost every day, both because Todoroki enjoys their company and because it means he can get away from his house sooner, they all meet for breakfast before classes.

Izuku starts to worry now. He knew today was going to be rough, knew it from the moment Aizawa had announced the training, had it reinforced when the younger student had been distracted and distant during their later classes. But now he’s worried.

He knows, realistically, there isn’t any danger. Endeavor would never hurt Todoroki in front of a class full of people. In front of another pro. Even if he did, Aizawa would stop it. He knows he would. Their teacher acts like he couldn’t give two shits, but he’s fiercely protective. He would stop it.

It doesn’t stop the uneasiness that stirs in his stomach or the weight that drags down his limbs as more time passes without a sign of Todoroki. They don’t have their first class together, but they share English the next hour.

He's sitting at his desk, head twitching to the door every time he hears someone approach, which more often than not is just a student walking past their classroom.

When Todoroki finally shows, Izuku isn't sure if he should be relieved or concerned. He's unharmed, which is good. No outward signs of injury, no bruises or scrapes, and his gait is normal, partially slouched with his left hand tucked into the pocket of his slacks. That should be good news.

It’s mitigated by the fact that the mask is back. The blank stare and vacant expression. He takes his own seat, throwing down his bag and propping his head on his knuckles but it’s so robotic, mechanical. It’s going through the motions without actually being present.

It happens from time to time, but it’s usually pretty brief. He’ll slip during lunch from present and chatting to this fugue kind of state and then randomly tune back in. He’s never seen it last more than a few minutes. Usually, the glaze melts and he can recognize his friend again.

By halfway through the class Izuku’s leg is shaking and he’s debating dragging both of them down the hall with the excuse of needing the nurse. He’s not sure that would fly though. He'd probably just get yelled at by Present mic, and then consequently scolded by Aizawa during homeroom because somehow the man knows everything.

Izuku wishes he actually knew everything. Maybe then they wouldn’t be having this stupid training session.

Izuku knew this was a bad idea. But he also knew, without telling Aizawa things Todoroki didn’t want him to know, there wasn’t anything he could do. They couldn’t turn away the number one hero for no reason. Izuku had hoped something would have come up in the short amount of time between the announcement and the course that would draw Endeavor away. How hard is it for villains to act up anyway?

It was a selfish hope and one that didn’t seem like it was going to reach fruition anyway.

They get dismissed and Todoroki collects his things silently, his bangs hanging over his eyes, covering metaphorical cataracts clouding his sight. Something he can't see, something innocuous to everyone else, making him shut out what's going on.

When Todoroki turns to leave Izuku has had enough.
"Todoroki?" It’s like Kaminari shocked him, with the way he jolts. It’s something that wouldn’t look that out of place if Izuku himself did it. He has a knack for spastic movement and unpredictable flailing. Todoroki though, he moves gracefully and with purpose. He doesn’t flail or fluster. Not visibly anyway. What goes on in his head is so far a mystery to even Izuku.

His heterochromic gaze turns to Izuku. Glinting silver and brilliant turquoise alight with inquiry, his eyebrows slightly pinched either in frustration or confusion.

“I missed you this morning.” Todoroki’s eyes widen fractionally. “I mean, I didn’t see you this morning, not that I didn’t also miss you because I did but that came out wrong it’s just that you usually come see us and I like talking to you and I was worried because I didn’t hear from you yesterday or this morning and then there’s this afternoon and.”

“I woke up late. I’m sorry. And my old man took my phone again. Said it ‘distracts’ me.” He shrugs. "At least he gave it back."

"What a saint," Izuku mutters. Every time he hears about the kind of life Todoroki lives at home he feels his blood simmer, a rage he’d never known he could possess wanting to bubble out of him, wanting to explode with the ferocity of Kacchan’s quirk. It’s volatile and frightening to feel so strongly and violently about something…

"I care about you." Izuku wants to drag those words out of the air and back into his mouth when the smile falls from his friend’s face.

"Why?" Izuku doesn’t get to do much besides sputter at the question when the bell rings, telling them they need to get on to their next class before they get a tardy.

"Why wouldn’t I?" He says. He wishes he had time to say more.

Because you’re kinder than you let anyone believe.

Because you’re so strong and I don’t mean your quirk.

Because you have a beautiful soul.

Because I don’t think enough people do.

Because I lo-.

Izuku near sprints down the hall to math, Todoroki moving at a bit more languid pace.

They separate again before lunch, heading to their own elective courses.
This one Izuku shares with Uraraka.

It’s a good thing. Usually. Until she slides into her seat with-

"So Ashido had something interesting to tell me this morning."

“Don’t listen to her. She’s an alien. Can’t be trusted,” Izuku murmurs, picking at a deep scratch on the surface of his desk.

“Oh come on, Deku! It’s not like it’s a big secret or anything,” she mumbles out the side of her mouth.

“Does everybody know?!”

“That you’re gay for Todoroki? Pretty much. Well, except Todoroki. I don’t know that he would figure it out if you wrote it on a brick and hit him with it.”

“I’m not gay for Todoroki.”

“Bi then.”

“You’re missing the point!”

“Deku, it’s not a big deal. So you like someone. I told you when I found out I liked Tsuyu more than a friend.” She had. Izuku, as always, had been eager to help. When Uraraka had lamented she didn’t think she was good enough for the rainy hero, Izuku had been her personal cheerleader.

They were like that with each other.

“Besides, I think it’s sweet.”

“Sweet?”

“You take a lot of effort to make sure he’s comfortable and stuff.”

“It’s just decent.”

“Besides that, while I can’t speak for Todoroki, have you seen him get close to anyone that’s not you? He’s ready to throw down Bakugo every time he even looks your way. Between you, me and Momo, I’m pretty sure he’s smitten too.” Izuku feels like his cheeks are on fire and he’s tempted to ask Uraraka to just float him out the window and into the sun where he can burn into oblivion. Tempted.

Class starts after that conversation, though Izuku’s mind wanders. Wanders to the idea of Todoroki being ‘smitten’ as well. Wanders to the prospective of this afternoon. Wanders to the thought of his hands on Todoroki’s waist. Of brushing his bangs away from his eyes for once. Of kissing the marred skin on his face because he sees the way Todoroki’s expression darkens when he sees his reflection. He can practically hear the skepticism anytime the girls loudly proclaim how attractive he is.

He wants to quell the self-hate simmering in Todoroki. He wants to bask in the boy who thinks Deku is going to be a great hero, who sometimes knows what to say to lift his spirits out of the mud. He wants to see the kind of man Shouto Todoroki grows into. Wants to see what they’ll develop into together, even if their only proximity is of friendship.

He walks with Uraraka to the cafeteria, running into Iida along the way.
They claim their usual table, Izuku sitting down while the other two, three now that Tsuyu made it, get food.

Usually, he gets to talk to Todoroki who somehow manages to get there before almost anyone else. But he’s not here yet. Izuku wonders if maybe he had a project or something in his last class holding him up.

When Uraraka, Iida, and Tsuyu return from the line and Momo makes her way over, Izuku gets antsy. Now he finds himself with his eyes roving the tops of heads and whipping around every time the door opens, but there’s still no sign of Todoroki. Inevitably, the conversation moves to the session this afternoon.

Iida and Uraraka are talking animatedly around him, and he gets worried glances from Uraraka periodically, likely wondering why her best friend and hero enthusiast isn’t vibrating in his seat at the thought of the number one from an ideal analyst perspective, against varying opponents and as close as safely possible. Instead, he’s silent, and his leg is bouncing for an entirely different reason. He’s sitting with a pit in his stomach and nerves on end and he can’t figure out why.

He’s already seen Todoroki and he’s more or less fine and there’s no way Endeavor would do something unseemly surrounded be classmates and pros. Right? Regardless, there’s something holding Todoroki up right now.

Todoroki never comes to lunch.

They file into homeroom, and he’s got the same apprehension hanging over his head. Everyone else is bustling with excitement. It’s a new experience, and class A is very lucky. Endeavor isn’t one to do publicity stunts and even less likely to take time to teach or pass on his knowledge. It’s a rare opportunity. It’s justified that they’re loud and rambunctious at an hour most of them are usually dragging their feet and prying open their eyelids.

Todoroki shows up at the last possible minute again, just as Iida is broadcasting that it's time for class to begin and a well-placed duck keeps him from being smacked with their class reps erratic arm movements.

He’s quiet, which isn’t unusual, but that blankness on his face that Izuku can’t stand is back. He sees it most often on Monday mornings after his dad has been home. He saw it after the licensing exam. He saw it after their internships. It’s his mask, his barrier from everyone, his shield between the damage in him and everyone else. He uses it to hide when he’s on the verge of breaking. It fades. Usually by the end of the day, most often by lunch, after he realizes how supported he is, after he’s had Izuku at his side with gentle support and reassurances.

He sees it sometimes during the week but it's sporadic. He can never really discern a pattern, sometimes it's morning, sometimes before he leaves. The consistent part, during the week it usually fades much faster.

Depending on the day, he’d give light squeezes or taps on the other’s knee at lunch. Sometimes it helps, sometimes it doesn’t. Todoroki, from what Izuku has surmised on the internet, is probably ‘touch starved.’ Basically, sometimes little touches overwhelm him because he’d been deprived of contact for so long. Sometimes he reacts to it like a man stranded in the desert who was just handed chilled water.

Now, looking at his friend, he’s not so sure of his earlier assumption that just because it’s public, Endeavor will behave. He wonders what’s changed. Todoroki has been downright defiant to his father in the past, now he looks like he’s facing the gallows. Izuku is the only one who has any idea
what happens in their home.

He can’t help but continue to side-eye his friend throughout homeroom. Once, Aizawa slaps the top of his hand with his scarf to get him to pay attention. Even then, it’s fleeting and his eyes slide back to the profile of white hair to his left.

For once, Izuku’s pencil isn’t rapidly scribbling notes on the page. It’s tapping idly at the edge of his desk, a replica of his impatience for other answers, for this day to be over and just be a stupid bad memory.

His mind is moving a mile a minute like it usually does when he’s analyzing, but this time he’s not writing it down. He can’t. Can’t leave evidence for someone else to see.

Aizawa finally dismisses them and Izuku packs rapidly, all the extra energy almost dizzying in the way it overflows his veins. Todoroki is like his opposite. His movements are slowed, his expression vacant. Until Izuku puts his hand on Todoroki’s shoulder.

He tenses, briefly, and there’s a quick bite of cold before it fades and he’s looking into the eyes of his friend again.

“Todoroki,” they both look up, to the front of the room, where Aizawa is standing, eyes on Todoroki. “Hang back a minute.”

Izuku’s hand lingers, longer than it should, before he draws it away. His fingers tingle and he’s not sure if it’s from the cold, or just the idea that he touched Todoroki scrambling his molecules.

He wonders if one day he’ll just combust.

He thinks if they ever took that step that he would. He’d be an Izuku sized crater.

“I’ll wait for you,” Izuku says. Todoroki shrugs, a ‘you don’t have to’ kind of motion, but his expression is soft, his eyes almost grateful.

Iida tries to pull him off, to make sure everyone arrives on time. The only way he gets out of the taller teen’s strong arm is by saying Todoroki shouldn’t walk to gym gamma alone, which makes Iida cede and allow him to wait for his friend along with praise for utilizing the “buddy system.”

“Everything okay, Todoroki?” Aizawa asks. Izuku isn’t meaning to eavesdrop, but he’s trying to stay out of the way of the throngs of students and there’s some gravitational pull to the room that keeps him from pressing himself against the other side of the hall.

“I’m fine. Slept like shit is all.”

“And you’re going to training now?” Izuku can practically picture the frown on Todoroki’s face, the aggravated grumble in his throat. Todoroki doesn’t like to be coddled. Cared for, yes. Coddled, no. It’s a very fine line to walk, a line that often is subject to Todoroki’s interpretation more than anything.

“I’m talking to you right now,” Todoroki says, a sharp edge to his voice. He feels cornered, Izuku thinks. Back off, Aizawa.

“All right. Go to the gym then.”

“Yes, sir.” Izuku winces at the sarcasm. When Todoroki turns the corner he brings a draft of cold air with him, sending goosebumps up Izuku’s arms where his sleeves are rolled up.
“You okay?” Izuku asks, hopping into step beside the taller teen.

“If someone else asks me that I’m going to write ‘I’m fine’ on my forehead.”

“You don’t have to be mean,” Izuku says, knocking Todoroki’s heel with the toe of his red sneakers. “You’ve been off today and we care about you.”

“Right.”

“I mean it,” Izuku says, stepping in front of his friend, effectively barring his path, making them both stop a moment. Todoroki clicks his tongue and looks away, to his left, his unmarred cheek to Izuku’s face. “Look at me,” he says, jabbing Todoroki in the chest. “When we ask, it’s because we’re concerned not because we’re about to tear into you over it.”

The tension ebbs out of Todoroki then, his shoulders slumping with a heavy sigh. “I’m sorry,” he mumbles, dropping his gaze, then his head, letting his forehead rest on Izuku’s curls. “This is still different to me.”

“I know,” Izuku says, wrapping his arms around Todoroki’s waist. “That’s why I’m not mad. I’m just going to keep telling you until you get it.”

“Thank you.” Izuku lets go then, pokes Todoroki’s nose and skips on.

“No need, but we better go before Iida sends a search party.”

“Ah. Must avoid that.”

They end up running the rest of the way to the gym, tripping each other in their antics.

Todoroki’s hair is wind mussed and Izuku is dusted in frost, both panting when they arrive with the rest of their classmates at gym gamma.

They get a couple of odd looks and a muffled, thanks to Kirishima, curse from Bakugo.

The light mood lasts until the hulking figure at the front clears his throat and Izuku watches progress he’d made with Todoroki after class disappears, his expression clouding over.

“Damn it,” Izuku mutters. He bites back another curse when Uraraka steps on his toe. Her meaningful look when he opens his mouth is the only thing that keeps him from exclaiming. She jerks her head in the direction of Iida, positioned directly between and in front of Todoroki and Izuku.

She mimics lacing her own fingers together before gesturing towards Todoroki.

Apparently, his little physical reassurances to the two-toned boy hadn’t been as subtle as he’d thought.

He’s proud his hand only shakes a little when he reaches out, tentatively brushing their fingers to get Todoroki’s attention.

The effect is instant, Todoroki’s head snapping to the side with near enough force to give him whiplash, his eyes dropping quickly to their touching fingers.

Izuku nods to Iida, conveniently blocking the view of their hands as he is, and gives a small smile, lacing their fingers all the way together.
Todoroki’s hand is warm in his and the tingle through his fingertips is back, though it runs all the way up his palm, sensation dancing along every point of contact.

Izuku squeezes when Endeavor starts speaking.

Todoroki squeezes back, his fingers burning now when Endeavor raises his voice.

He stays present through the introduction and explanation of the exercise.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this is so late. I had a really rough week.. My career plans got screwed for at least another six months, my confidence kinda got shot, my little one isn’t sleeping well AT ALL and I just couldn’t really deal with Todoroki’s headspace for a few days.

Next time: An after school lesson gets too heated
Chapter 9: The calm before the storm
Chapter 10: Revisiting the beginning, the second year sports festival

As always, you can find me at protect-baby-shoto@tumblr.com. I have some arts there that I’ve posted (one WIP pertaining to a future scene of this fic). My art tag is #art ish. Feel free to talk or rant at me.

Thanks for all the lovely comments so far, you guys are great <3
(Special thanks to my beta that_one_fran_fan! Always super helpful and super quick:D

Cassie
You would

Chapter Summary

Things heat up, literally, during Endeavor's special supplementary combat lesson. Izuku is frustrated... and then frightened.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Endeavor finishes his speal and Aizawa has explained the guidelines, he called them "rules", but when nobody really follows them you can't help but think of them as guidelines instead- Izuku gives one last squeeze and releases Todoroki's hand.

Aizawa starts reading off the fighting order but not many are paying attention. Izuku's squad included. Uraraka and Iida are in their semi-circle eliciting analysis advice, trying to look for weak spots they can exploit in their own battles.

Izuku is hard pressed for any. The only thing he can really say is that for all his firepower, Endeavor isn't the most agile or the quickest.

"Endurance is your best bet," Todoroki says quietly. "In a display like this, he'll be extra flashy. Too much fire for little things."

Todoroki has his back to the outside, turned in towards all the students, so he doesn’t see All-might and Vlad approaching.

Izuku sees the moment Todoroki sees the other homeroom teacher’s hulking shadow, sees his shoulders tense up just as the hand falls on his shoulder. Todoroki jumps like he’s been burned.

"I am here approaching quietly!" All-might shouts, using his brief seconds in his muscle form to make his goofy announcement.

Todoroki is wide-eyed in the center of their circle, watching as All-might literally deflates in front of them, his hollowed eyes on the teen, brows furrowed.

"Are you alright young Todoroki?" He asks, his voice more diminutive and serious.

"You startled me." He says minimally.

"Yes! One should not sneak up on students preparing for battle, Sensei!" Iida shouts.

"You’ve gotten so much better at sneaking All-might Sensei!" Uraraka chirps. “You startled me a bit as well,” she confesses, her fingers coming together and her feet lifting off the ground. “Oops! Release!”

“Pay attention,” Aizawa growls from the center, drawing everyone’s eyes to him, and subsequently to the group of misbehavers.

Izuku doesn’t miss the look that passes between Endeavor and Todoroki.
He also doesn’t miss the way All-might looks between the two, his bright blue eyes analytical, burning in their sunken shadow.

Chaos descends quickly.

The first up is Kirishima.

The match doesn’t last long. Kirishima fights well hand to hand, but there is only so long that his quirk, unbreakable mode or otherwise, can hold up before he’s exhausted.

In an endurance match, it’s simple that the one with more experience will win out, much as Izuku wishes he could have watched Endeavor take a thrashing, even if he isn’t the one to give it.

Sato’s match ends similarly.

Tokoyami starts out fierce, but after several powerful fire attacks, dark shadow practically retreats, leaving Tokoyami pretty much defenseless against the flames.

Sero’s tape is incinerated.

Mina’s acid is evaporated to dust.

Ojiro doesn’t make it far before the close combat requirement for his quirk makes him have to surrender.

Through it all, the amount of advising from the pro is slim to none. There’s no ‘you should have done this’ or ‘next time try this when you’re against a poor match.’

The most they get are glib comments from Aizawa, who they see daily so Izuku is seeing less and less of a point to this exercise as the time drags on.

Momo is quickly overpowered.

Uraraka does well, dodges and parries, but again, the heat brings her down.

Iida, even with all his speed and agility, can’t land a hit and eventually, his engines overheat.

“You think you’re some big shit don’t you,” Bakugo taunts as he takes his place in the makeshift ring.

“You can’t teach your students some manners, Eraserhead?” Endeavor gripes, but Aizawa responds with little more than an eyebrow twitch.

It’s a battle of flames at that point. Explosions and roaring walls, blinding light and scorching waves of heat.

None of Bakugo’s hits seem to find purchase, or if they do, they don’t even do a visible amount of damage. Even from his place at the sideline, though closer than he probably should be, Izuku is sweating with the overflowing heat.

A chill radiates to him, making him sigh with relief.

“You could step back,” Todoroki says from beside him, his right side beginning to frost over.

“Nah. You’re making it bearable.”

Izuku doesn’t miss the tender smile. The spike in heat makes him think Endeavor didn’t either.
In the end, Bakugo overexerts himself and Aizawa calls the match, dragging Bakugo away screeching.

“I see he’s had no improvements since his spectacle last year. What do you teach them here?”

“Sit down and be quiet or so help me,” Aizawa says, pressing Bakugo into the benches off to the side where Kirishima and Kaminari fawn over how close he was.

It wasn’t really close, but he’s not about to tell Kacchan that.

He doesn’t think Kaminari and Kirishima really believe it anyway, they’re just trying to keep him contained.

Izuku finds himself across from the number one hero next. Even this close, there's no comparison to his presence and All-might's, not even to All-might's real form. There's no safety or jubilance. There's hostility and barely controlled malice.

That may be reserved just for Izuku though. The thought kind of makes him giddy as he bounces on his heels, waiting for the start signal.

When it’s called he launches himself across the concrete, ducking between Endeavor’s legs, using his size as an advantage and taking a sweep at flaming ankles.

He’s dodged, but only just. His classmates are in an uproar, cheering and calling suggestions.

“Kick his ass, nerd!” Izuku smiles as he rushes past a soaring wall of fire. His hair sizzles in his ear, knowing he’d been that close to being burned has adrenaline pumping through him, his heart hammering.

This is what Todoroki faces down every day?

How does the poor boy’s heart still have the courage and energy to beat?

The next flame attack he counters with a smash, sending the heat rushing back towards its conductor.

“Is this all All-might’s beloved successor can muster? I’m disappointed.”

“I'm just warming up.”

"So am I," Endeavor growls, a white-hot comet rushing at Izuku. He, counter to his instincts, goes towards it, sliding under it as it passes, knowing his smash wouldn't redirect that level of heat. He nearly loses his wrist to a heavy boot when he rolls out of the way, skipping and scrambling back up to his feet in time to leap away from another raging inferno.

He’s on the defensive for what feels like forever.

“Above, Midoriya!” It’s Todoroki this time, his voice singling itself out amongst the roar of the others’. Endeavor’s eyes burn when he turns his gaze on his youngest and Izuku uses that moment to launch himself up, to the corner and back down, a parody of Gran Torino’s movements, the top of his foot landing soundly with the jaw of a man he may hate more than Shigaraki himself.

In fact, he does. At least Shigaraki embodies what he is. Doesn’t ask for praise for his actions, just attention like a child.

Endeavor broadcasts heroics while he beats down on those who can’t defend themselves, people who need a hero more than anyone else.
He’s pinned to the ground by his face, a strange throwback to the way Kacchan had him pinned after the exam and the match is called.

Izuku is seething as he takes a seat next to his also defeated classmates. He’d barely been able to scratch Endeavor. His shoot style narrowly, and not so narrowly, avoided each time, the wind power from smashes blown apart by flame. He’d thought he’d get just a little bit of retribution in the match. All he got was frustration.

It didn’t make him feel any better that even Kacchan hadn’t gotten much farther. He’d yelled and carried on, blasting the ground with wide shots and his new precision point. All to no avail. The flame hero remained hulking and unfazed until Kacchan couldn’t fire off anymore.

So far, he and Kacchan were the closest to doing any damage. Tsuyu had practically wilted under the flame; Kaminari was down before he got to try anything. It was disappointing because Izuku wasn’t sure fire could beat down electricity.

“Todoroki, you’re last. Let’s get this over with.”

“Come now, Shouto. Don’t disappoint me. Show your classmates what I’ve taught you. Show them who they’ll be dealing with in a couple of weeks. Show them who to fear, boy.” Izuku sees the way Todoroki’s jaw clenches. It’s a small tick, but with someone who knows exactly how to pull himself together, exactly how to slide a mask in place, the small things mean everything.

Todoroki steps up with a pieced together expression; average at a passing glance, but not quite right when you look closely. His eyes are too tight, his jaw loosened again, his shoulders tense but his gait easy. It's jarring in its incongruent disparity. It's his persona cracking and the match hasn’t even started yet…

“Go.” Aizawa’s words sound like the passing of a prison sentence.

It’s violent from that word forward.

Todoroki launches his glacial attack, the ice rushing a remarkably unconcerned Endeavor. The frozen onslaught withers into water and steam long before it makes contact.

It’s seconds into the match and Todoroki already looks… resigned.

"That was pathetic," Endeavor taunts before surging forward. Todoroki throws up a defense and sidesteps, another icy blast as a counter but once again doesn’t make contact. Endeavor’s flaming fist does.

It’s a shot right to the solar plexus that leaves Todoroki sputtering, wide eyes and an explosion of ice to follow.

“He’s trying to push him back,” Izuku mutters. They’ve been working on it, but Todoroki’s hand to hand just isn’t his strong suit. He has a massively destructive quirk, why would it be?

“This is… scary,” Kirishima comments. He’s not wrong. It’s definitely frightening to see the number one hero beating down on his son without pulling his punches. He’d held back against the other students, but now there’s ferocity that wasn’t there before.

“Use your flame, boy.” Endeavor’s voice rings out. This time, when Endeavor charges, Todoroki doesn’t put up ice. Izuku sees the moment his feet slide into position that he’s not defending with his quirk.
“Be careful,” he whispers to himself. Endeavor’s body is licked with flame even in a neutral state. He’s sure it burns hotter during combat. He knows Todoroki’s right side doesn’t do well with heat.

He also knows Todoroki is going to lead the move with his right side. At first, it looks like it’s going to work. It looks like he may actually get the upper hand on the pro.

Izuku is practically vibrating in his seat.

It’s perfect until it’s not. Until Endeavor’s fingers close around Todoroki’s wrist and grind the bones together, breaking his hold. He slings Todoroki like a rag doll, his body hitting the ground with a thud, rolling with the impact and out of the way of the fireball that followed.

“Endeavor,” Aizawa warns from the side.

Izuku has never liked their homeroom teacher more. Though, he wishes he would just stop this.

Todoroki launches back in, kicking off a spiral of ice and attacking his father. It’s like watching a child fight an adult. Todoroki is dwarfed by his father, his movements slower and clumsier in comparison. They aren’t even close to being on the same level. None of them were. But with the rest of the class, Endeavor wasn’t fighting like they were.

Todoroki’s attack is redirected, once again thrown bodily out of Endeavor’s space. This time, when he lunges, Endeavor catches him by the right bicep and by his hair and Todoroki freezes, his left arm falling limp out of its fisted, wired track.

“You still let this get to you,” Endeavor snarls, dropping Todoroki, letting the boy crumple to the ground on his knees and rearing back before letting loose, an unguarded, blazing punch straight to his face, sending him careening into the floor.

Endeavor stalks forward, arm raised in what could be the power-up of a flame move, or readying himself to backhand Todoroki if he gets up.

Either way, before he reaches his son there’s a snap as Aizawa’s scarf whips around his wrist. “Endeavor!” Aizawa yells, his voice tight, hair flying up as the flames die down. “That’s enough,” he barks.

Todoroki is on his back.

Izuku is the only one who notices the lingering ice melting.

“Aizawa sensei!” He yells.

It’s instantaneous, an eruption of flame, a seismic outflow of power.

Endeavor looks frightening in the glow.

The… blue glow?

Aizawa had barely managed to get out of range in time, leaping back, his capture weapon at the ready.

Todoroki is still lying prone on the ground, his flame raging around him. Faintly, Izuku can hear the alarm of his regulator going off.

“Yes, Shouto!” Endeavor yells, boisterous laughter following. “All this time I knew you were just holding back!”
“Todoroki!” Izuku yells because this is bad. There’s smoke wafting in the flame and Izuku doesn’t know and is frightened to find out where it’s coming from.

Concrete doesn’t burn and Todoroki’s suit is flame retardant. It has to be or he’d need a new one every fight, the same way he needs a new gym outfit almost once a week.

Slowly, the flames recede, both in intensity and in size until they pitter out completely, leaving only the heaving body of Todoroki who turns on his left side and curls in on himself.

Without thinking, always without thinking, Izuku leaps forward, running to his side.

He can hear Aizawa talking, can hear the angry tone but he can’t hear the words over the ringing in his ears. Can’t make out the rumble Endeavor is retorting with except for that they are too jubilant for someone who’s son is unresponsive on the ground in front of him.

“Todoroki,” Izuku calls, reaching for him. His shoulder is ice cold where he touches, his body shivering. Izuku tugs, pulling him closer.

His eyes are open but he’s not looking at anything. Not at Izuku, not at his father. It’s like he’s looking through it all, past it all.

Then they skip closed completely.

When Midoriya scans his body he sees the smoke was coming from two places.

Todoroki’s regulator is melted in places, the mechanics whirring and sputtering before dying out, smoke withering in and out of the air pockets.

The other spot is his skin.

His neck and creeping up his jaw to his ear and dipping below the fabric of his uniform is mottled and angry and dark smoke is seeping one of the most horrible smells he’s ever had to deal with.

“Aizawa!” He screams. His teacher is by his side in a moment, drawing Todoroki’s torso up into his lap, his fingers pressing into his pulse point, his eyes watching his chest as it rises and falls in shuddering breaths, his whole frame trembling.

“Midoriya, pick him up carefully. We need to get him to the infirmary now.” His voice is calm but urgent and Izuku nods, placing his arm under Todoroki’s shoulders when Aizawa raises him up, his other arm sliding under his knees diligently.

He’s scorching against Izuku’s chest, his other side tepid.

“You had better be here when I get back,” Aizawa growls to Endeavor. “The rest of you, dismissed.” When they linger he snaps. “Don’t you have studying to do?! Quit gaping. You’ll see worse when you’re pros.”

You’ll see worse.

Izuku doesn’t want to see worse.

He doesn’t want to see this.

He doesn’t want to feel Todoroki’s icy body limp in his grip.

Icy? He was just burning.

“Aizawa-sensei something’s wrong,” he says. “He’s… he’s freezing. But he was just hot.”
“His body is overcompensating. Dammit. This is going to make it harder. Run in front of me, but keep his head over your shoulder where I can see him.”

“Okay,” Izuku says, a little confused but complying anyway, taking off in a jog, one for all barely awake in his bones.

When he glances back and sees Aizawa’s gravity-defying hair he understands. He’s erasing Todoroki’s quirk. Erasing it because it’s overacting. It’s unregulated with Todoroki unconscious.

They burst through the door to a very unamused recovery girl.

“Well, at least it isn’t you again,” she says, looking to Izuku. When Izuku sets Todoroki down she lets out a weary sigh. “What happened to this boy?”

“Training. Heal him some. I can’t keep this up forever.” Aizawa blinks and Recovery girl’s eyes widen.

“Oh. My that is dangerous.” She reaches into her coat for a thermometer. ”107 (42 c) Fahrenheit. Oh dear. You ought to have your class under better control.”

“It was our beloved new number one doing an exercise.”

“His father did this?”

“Not directly.” Aizawa opens his eyes, ready to reactivate his quirk when Recovery girl squints at Todoroki.

“Wait,” she says, taking his temperature again. “88 degrees(32 c). Well, thankfully you were there. This would be very bad if it had continued.”

“How bad?” Izuku asks.

“Fevers that high can boil CSF, the fluid your brain sits in. Getting that cold can stop your heart.” Izuku feels like his does stop.

Aizawa grimaces as he activates his quirk again. Prolonged use has taken an extra toll on him since the USJ; Izuku hadn’t known it was this bad.

“Just give me a moment you big baby.” She grumps before approaching Todoroki. “Poor child. I’m not going to be able to keep this from scarring some. His body needs the energy to control his quirk and with him already unconscious I don’t want to risk inducing a coma.”

“Do whatever you need to,” Aizawa says, massaging his temples, red eyes on Todoroki’s limp form.

Izuku is quiet while Recovery girl works, contemplating what he’d just seen.

Todoroki could make his flames blue. Which means it’s twice the intensity of his normal fire. Fire he’s barely gotten used to as it is. Is he able to get acquainted with that level of his quirk, or is his ice side actually holding him back since it seems to be so intolerant of the heat? Was passing out because of the quirk, or emotional stress? Why did he do it in the first place?

“That’s the best I can do for now. Release your quirk Shouta. Let’s see what happens.” Aizawa does, letting his head fall back and putting eye drops in his eyes. She re-reads his temperature.

“He still has a fever, but not a dangerous one. I’m going to keep him here for a while and make sure
it doesn't spike again. Get back to your class and make sure no one else is getting injured."

“I dismissed them.” He grumbles.

“All of them?” She asks, looking at him meaningfully.

“No. I’ll check in later. If you see Nedzu, send him my way.” Recovery girl nods and Aizawa slides
the door closed behind him.

“You don’t have to stay, Midoriya,” Recovery girl says.

"I'd like to if that's okay. If something happens, I'm one of the fastest- I could quickly go get Aizawa-
sensei again. Plus…” I can’t leave without knowing he’s okay. I can’t leave him alone after that.

“That was probably an ugly thing to witness,” she murmurs and Izuku’s heart stutters. Does she
know?

"Self-destruction is so painful to watch. Now you know why I cut you off. Children
shouldn’t try so hard to improve that they injure themselves in the process. It’s his duty as your
teacher to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

“Aizawa-sensei tells us not to. And… I don’t think Todoroki meant to. The match was kind of
already over when his fire went up.”

“It was over? Did he lose?” We all did. Was it the loss that freaked him out? He told me… He told
me he keeps going until he can’t get up anymore. Was he trying to protect himself?

“We all lost against him.”

“Well, that's a top hero for you. It's not unattainable you know. You'll get there but in your own time.
You can't skip steps or you'll find yourself with gaps in your skills.” Izuku nods.

Izuku has a gap where quirk control should be. Todoroki has a gap where quirkless combat should
be. They're both speeding along but for different reasons. Izuku because he started ten years behind
everyone and with lofty aspirations. Todoroki because his father wants him to be ten years ahead of
everyone. Regardless of how he has to get him there.
Iida brings him dinner when it’s seven thirty and Todoroki hasn’t woken, meaning Izuku hasn’t left.

“That was.. rather frightening.”

“Who knew Todoroki had that kind of power,” Uraraka says, creeping in the door behind Iida.

“Yes, but look at him. It’s like Midoriya in the beginning. A huge overwhelming blast, but he’s
incapacitated in the end. I thought Todoroki was smarter than to use a move like that!”

“Settle down children,” Recovery girl scolds. “There are people trying to recover in here.”

“Sorry recovery girl,” they all say in unison.

“Poor Todoroki. He looked like he really wanted to win.” Urararaks says. Izuku wonders what
would happen if Todoroki ever beat his father. Would it end? Would he finally be good enough to
that man?

He doubts it.

"Of course he did. Who wouldn't want to succeed while their parents are watching? That's why I aim
to take the top at the festival! Tensei, mother and father have all promised to be in the stadium this
year!”
“Over my dead body!” Uraraka says grinning, driving her fist into her palm. “I’ll make you eat those words.”

“You need to spend less time around Bakugo,” Iida says, his voice a little unsure.

“Everyone needs to spend less time around Bakugo,” Todoroki grumbles, struggling to sit up.

“Todoroki!” Izuku cries, jumping to his side, his hands flying to assist his friend. “How do you feel?” Izuku’s eyes narrow in on the pearlescent scar webbing over Todoroki’s neck, crawling up just over the edge of his jaw and encroaching on his eyes, overlapping the angry red scar that was already there.

“Exhausted. Sore. Pissed.” Todoroki says, his head bobbing to the side. “Your eyes are very green, Midoriya. Did you know that?”

“Yeah. I knew that.”

“Shitty dad is shitty. Couldn’t even chill in front of the school. Well, I guess he did a little. I didn’t throw up this time.” Izuku glances to his friends and back to Todoroki.

“Yeah, maybe we talk about that later? Are you hungry?” Izuku asks, his hand still lingering.

“Oh good. You’re awake,” Aizawa says upon re-entering. Unfortunately, the hulking flame garbage is behind him. Todoroki isn’t looking at either of them though. He’s staring at Izuku’s face and is uncomfortably close.

“You have… a lot of freckles.” He says.

Oh my god. Be quiet!

Izuku screams internally. Both because he can barely stand being under Shouto Todoroki’s scrutiny and because his father is there barely suppressing a glare at the end of the bed.

"Your self-control is poor, Shouto." Endeavor says. Aizawa rolls his eyes.

“You shouldn’t fire off attacks you and your body aren’t able to control,” he says, his eyes meaningfully on Endeavor. “You’re lucky you were only hurt as bad as you were. Your quirk is sometimes complementary to itself, the halves working together. They weren’t after that display.”

“We’ll work on it,” Endeavor says. “Won’t we?”

“Like I have a choice.”

“Still acting like a brat I see. We will continue working on your manners.”

“Give it a rest Enji.” Recovery girl scolds, smacking him on the knee with her cane. “He’s exhausted. Leave him alone. No one talks right after intense healing. Surely you aren’t that fragile.”

Izuku thinks his eyes may be saucers in his skull. Maybe cracking their very sockets.

“Very well. Alert me when he’s well enough to go home.” Endeavor says, effectively dismissing himself and striding out of the room. Todoroki’s head flops onto Izuku’s shoulder.

“I hate him,” he says, his voice quiet, too quiet probably for anyone else to hear. “I hate him.” His voice breaks the second time. Tentatively, Izuku brings his hand up, brushing it through Todoroki’s hair, tucking strands behind his ear.

“I know.”
“Todoroki,” Aizawa says.

At some point, it seems, Uraraka and Iida snuck out.
“What?” Todoroki asks, leaning into Izuku’s gentle touch.

“Do we need to talk about what we all saw out there?”

"No, sir."

“Todoroki,” Izuku starts, but Todoroki is having none of it. His eyes are all ice when they lock into his, biting and cold.

“Midoriya. I’m fine,” he turns back to Aizawa, giving Izuku a good look at his face. The scars. Both inflicted by family. In the end, both by his father. A hero. Someone who should be motivated to protect and help, not hurt. Someone who showed little to no concern when his son was hurt. Izuku has half a mind to tell Aizawa that Todoroki is full of shit. That nothing has been ‘fine’ for him for a long long time.

To tell him about Todoroki’s trauma.

Izuku wonders how great his friend could be if he wasn’t weighed down by his past and by his fears of his own powers.

“He got carried away by being in front of our class. There’s no need to worry.” Aizawa looks at him. Giving him time to retract the statement, to tell the truth.

Izuku knows their homeroom teacher is by no means stupid. He knows there’s more. He has to. He has to have seen how easily that violence towards his own child came to Endeavor. How practiced striking him down was.

This was no single occurrence.

Izuku mentally implores his teacher, both of their teacher to understand.

“Alright. You know where I am,” Aizawa finishes with, turning and leaving. Izuku can’t help but be a little disappointed. He knows there’s nothing either of them can do to force Todoroki to talk, but he still wishes he would.

He wishes he’d free them both from the burden of this secret. A burden that could really hurt one of them…

Izuku wonders if there’s a time he should draw the line… when he should stop being a friend that stands by and step up to being someone who acts to protect.

Todoroki sighs.

“Thank you,” Todoroki says quietly. “For not saying anything.” Izuku isn’t sure what to say. He can’t quite bring himself to say ‘you’re welcome,’ not when he’s so unsure of if he’s even doing the right thing or not. Not when he knows it just means he’s letting him go home to that man another day.

“How are you feeling?” Izuku asks instead.

“Tired,” he mumbles.

At some point, Izuku went from sitting on the bed to reclining on it with Todoroki’s head on his
shoulder.

At some point, he fell asleep with the other boy's heartbeat thudding against his ribcage, a steady thrum like a metronome, reassuring and grounding him, soothing the burn in his veins till it ebbs to normal warmth.

When he dreams, it's horrible. It's a myriad of bright blues and smoke choking him, filling his throat and clogging his nose. He's reminded vaguely of the training camp. Of blue fire ravaging a forest. Of a terrified boy on his back. Of desperation.

At the center of the inferno is Todoroki, burning and falling, his friends scattered in heaps around them.

His throat is raw and when he screams nothing comes out.

He watches Todoroki be speared by something beyond the wall of fire, peeking through in the blurs of red punctuating the blue.

When he wakes he just barely resists jolting up. Barely resists the desperate cry trying to tear its way out of his throat. He crawls out of the hospital bed, limbs trembling with the lingering fear. Recovery girl's office door is cracked open, indicating she is here but letting them have privacy, something odd but that he is grateful for.

He takes a moment, just one, to step out of the room. To have a small break from seeing the new scar clawing up Todoroki's shoulder to his pulse to his ear, the yellowed skin on his cheek.

He gets a juice from down the hall.

When he comes back in Todoroki has his head in his hands, his shoulders shaking and the sound of dripping water.

“Todoroki?” He asks and the other turns his head sharply, eyes wide.

“I didn’t mean to,” is the first thing he says, Izuku doesn't like it.

“It’s okay.” Todoroki shakes his head. Todoroki stands, his hands clasped in front of him, over the front of his pants. He looks... small. Like this. Childlike.

“I need new sheets.” He won't meet Izuku’s eyes.

“Okay. Did you spill something?” Todoroki’s hands tighten, and Izuku notices the wetness on his pants. “Oh.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to.”

"Todoroki it's... it's ok. It was an accident. I'll just ask for some clean ones."

Recovery girl peeks in at that point and Izuku doesn’t miss the way his friend shrinks away when she talks.

“You really should keep on monitors when under my care,” she says. “There are sheets in the closet across the hall. Fetch them and some milk for him would you, Midoriya.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Izuku grabs the sheets and then heads off for the drink.

He knows a distraction when he sees one. Maybe Todoroki will talk to her...
Note: I got so many thoughtful comments after the last chapter, so first off I just want to say thank you. I’m glad you all seem to enjoy what and where this is going. I’d also like to apologize. If anyone read the footnote in Stella where I said I would update this hours ago. I was going to, and then I wanted to tweak some stuff. :P Anyway, thanks again for reading, can’t wait to see what you guys think (I hope this chapter is ok, I feel like the pacing is weird and went like 0-60 between last chapter and this one).

Until next time!
Next: Recovery, a break, and an… apology?
Chapter 10: The sports festival (pt. 1?)
Cassie
“Where is he?” Shouta grumbles.

“He’ll be here,” Nemuri assures, almost unrecognizable in her jeans and sweater, wild hair pulled back for the most part.

“The stage is setting itself, be patient bro,” Hizashi says and Shouta just barely restrains himself from hitting his former flatmate.

“I have things to do,” Shouta says.

“You have naps to take, you mean.”

“That’s when I can sleep thanks to you.”

“You don’t even live with me right now! Your digs are at the dorms.”

“Habit then.”

“Boys,” Nemuri admonishes. Then, All-might, accompanied by their small principal, slips through the door.

“Sorry I’m late,” All-might concedes, waving feebly.

“I’m surprised you noticed,” Shouta complains.

“Come on, aren’t you two at least a little friendly after two semesters?!”

“Yes.”

“No.”

"I think this meeting had a point besides staff bickering," Nedzu comments, hopping up into one of the armchairs. "Recovery girl gave me some details but I'd like to hear what you all have to say."

"I have some concerns about Todoroki," Shouta says flatly.

"I think we all have some concerns," Nemuri adds.

"I'll be honest, I've had concerns about the boy since he stepped on my campus. But unless things have changed and I'm not aware of it, we don't have any evidence." Nedzu explains.

"What happened yesterday isn't evidence enough?! For fuck's sake, Chiyo told me he wet the bed!
He's sixteen!

"And she told me she suspects past trauma. I know you feel strongly about this Shouta, but you and I both know at a top heroics school -and from a top hero no less- that won't stand to a judge. And without his consent, she can't look into it any further than his present injury," Shouta slumps in his seat, Nemuri's shoulders similarly falling. "All-might just came from talking to the child and he denies any issues. Refuses further examination. If Todoroki is being hurt at home, it is my opinion that bringing attention to it now would likely just make it worse, and we would be leaving him to go home and deal with it. I know this is frustrating, but all we can do is be there if he chooses to talk."

"Or someone else does," Hizashi says.

"He has siblings doesn't he?" Shouta adds. "I'm pretty sure I have an older sister on my emergency contact form for him."

"I have a feeling young Midoriya may know something," All-might says. "I spoke to him as well. I don't know how they are in other classes, but young Todoroki seems closer to him than anyone else."

"If he knows and he isn't telling us," Shouta starts. "That is a serious err in judgment."

"Shouta.." Hizashi attempts.

"I'm fairly certain he lied to my face about this. Todoroki had an injury from outside of class and Midoriya claimed they'd been sparring. I overheard part of their conversation after I spoke with our problem child. He knows something and he's covering."

"Why don't we just compile what we do know, get everyone on the same page, and do what we can," Nedzu says.

"I saw them together over break. When Endeavor came home. Young Todoroki was at young Midoriya's home with a bruise. I had a chance to speak with Inko, young Midoriya's mother, and she said it wasn't the only injury the boy had."

"I spoke to All-might about this already, but I had a concerning few answers in a trauma index we did in class for Shouto. He indicated he'd had fairly severe injuries at his home, broken bones and needing hospitalization or quirks to tend to them, but he denies abuse, physical or sexual."

Shouta feels like he may hurl. Hizashi looks like he's in a similar state.

"He's either deliberately hiding it for some reason, or he doesn't think he's being abused."

"How could he not know?" All-might asks.

"Abusers have very specific methods sometimes. Victim blaming and normalization can make people very unwilling to speak up. I'm not saying it's true, I'm just saying it's a possibility."

"Yeah, or he just thinks no one will believe him," Shouta says. He sees the hurt on each of their faces, All-might perhaps the most unreservedly. "Would you? Without this meeting? Without what happened yesterday?"

He knows they're all tempted to say of course they would.

"Would you seriously think a fellow hero would hurt their own child by his word alone?"
"So what I'm gathering is, most of us suspect something unsavory is happening with Todoroki. It's likely Midoriya is privy to part or all of these occurrences but we don't know what type or severity. Am I correct?"

"Pretty much."

"His mother is in inpatient psychiatric care isn't she?" Nemuri asks.

"Yes. That was... a horrible event." All-might shudders, his thin frame vibrating violently.

"Do we know why she was admitted?"

"Psychosis or something."

"What if it wasn't?"

"Would you speak plainly?"

"What if it was trauma induced?"

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"You really should just rest today," Izuku says as Todoroki folds up the linens they'd redressed the bed with.

"I'm fine. I don't want to get behind."

"I'll bring you notes. You can sleep in my dorm room if you don't want to go home," he bargains.

"I'm fine," Todoroki bites out.

"Fine," Izuku says, a little snappier than he'd wanted, especially seeing the way his shoulders tense up. "Alright, I'm sorry. I'm just worried. You're still running a stupid fever."

"My temperature is never quite normal. It's fine. I'm sorry I worried you. But seriously Midoriya, move." Izuku sighs, but gets out of the way. If Recovery girl couldn't get him to stay longer Izuku doesn't know why he ever thought he would be able to change the hard head's mind.

They walk side by side to the cafeteria together. It's late, compared to when Izuku usually gets there. Since Izuku stayed with Todoroki last night, he didn't pack or prepare anything for his breakfast, so he drags the other teen through the line.

When they sit down a hush falls over their table. It's brief and for that second Izuku thinks he's gone deaf because Kacchan is at their table.

Then whatever spell had a fourth of class A transfixed breaks, and the roar resumes, kids swarming over Todoroki.

"Dude, that was ridiculous!"

"That was far too unsafe!"

"What the fuck icyhot!"

"I'm glad you're okay!"
"You three, all three of you are freaking terrifying!"

"I'm glad you seem to be doing well, Todoroki."

"Seriously, you guys scare me."

"Grow a pair, Kaminari!"

"Your dad wasn't very manly out there. But bro, the blue fire! What was that?!"

Todoroki is looking at them all blankly, eyes wide, chopsticks in hand but making no move for his food.

Izuku is practically shoveling his down.

"Dude, Midoriya, it's not running away."

"It might!" He forces out around bites.

"That's so gross, dude!" Kaminari whines.

"Seriously. Grow. A Pair."

"Shut up!" Todoroki side eyes Izuku, a silent thanks in his eyes. Izuku shrugs. It was only semi-on purpose, distracting people. He was also just really hungry.

"Aw, you've got a scar there," Uraraka says and Todoroki freezes. With his collar the way it is, you can't see much of the mark. Izuku sees the way Todoroki's eyes fall, looking to his tray, pushing the items around without once moving a bite towards his mouth. "Be careful or you'll end up looking like Deku!"

"I don't think... it would be bad to be like him," Todoroki mumbles. Izuku wonders briefly if Todoroki literally set his face on fire because it sure feels like his skin is blistering.

"Oh my GOD!" Bakugo yells, slamming his tray onto the trash receptacle. "You two-," he points at Izuku and Todoroki, "so. Gay."

Welp. Now he's on fire.

"Bakugo, you can't just say that to people! It's rude!"

"Shut up shitty hair." Kacchan stares at Izuku for a moment before turning the corner. Kirishima shrugs before taking off after Bakugo.

"He's completely hopeless!" Iida exclaims. "Not even a modicum of manners! How did you manage to be friends with him for so long, Midoriya!"

"Earplugs," Izuku answers seamlessly, shoveling more food in his mouth. "You better eat before I start feeding you," he says, jabbing his own fork at Todoroki.

"And we thought Iida was the mother hen," Mina laughs. Izuku pouts, but Todoroki does take a small bite of his breakfast.

After the smile he gets for that, Shouto can't help but eat a couple more, even if it tastes like ash and settles like lead in his stomach. He can't bring himself to disappoint Midoriya.
His body still aches. Recovery girl had only been able to tackle his absolute needs, his energy already in the toilet from his quirk acting up.

"Wait, where'd Bakugo go!" Kaminari exclaims.

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Homeroom starts similarly. Everyone swarming Todoroki's desk, making sure he's alright. Izuku's happy to see it. He's happy to see everyone showing that they care. He's pretty sure Todoroki has spent too long without anyone doing that. Maybe his sister, but he doesn't think they're allowed to have much to do with each other.

He can tell by the way he leans into Izuku's touch that he wants it, needs it even, but more often than not won't initiate it. It pains him, how some of the innocuous things have such dark reasons. He doesn't seek comfort because he's been told it's weak. He doesn't take it easy because he's never been allowed. He didn't have friends because it was instilled in him that he didn't need them, that they were a distraction, a hindrance rather than support.

It's great until Aizawa cracks the drywall throwing the door open, glaring at each one of them. He doesn't actually say anything to them. Izuku wonders if his frustration is actually about them talking when class is supposed to have begun already, or if it's something else entirely.

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The next two days pass... extremely quietly given what kind of months they've had.

Izuku and Todoroki are sitting outside at lunch underneath a cherry tree. It's one of the first really nice days they've had since the semester started.

"How are things with your dad?" Izuku asks, filling his mouth with a peanut butter sandwich. Todoroki shrugs.

"He apologized for overdoing it. I don't buy his bullshit, but he's letting me off this afternoon. So..."

"So?" Izuku prods. He's pretty sure Todoroki is hinting that they could hang out, but he kind of wants him to say it. Wants him to be comfortable to initiate it.

"Well..." Todoroki is picking at the grass, shredding it and flitting it through his fingers. "I could hang out here. Instead of going home. With you."

"I think that would be fun," Izuku says, smiling. "I miss hanging out with you." The small smile that had worked its way onto Todoroki's face falters.

"I'm sorry."

"It isn't your fault."

"Maybe if he was happier with my progress he wouldn't have made me leave."

"Todoroki, you know that's not true," Izuku tries. They've gotten... somewhat better, more candid when talking about his dad. "Unless you could beat All-might in his pre-retirement form with one hand behind your back he wouldn't be happy. He's just... not reasonable." He waits for the defense, for the retorts, but all he gets is a weary sigh and somehow it doesn't feel good. It just makes him sad.

"You're right," Todoroki admits. "You've been right about a lot."
"Todoroki?"

"Thank you. For trying to help. Even when I was being an ass about it." Izuku doesn't like his friend like this. He doesn't like the meek way he's sitting, the hunched slope to his shoulders or the sad slant of his eyes.

"Of course. I-I care about you... Shouto." Wide eyes, half dark half bright look up at him, mouth slightly parted in surprise. "It's okay if you don't like that. You can tell me."

"No... No I, I like you saying my name." Todorok- Shouto's cheeks are pink and he worries his bottom lip. Izuku throws him a lifeline.

"You can call me, Izuku. If you want."

"Thank you... Izuku." His heart feels like it's fluttering and beating against his ribs at the same time. His fingers slightly numb, all the blood rushing other places. Kirishima's teasing comes back to him, Kacchan's taunts about his feelings. He doesn't dare to hope. Doesn't dare to think that could actually happen. Shouto doesn't... he just doesn't feel that way about him. Sure... Shouto is closer to him than anyone else, but part of that is because Izuku is the only one he can talk to about a lot of things. It's nothing more than that...

It's not like Izuku is special outside of that fact anyway. He's just... plain, muttering, anxious, invasive Deku. Sure Shouto accepts his little affections easily, but he's touch-starved and probably doesn't even recognize them as things that could be romantic. He sees them as comfort and Izuku should be focusing on that. Not on what he wants, but what Shouto needs.

"You can't always put everyone else above yourself. You have to do things for you too, Izuku." Izuku shakes his head, wanting his mom's words to fall out of his ears. Izuku does plenty for himself anyway. His whole being here is for himself. Hell, he could argue helping Shouto is selfish in the end. It gives him reasons to be close to the other teen and... it kind of makes him feel like a hero.

"Meddling where you don't have to is the essence of being a hero."

Unsurprisingly, it turns into a class-wide affair. They can go off campus, but nobody has any way of driving them anywhere, so they end up hanging out in the common room of the dorm.

Kaminari brings down his PS4 and it turns into a video game tournament. Mina brings her DDR GameCube set, Kirishima has an Xbox and Koda has a pokemon handheld. Izuku takes Shouto up to his room while they set up, intent on letting the other boy borrow some clothes that aren’t a stiff school uniform.

He’s pink in the face when he opens the door to his room, no less All-might decorated than it had been when they moved in Freshman year.

“So most of my sleep clothes are All-might themed,” Izuku mumbles while he digs through drawers. He looks up, noticing Shouto standing somewhat awkwardly by the door. “You can sit down. I cleaned earlier this year so it should be fine,” Izuku jokes. Shouto nods, sitting delicately on the edge of his bed as if trying not to disturb it.

Izuku frowns and sits up, flopping onto the bedspread. Shouto watches him, not moving and Izuku sighs, grabs the other boy’s arm and pulls him down with him.

“Oops. Messed it up,” Izuku says. He feels like his face might split open he’s smiling so wide. To his joy, he gets a smile from Shouto and a small breathless chuckle. “I guess I should find us clothes.”
“I don’t think many would appreciate us sitting in our underwear. So that would be good.” Izuku drops back to the floor, hiding his burning face in his task. The idea of Shouto in his underwear…is, not something he was at all prepared for. Izuku pulls things out, holding them up to judge their size. He’s grown a bit, slowly catching up to Shouto, but he still needs something a little on the bigger side for it to be comfortable. Izuku is already concerned he’ll spontaneously catch fire at the sight of Shouto wearing his clothes, he doesn’t need to also compete with the fact that said clothes are tight. You might as well preemptively launch him into orbit instead.

"That,” Shouto says suddenly. “Is interesting.” Izuku looks to what he had just thrown behind him. It’s the All-might onesie his mom had gotten him as a gag gift this Christmas. It looks just like the one he used to wear when he was little, running around the house as ‘All-might Junior’ and saving her from “peril.”

“My mom bought it for me. I actually have two. Uraraka got me one as well,” he says, pulling out another similar garment. “They’re different costumes of his and they’re really soft.” Izuku throws it up to Shouto to feel, going back to what seems to be a monumental task of finding something that might fit and isn’t covered in All-might’s face.

He’s about out of options when he hears a clink of metal and a thunk. He turns around, abruptly turning back around when he sees Shouto is in just his tank top undershirt and boxer briefs. He’s scrambling in the pile of clothes when there’s the sound of a zipper and he habitually turns towards the sound.

“Uh…” Shouto is zipping up the All-might onesie, hood up and obnoxious fleece hair pieces and everything.

"I like it,” Shouto says simply. Izuku gapes. “I like All-might. He’s my favorite hero. I just can’t flaunt it like you can.”

"Oh. Yeah, I guess your dad…”

"Would burn it. He has. It’s exactly the kind of thing he would hate, ”Shouto looks down at his chest, fingers playing over the fleece. “Momma used to play me his videos when the old man was away. Honestly…Knowing there was a hero out there like him, was probably the only thing that kept me from hating heroes altogether.”


“So are you.”

“It’s easy to be kind when you’re raised in it.”

“Bakugo wasn’t kind to you. He still isn’t.”

“No…but I had my mom to make up for it.”

“Don’t undersell yourself,” Shouto says, folding his discarded clothes. “You’re amazing too, Izuku. Very fit to be the next All-might.”

“What?!” Izuku sputters. He hadn’t told anyone that! Right? Right?! “Am I wrong?” Shouto asks, the confident expression on his face showing he knows he isn’t.

“Well…no…But it’s not exactly common knowledge yet.”
“It is to people with eyes. Besides the quirk. You’re very alike. Now. Aren’t you going to change?”

By the time they come back down, most of the class has distributed themselves between the makeshift stations, some sitting on the large couch and choosing just to watch instead. A couple of people turn their heads when they hear the two of them come down. They get some confused blinks and wide eyes, but no one comments on the fact that they are both wearing All-might onesies at sixteen.

Izuku and Shouto end up in the group of observers, sitting comfortably on the couch. Izuku is... quite frankly terrible at video games.

"Come on, at least play one!" Kirishima complains after a little bit, tugging on Izuku's hand.

"I don't even know what you're playing! And I suck!"

"Well, Todoroki can help you. We'll do a team match," Kaminari interjects.

"I've never played," Shouto says. You would have thought he said he tortured animals. The next hour is spent cycling Shouto through the various gaming systems.

He's surprisingly good at DDR.

He doesn't get pokemon.

He doesn't like COD.

He doesn't last long in PVP. Somehow, Bakugo got a controller and made it his personal mission to kill the person who couldn't even find the X button to fire his own weapon.

Through it all, he's touching Izuku. Either their legs pressed together, or a loose tangle of fingers, or Izuku's chest acting as the back of his chair while he sits on the ottoman closer to the screen.

"Dude, did you not see that guy?"

"Where are you firing?"

"Die!"

Izuku manages to keep the controllers out of his own hands, thankfully. Once the novelty wears off and someone else asks for a turn, Shouto hands it over more than willingly, slinking back to the background on the couch, Izuku in tow.

Izuku is in the corner, his legs stretched out on the L of the couch, Shouto at his side, close, barely touching, just a brush of their arms.

Until, with a conspiratory look with Kacchan, just as Izuku is stretching, arms above his head, Kirishima throws himself on the couch next to Shouto, effectively pushing him further into Izuku’s space.

"Yo, 'mini-might," Kirishima says, looking around Shouto at Izuku and waggling his slightly scarred eyebrow.

"I said stop calling me that," Izuku grumbles, hesitantly lowering his arms, his right one with no choice but to rest on Shouto's shoulder. Shouto glances at him, curious but not uncomfortable or angry, and then looks back at the voracious redhead.
Kirishima yaps for approximately ninety seconds before excusing himself, mouthing 'you're welcome' at Izuku when Shouto isn't looking.

Here he thought Ashido was going to be his problem.

Apparently, it's redheads who don't know what is and isn't their freaking business. Or who don't care. He's not sure which is worse.

After a while, the gaming dies down, and they end up putting on a movie off of Netflix, turning the lights down and hanging extra sheets over the windows that the setting sun is shining in through.

When a warm leg throws itself over his lap, a fleece boot laden foot tucking itself between his thighs, and hair tickling his nose Izuku thinks he may implode.

Kirishima is giving him a thumbs up, again, and Izuku is oh so tempted to give him the finger. He doesn't like being pushed. He doesn't like that Shouto was pushed. Yes, he loves that the other teen is curled into his side like a koala or a cat, and he couldn't be happier about that. He could be happier about the circumstances. He wants them to go at their own pace, if there's a pace at all.

Halfway through the movie, Izuku pulls out his phone.

_Izu_ku: Hey, question

_Uknow_ kn: Hello. What do you need?

_Izu_ ku: Is it going to be a big thing if Shouto stays at the dorm tonight?

_Uknown: ..._

;)

_Shouto huh?_

_Hang on_

_Izu_ ku: why is everyone being liek this??

_Uknown: Dad's in a good mood for some reason.

_Should be fine.

_Why though?_

_Izu_ ku: Img attached

_Uknown: .... thank you...

Izuku pockets the phone again, looking at Shouto's peaceful face. His slightly open mouth, the squish of his cheek where it's pressed against Izuku's arm, the smoothness of his skin, absent of the weary lines and conflicted wrinkles and creases. Izuku's tempted to run his fingers through the silvery hair splayed across Shouto's forehead.

When he looks back up, Kacchan is miming gagging and throwing up.

Izuku doesn't hold back the finger this time.
At some point, Izuku's head starts bobbing, drifting lower until it rests atop Shouto's soft locks, his own eyes slipping closed as the sequel to whatever terrible movie they're watching reaches its climax.

For the first time in a while, Izuku's sleep is dreamless.

There are no haunting images of All-might's scrawny form in a tattered hero uniform. There's no bloody splatter of the number one hero in the cracked concrete of Camino. He doesn't see explosions dancing behind his eyelids. He doesn't see his friends slaughtered around him. There's no mental construct of what Shouto would look like, beaten by his father until there's no chance left for healing.

It's just... rest.

~_~_~

When he wakes up, he's surprised- one, to find Shouto is still lounging on him, and two, Shouto is awake and still lounging on him. He's scrolling through his phone, head still tucked into Izuku's chest, the rest of him under a blanket someone had apparently decided to cover them with at some point during the night.

At least they don't seem to be the only ones who camped out in the common area. Kaminari and Kirishima are starfished across each other in the middle of the floor. Asui and Uraraka are cuddled together similarly to the way he and Shouto are right now.

Should he be concerned they're cuddling the same way an actual couple cuddles?

"Morning," Shouto says, looking up at Izuku.

"Your eyes are pretty," Izuku blurts out. Shouto raises his eyebrows. "They're like early morning and midnight. I dunno. They're just pretty."

"They're weird," Shouto says. "I look weird."

"You're beautiful." Shouto scoffs. "You don't have to listen to me. I have it on good authority that's the consensus. I could go get Hagakure or Mina. I think even Kacchan said he wanted to, quote, 'punch your stupid pretty face.'"

"Well, they're blind. They should be talking about you." Izuku blanches. "Better personality too. I have 'the personality of a potato.'"

"Did you seriously A, imply I'm more attractive than you and B, actually use finger quotes?"

"Are you two seriously being that gross this early," Kaminari whines, stealing the closest pillow, not his, and putting it over his head.

"It's not even early," Izuku says, looking to the clock. "Iida’s probably going to be down here any minute to scold us for not sleeping in our beds." Kaminari groans loudly, causing Kirishima to sit up and push the pillow on his head harder.

"Be quiet or die," Kirishima grumbles before flopping back down.


"Ah. You can make jokes! Katsuki owes my five dollars."

"Kirishima!" Izuku admonishes, his voice pitching higher.
“He started it. Said Todoroki had too much of a stick up his ass.” Izuku glares. “What! I defended him, bro!” Their banter is interrupted when the elevator doors ding and heavy footsteps approach.

“Kaminari it’s no wonder your grades are poor with such poor sleep hygiene. One cannot learn without proper rest!” Izuku thinks he sees something die in Iida when he spots not just Izuku, but Uraraka and Todoroki in the same predicament. “I cannot believe all of you!”

"Iida. Too loud," Uraraka whines, burrowing into Asui’s shoulder.

“I slept better here than I ever do in my room,” Shouto says quietly. Izuku’s smile falters, the ease of the morning falling with the reminder that this is very temporary. That tomorrow everything could one-eighty and he’ll have so see Shouto with fresh bruises again. Iida, ever missing the point, bulldozes right over what Izuku perceives to be an awkward silence, but may just be a sleep deprived pause.

“Perhaps you need a new pillow. Improper neck alignment can also hinder proper sleep.”

“I’ll look into it,” Shouto deadpans. Izuku can’t help but chuckle.

“Do you want to borrow an undershirt, Shouto?” Izuku asks, realizing belatedly that the other teen only has his already worn uniform to put on. Shouto nods, following Izuku to the elevator.

Neither of them misses the whispers that slink through the cracks as the elevator doors close.

“So he’s ‘Shouto’ now."

“They’re practically married now.”

“Don’t gossip about your classmates!”

Finding an undershirt goes immensely better than the sleepwear search, thankfully, since Izuku isn’t sure he could bear the taunting if they were gone too long.

Before Izuku knows it, they're in the cafeteria, picking up breakfast and sitting amongst their friends like any other day. Despite Iida's scolding, no one who slept downstairs seems to be faring any worse than usual, if anything, a few seem brighter.

Still, judging by the look they get when they enter homeroom, they better not make it a habit.

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Chapter End Notes

Okay. I guess I lied. Or at least lied a little. I had planned for the next chapter to be exclusively Sports festival stuff, but that may end up being chapter twelve after all. Before I knew it, this had gotten to 4700 words and I still have crap to do before we get to the festival. So....

Next time: Class A does some sparring with their newest classmate!
Katsuki Vs. Kaminari
Kirishima Vs. Iida
Urara Vs. Momo
Shouto Vs. Shinso: Does Shinso have a secondary quirk for pushing people's buttons!?
Shouto has one more chance to explain things on his terms.
Enji's good mood passes.
PREVIEW: "I bet you never had to work hard for anything in your life! People just handed you things didn’t they? Because your dad is so important. You don’t know what it’s like to be a nobody. You don’t know what it’s like to be picked on. You didn’t even have to try to get in here! I don’t know why Izuku clings to you. You’re just another flashy, power hungry, rich, brat. The only thing that makes you stand out is that scar. Get too big for your britches when you got your quirk? No? Where'd you get it then?"
Izuku sees the moment Shouto loses his temper, he sees the tiny shards of ice start erupting around his foot and then, he opens his mouth and it's over.
"Momma."
NEXT NEXT: The sports festival (forreal this time many apologies)
Seriously, I thought it would MAYBE take 10k to get back to where the prologue started. This fic is nearly my longest to date and I'm not even back to the beginning. WTF.
Chapter Summary

Another class exercise...
Something Shouto has long kept a secret comes out and Class A gets a brief look at his temper.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

They're gathered at training center beta, somewhat of a hybrid between cityscape and landscape. It's an open area, concrete and pillars on one side giving way to grass and scattered trees at the back end of the school. Their perpetually tired teacher sits atop one of the pillars, relaying their lesson for the day.

"You're drawing lots for a one on one fight. Hopefully, these will be more educational than our last display," Aizawa says disdainfully. He somehow looks even more tired than usual as he drops the slips of paper into a box.

“What are the rules for these battles?” Iida asks.

“Immobilization. Excessive force will be met with point penalties. If anyone has to see the old lady for any reason you will regret it. She’s already had it with me. Now come pick your opponents.”

Izuku draws Tokoyami.

Uraraka draws Momo.

Kacchan draws Kaminari.

Kirishima draws Iida.

Shouto draws Shinso.

Izuku stops paying attention after that. Loses the capacity to pay attention after that. Izuku remembers his own one on one matchup with Shinso last year. He doesn't know if it was a coincidence that he was able to get under Izuku's skin the way he did, or if he has some kind of sense for picking out people's weaknesses. If somehow he knew Izuku struggled with his quirk, if he knew how fierce his loyalty was to the first friends he's ever had.

He wonders if he'll be able to hone in on anything in Shouto. He's frightened for what it could be.

He's distracted through his own match, spending more time than not on the defensive from Dark Shadow's claws.

In the end, he loses. He's still too harrowed by the idea of Shinso and Shouto and hindered by Aizawa's threat of putting anyone en route to Recovery girl. He's gotten infinitely better with his quirk, but he's still fairly reliant on high power attacks and still learning exactly how much each opponent needs.
Aizawa gives them both a fairly thorough review and weaknesses to watch out for tomorrow. It's been one fight and he thinks they've already learned more than they did with their flashy top hero. They seemed to only learn two things that day. Endeavor wants to win and he doesn't pull punches on kids, least of all his own.

Urararaka and Momo's match is very interesting. Ever since Uraraka met Gunhead she's been way into martial arts. Izuku, on many occasions, has been her somewhat unwitting practice dummy. So has Iida. A couple of times she's been able to wrangle Shouto in too, but his time with them outside of class is limited, so he doesn't get thrown on his back as much as the other two.

But Momo is quick, both in her quirk and in her thinking. Uraraka grasps at her wrist and Momo creates something that keeps her from being touched and helps her slink out of the hold. Uraraka throws her off balance, in a flash Momo creates a stabilizer that puts her back on even footing. Uraraka floats and throws discarded items, Momo parries with a shield.

It's like a well-choreographed dance, graceful and fluent, with each step forward there's one back, chasing and circling each other in their space.

They end up running the clock into a draw.

They actually get praise for their improvements, followed by helpful criticism each girl drinks up. Izuku thinks he'd like to get to know Momo better. She's one of the few people outside of their little quadratic that Shouto more than tolerates. Wanting to know your friend's friends is normal, right?

Kacchan has sparks in his palms before Aizawa calls go. The second the match starts he flies across the ring at someone who is supposedly a friend, a wicked grin cracking his face and heat blazing his hands.

"Game over, Pikachu," he says, unleashing one of his larger scale blasts.

"Bakugo," Aizawa warns from the side.

"He can take it," Bakugo says, the equivalent of a compliment from a normal person. He jumps back when his explosion reverberates off of something solid, the smoke clearing to show an unscathed Kaminari bearing a glowing, sparking shield. Kaminari has spent more time than any of them with the support students. The electricity fades, leaving behind only the metal cross shape that folds into itself, only a small handheld device that Kaminari clicks back magnetically to a utility bracelet remaining.

From his belt, he pulls a cylindrical object, almost like Shouto's first aid containers but a bit thicker and elongated.

"A smoke bomb?" Izuku wonders to himself.

At the last second, right before he's on Bakugo light erupts from it, a blade of lightning cutting through the air where Bakugo stood, his blast enhanced maneuvering the only thing that saved him from electrocution.

"Should he really be showing all of his new tricks right now?" Shouto says from beside him. "Seems stupid."

"Well..." Izuku says. Kaminari... isn't their brightest bulb. He's friendly and motivated that's for sure, but Shouto is right. He could have easily done what Iida did during their cavalry battle as first years and wowed everyone with his new moves. Taken people by surprise, let them expect he'll be easily tired out and a one hit wonder like he showed last year. He's surrounded by nineteen of his friends,
and nineteen of his competition. "You're not wrong."

It's a longer match than Izuku had thought it would be, but Bakugo ends up victorious, with surprisingly few points deducted for violence.

Kirishima and Iida turn into more or less an endurance thing. Kirishima hardening to block Iida's recipro and Iida bolting away from Kirishima's swings.

Iida ends up outlasting him though.

Izuku's leg is bouncing on the makeshift seat as Shinso and Shouto take their places.

"Todoroki, I want to see something besides that ice wall," Aizawa says before they start.

"There's too much stuff in the way that would cloud the field if destroyed. That would be stupid," Shouto snarks. Aizawa's eyebrow twitches.

"I put up with a lot from this class. I will start handing out detentions." No response, though there is an upturn of lips from Shinso. "Begin."

Shouto does start with ice, though, to Izuku's dismay, it doesn't end the match. Just like the rest of them, Shinso has been steadily improving and he has the added advantage of a capture weapon that, as he slings it around a pillar and pulls himself out of the line of fire, it seems he is adept at using.

"If you value that item, I wouldn't touch me with it," Shouto growls, his left side lighting up with fire. "I'll turn it to ash."

"I'm surprised you even warned me. I'd think something like value would escape you since you've had everything in your life handed to you so easily." Izuku watches, eyes wide as Shouto opens and closes his mouth, a sigh of relief escapes Izuku's lips. "What must it be like not to have to work for anything?" He teases, dodging another elemental attack. "To have people practically worship you when they hear your last name. To have a dad who's a top hero and can get you anything you want."

Izuku's fists clench, knowing how hard it is to stand there silently when all you want to do is scream that everything being said is wrong.

"I don't even know if he's doing it intentionally. He'd pegged me so well at the festival and now he's doing the same to Shouto. He could just be ranting his own frustrations and coincidentally pushing buttons but it seems too effective for it not to be deliberate."

"Deku, shut the fuck up," Kacchan growls. It doesn't have near the animosity that it had this time last year.

"What are you talking about dude?" Kirishima asks from beside their explosive friend.

Izuku doesn't answer, watching everything unfold.

He can see the steam rolling off Shouto's body; ice melting and evaporating, freezing and burning. "You didn't even have to try and get in here! I don't know why Izuku clings to you the way he does. Just another flashy, power-hungry, rich brat. The only thing that makes you stand out is that scar. Get
too big for your britches when you got your quirk? No? Where'd you get it then?" Izuku sees the moment Shouto's mouth goes to form syllables, the instant he tries to tell Shinso to cram it.

Different words come out instead as his hetero-chromic eyes glaze over, his quirk fizzling out, water dripping from his right side to the growing puddle on the concrete.

"Momma."

"Shinso, please stop!" Izuku screams.

For a brief moment, Izuku doesn't think he's going to back down. He thinks the things Shouto had shared with him in confidence through these months are going to be spilled out for their whole class to see.

Then, Shouto's eyes clear, just for a moment before they're clouded over with fear and frustration, his mouth twisting and eyebrows pinching, his nose scrunching up before he drags his hand over his face, tugging at the ends of his white hair.

In that moment, Izuku sees the potential for destruction. Shouto spins on his heel, facing the open expanse of grass and throws a wall of flame exploding outwards with a roar, the heat radiating outwards, painting the area in a hellish glow.

"Fuck!"

The whole class is silent, struck either by the brilliance of the display, the power of his quirk, the shock of the 'stoic student' completely losing his cool or a combination of factors.

No one has the mind to stop him when he stomps past them all, leaving cinders and ash with every other footstep.

No one but Izuku, who turns a pleading eye to Aizawa and follows the ebbing light as Shouto retreats.

By the time Izuku catches up to Shouto, he's locked himself in a bathroom on the fourth floor.

He can hear him retching before he even pushes the door open.

"Shouto?"

"Get out," Shouto rasps, an angry grating sound as he spits again. The door isn't even closed. When Izuku gets closer, he realizes it's not because Shouto didn't try and lock it, it's because it's melted out of shape, the lock no longer aligning with its slot, leaving it wavering on its hinges instead.

Its gross, but he kneels beside his friend, brushing Shouto's hair out of his face, collecting the sweaty strands and pulling them back, tying it back with a spare hair tie Uraraka lent him when he'd lamented his wild hair constantly being in his face. He sits beside Shouto, his other hand running up and down Shouto's back, feeling every convulsion of muscle beneath his palm, wincing at every wet splash and slosh of displaced water.

"I'm sorry, Sho," Izuku murmurs.

"Fuckin' kill me," Shouto says quietly, the heaving subsiding.

"If I'll blow over. Give them a week and they'll forget," Izuku says, slipping out his phone.

_Izuku: Can you keep them from freaking out over this?_ Izuku knows the last thing they need is to be
bombarded when, and if he supposes, they go back.

Iida: Of course! Aizawa-sensei already shut down the chatter but I will do my part.

Is Todoroki alright?

Izu looks at their friend. He's ashen and sweaty and feels like a literal block of ice where his skin touches Izuku's own heated body. Between the exertion, worry and proximity Izuku is quite warm.

Izuku: Not taking it well.

Iida: I understand. He has Uraraka and my full support.

It can be hard to have your personal life on display.

Especially without choice.

If there is anything else I can do as class rep or as a friend do not hesitate to let me know.

Izuku: Thanks, Iida.

We love you

Izuku slips his phone back, taking in Shouto's slumped form.

"Iida is helping."

"I didn't ask him to."

"I did."

"I didn't ask you to."

"I'm your friend. I wanna help." Shouto turns his head, giving Izuku an insufferable look that's mostly withered by his miserable state. "Is it just them knowing or...?" Izuku leaves the 'why are you so upset' implicit.

"I don't know. Nothing makes sense right now."

"What do you mean?"

"You made things not make sense," Shouto says, his eyes flicking back and forth, refusing to stay in one place. "I talked to Iida. His family isn't like mine."

"I know."

"I don't want them to think of her that way," he says quietly. "Momma didn't mean to hurt me," he whimpers. Izuku's heart breaks, literally breaks. Shouto has been through so much pain for someone so young, had so many choices ripped from him, so much innocence rendered to cinders instead of being allowed to thrive and mature on their own.

"Come on, let's get out of the floor," Izuku says, tugging on Shouto's icy arm. His friend stands without comment, stumbling slightly before tapping the toe of his boot on the ground, taking steadier steps after. "Foot asleep?" Izuku asks. He gets a solemn nod in response. Shouto splashes water on his face, looking up into the mirror, his face pensive. He picks apart several strands of crimson hair, staring at it disdainfully.
"I acted like him, didn't I," he says, his intonation flat. Apparently, Izuku doesn't answer fast enough; Shouto's face scrunches up and his right arm rears back, knuckles glazing over with ice before he throws his weight into a punch, shattering the mirror, the cracking echoing in the small space and making Izuku flinch.

When Shouto turns to him his eyes are wide and full of thinly veiled horror.

"I scared you," he says quietly.

"The noise- not- Shouto it wasn't- you didn't." Shouto stalks forward, backing Izuku into the wall of the stalls, icy puffs of breath hitting his nose. The door clatters against the frame when Izuku’s shoulder hits it and Shouto startles, pulling back, but Izuku follows, staying just as in his space as they'd started.

"Get away from me," Shouto says. His voice is shaking and there’s frost creeping up his neck, the temperature in the room dropping, ice spreading from the sole of his shoe.

"Sho, I'm not afraid of you I promise," he tries, reaching forward, trying to show him.

"Don't touch me! Get away from me!" Izuku steps back because Shouto is panicking. His eyes won't quit moving, flitting around the room, resting only minutely longer when they cross over exits. There's flame licking at the ends of his hair, drawing the spider web of scarring on his neck into sharp relief.

Should I be afraid? Izuku wonders. He hurt himself. He could hurt me. He could kill me.

Even with those thoughts, he doesn't feel frightened. Shouto is out of control in front of him and he's not scared.

At first, he'd thought he'd only been offering platitudes when he said it was just the noise. But he wasn't lying.

He's not scared of Shouto.

Shouto on the other hand... looks like he's about to implode.

"Shouto, come on. Calm down, I'm not scared, so you shouldn't be," Izuku says, trying to be soothing but Shouto doesn't seem to be buying it. "Feel my pulse," Izuku urges, holding his hand out to his friend. "I'm completely calm."

Shouto eyes his hand dubiously, his focus flitting between his hand and his face and the doors.

"I'm not scared," Izuku says once more. Shouto reaches out to him with shaking fingers, their chill sending goosebumps running up his arm, pressing on his pulse point.

With each thrum of Izuku's heart, he feels some of the cold ebbs, sees the embers snuff.

"See?" Izuku says, giving a gentle smile. Shouto nods numbly, his grip loosening and hand falling limply at his side.

Izuku doesn't know why he wasn't scared. By all accounts, he should have been. He's been on the receiving end of volatile quirks most his life. Hell, he got knocked out of the ring, out of consciousness, by Shouto's power once before. He knows the pain of healing burns and bruised bone.
It just seemed... like he trusted Shouto not to do anything. The evidence that even someone you love can hurt you is a constant reminder on Shouto's face. A permanent scar left by someone who should have protected him. 'It doesn't matter if you're friends. He could have hurt you,' a voice that resembles his mother's says. 'But he wouldn't.' Is his automatic response. He doesn't know why.

He also doesn't know why when he thinks of his relationship with Shouto that word is coming up.

Izuku forces it away. Now is not the time.

"Do you want to go back to class?" Izuku asks. Shouto shakes his head. "Do you want to come to my dorm for awhile?" Shouto hesitates, contemplating, before a slow nod. "Then let's go," he says, extending his hand.

Shouto just stares at it. Izuku sighs, reaching down, grasping Shouto's left hand and twining their fingers together.

"Everything is fine," Izuku says as the bathroom door closes behind them.

Shouto's knuckles are bruised and there's glass in pieces in the sink.

There are char marks down the center of the new training ground.

Things are not fine.

—

Endeavor paces his home, barely restraining himself from lighting the walls on fire.

The league of villains reviews their plan.

A many times folded photo lays in a scarred palm, it's memories shining upward from dulled ink and creased lines.

"It's showtime."

---

**Preview: (minor hint at rape threat from Enji concerning Rei)**

"You're late. God. That brat is ruining you. Come. It's time for your lessons. If we don't work hard you'll end up just as useless as your mother."

"Shut up. Mom wasn't useless and Izuku is a good friend!"

"You don't need friends, you insufferable insipid child. You have a purpose and All-might's bastard is holding you back."

"Fuck my purpose!"

"You better hope your whoring around doesn't make me look like a fool tomorrow."
"I think you'll do fine without my help."

"If you want to be that b-list sidekick's bitch and talk to me like that. Then maybe I don't need you at all. I'll pull your mother out of that hospital just as easily as I threw her in and I'll be sure to tell her she has you to thank when I replace your ungrateful, useless ass."

"Dad stop it!" Fuyumi screams.

'With just one hand he's going to kill me.

He's going to kill me.'

He can see the smoke rising in front of his good eye, can smell the acrid stench of burning skin.

It takes a moment to connect that it's his skin, his face beneath his father's hand that's burning.

"I made sure no one talked about your brother. I'll make sure they don't talk about you either."

Chapter End Notes

For anyone who also reads Stella (my porn turned angst turned fluff) this is the same note explaining my absence.

This is a personal note with no real information about the story progression, so feel free to skip.

The past couple weeks, I have been struggling with motivation to write these fics. It started with a bad comment on one of my newer writings, which snowballed with some family shit, and just kind of sunk me in a ditch.

The only reason these chapters are here at all is the very kind folks on tumblr and twitter (I won't say their names in case they don't want to be called out and because some were Anons - but you know who you are) reached out with emotional support and with some very kind words about my writing.

This is NOT to say these stories won't get finished. They will, but at a slower pace than most of you are used to.

I'll be honest, my family can suck sometimes. I love them dearly but there are times they push the wrong buttons and make the same stupid jokes about things you've said aren't funny and are not supportive of my hobbies. Even my husband not so kindly mocks me about spending all my time writing gay porn (comparatively, I write very little of that honestly, he just likes to give me shit and sometimes it makes me feel bad instead of being a joke).

I struggle with bipolar 2, have struggled with managing the depression part for eight years. I am very sensitive to nasty things so when I'm even a little bit down, stupid things throw me in the dirt and tend to just keep piling on. I'm doing better than a few days ago, but I'm hanging on rather precariously so updates will have a weird schedule to them.

I also am going to level, I have almost no time to write. I have an eight month old who DOES NOT sleep. He has acid reflux BAD so he naps on my chest, he sleeps at night (when he does sleep) on my chest or in my bed on my arm.

I literally spend my time writing on my phone while he is napping. Occasionally I have time at work to write on an actual computer.
It takes a lot out of me to write. I love doing it, I really do. But when I feel like shit and it's already a task to get done, it tends to not happen. I have maybe a day a week where my mom is the one baby wants to put him to sleep and I get a couple hours (sometimes less) with my laptop, which is usually when I post my updates and reply to comments until he wakes up screaming bloody murder.

I rely heavily on evernote, which keeps files updated on my phone and computer and is accessible at work when I do have time to put down a few sentences, and grammarly for catching my stupid spelling errors because my spellcheck is dumb as fuck. (It also catches every time evernote decides to fuck up Shouto's name - it gets Izuku's, but Shouto is still a mystery to it for some reason). If you ever see "All-NIGHT" you can thank spellcheck for being a douche.

ANYWAY

I wanted to thank people for the support you give with your comments and kudos and especially those lovely folks that sent such touching messages over SM. These updates really go out to you guys. I just wanted to level with everybody about what was going on.

TL:DR
These stories WILL get finished.
The update schedule WILL be wonky.
I'm a sensitive snowflake (I can take constructive criticism, I like improving, I don't do well with 'It was meh, didn't like it, hate your writing etc.' 'Watch your tenses,' or 'less dialogue would flow better' something I can quantify and work on I can work with.)
I yammer about what I'm working on and sometimes post bits on twitter @all-time-low3st.
I have a rather large backlog of WIPs, but I do like taking requests. (Yesterday's son was BORN from a tumblr prompt and I LOVE it).
So there you go. That's what's been going on.
Shouto shouldn't have come home. He knows it from the moment he walks in the door. Despite this, he goes into the kitchen, puts his bag and his jacket in the floor.

"He's waiting for you," Fuyumi says from around the corner. Her eyebrows are drawn together, her mouth pinched. It's not a good expression on her. She shouldn't have to contort her face that way. Shouto knows she's only here because he is. He wishes she would leave. She still has a chance to get away from this shit storm. From this house.

"He can keep waiting. I have to send Izuku my notes for a project."

He smells his father before he sees him. The ever present smoke that seeps into his lungs and chokes him. He's barely turned his head when the hit lands, a harsh snap of knuckles against his cheek, whipping his head to the side and knocking him off his balance, sending him stumbling into the hallway.

"You're late," Endeavor says, his deep voice sinking into every pore of Shouto's skin, sending a tremor down his spine almost as violent as the motion his neck just went through. Shouto's brain is scrambling. He's never reacted like this before, why now? He's piss and vinegar and backtalk, why now is he still sprawled against the wall, why isn't he moving? "God. That brat is ruining you. Come. It's time for your lessons. If we don't work hard you'll end up just as useless as your mother."

"Shut up," Shouto growls. "Mom wasn't useless and Izuku is a good friend!" He’s hoisted up and thrown over his father’s shoulder, the meat of it nailing him in the solar plexus, forcing the breath out of him. Shouto beats on his back until he’s thrown in the floor of their dojo, his father glaring down his nose at him.

"You don't need friends you insufferable insipid child. You have a purpose and All-might's bastard is holding you back," his father's flames are climbing, their color fading as their intensity increases. He's pissing him off. His heart is hammering in his chest, every neuron telling him to drop it and do what he does, survive and move on. Endure. Go to school and pretend someone else is your father, that this isn't your life.

"Fuck my purpose!" Shouto starts walking away, heading to his room to do what he needs to do when a searing grip closes around his wrist, melting polyester dripping onto the floor and sliding down his skin, leaving blistered flesh in its wake.

"You better hope your whoring around doesn't make me look like a fool tomorrow," his father growls in his face.

"I think you'll do fine without my help," Shouto spits out. His wrist is released, the air of the house
burning it as it hits the open wound. Shouto opens his mouth to say something else when his father's enormous hand enters his good field of vision, it's heat closing around his face, thick fingers curling around his skull and under his jaw, his thumb creaking his nose where he grips him. He squeezes, more brute strength than quirk behind it, dragging him up, his head sliding against the wood paneling.

"If you want to be that b-list sidekick's bitch and talk to me like that," his grip tightens. Shouto’s fingers scrabble for a hold on his father's forearm, his socked feet pushing against the iron wall of his old man's chest, trying to release the pressure on the artery on his neck that's making black dots take over his vision. His teeth are bared and he can feel his quirk licking beneath the surface in desperation, can practically hear the grind of the bones in his face. "Then maybe I don't need you at all. I'll pull your mother out of that hospital just as easily as I threw her in and I'll be sure to tell her she has you to thank when I replace your ungrateful, useless ass." His father sneers, saliva landing on Shouto's face as he spits out the words. Shouto feels the fight leave him, feels his snarl turn to disbelief, his feet slipping down the brick of muscle to hang limply above the floor.

"Dad stop it!" Fuyumi screams, clawing at his arm and pulling at the other arm fisted at his side. 'With just one hand he's going to kill me. He's going to kill me.'

He can see the smoke rising in front of his good eye, can smell the acrid stench of burning skin.

It takes a moment to connect that it's his skin, his face beneath his father's hand that's burning.

"I made sure no one talked about your brother. I'll make sure they don't talk about you either."

Finally his grip releases, dropping Shouto unceremoniously to the floor. He knocks Fuyumi off him none too gently, heavy footfalls echoing as he leaves. Turquoise eyes burn into Shouto when his father turns to look at him.

"Let those two embarrassments outperform you tomorrow if you want me to pay your mother a visit," his scathing glare turns to Fuyumi who has stepped directly between Endeavor and her little brother. "Don't get in my way again. Clean him up." For once, Fuyumi stands tall under their father's gaze. Her shoulders tremble but her stance is strong, reinforcing her position between him and Shouto.

As soon as his office door rattles its frame she sinks to the floor in front of him, falling to her knees gracelessly, her delicate hand coming up to clasp over her mouth, tears running around it like a river diverts around boulders, not to be stopped.

"Oh, Shouto. I'm so sorry."

Shouto feels... numb. There's no pain. Even his sister's voice feels like it's coming to him through gelatin. The colors of their home have never looked duller, even the crimson in his sister's hair seems diluted somehow.

He's not sure how long he sits there, or when Fuyumi decides to take the hand hanging limply by his knee, hesitating before pulling the other away from his newly marked face.

At least now he's symmetrically disfigured.

She drags him down the hall to their bath, the corner of the house farthest from where their father dwells.
“I’m sorry Fuyumi.” He thinks he says it, but the determination on her face doesn’t falter. Maybe he didn’t. Everything’s still so blurry.

The wood fades to tile far quicker than he had expected and he feels her cold hands push him to sit on the stool as she clicks the lock shut behind them.

It’s a formality really. The only other person in the house is their father.

Shouto knows from experience that lock won’t stop him. Fuyumi starts the water, a tepid temperature, the way Shouto likes. Anything too hot or too cold is just... uncomfortable on one side or the other. She tests it with her fingertips a couple times, flicking off the excess before kneeling in front of him.

Fuyumi studies his new burn, turning his face to the left and right, her lips pursed, analyzing it as if somehow, if she turns his head just the right way, it won’t be there anymore.

"I don't know that even Mrs. Okumura can help much," she says, using a warm cloth to wipe away the frost. "Does it... does it hurt?" She asks.

It does. Distantly. Everything seems distant. Her voice, his hands, the pain. He can see his palms but they're wavy.

"I should have turned him in a long time ago," she says, her voice carrying a bite he hasn't heard in a long time. She's always so soft spoken, so even tempered. She's been his constant, always there, never outwardly overwhelmed though he knows she had to be. She took on trying to fill momma’s role when she was thirteen? Fourteen? He's embarrassed he doesn't even know. He doesn't know much of anything about his siblings. He was kept so far away from them. He's closest with Fuyumi, but even with her his father kept their interactions minimal, measured. He trusts her because she's always been there. After harsh training, when he was floating, she was there. He didn't say much to her, could rarely find his words, but he knew she was there.

He knows her scent and her touch. But... that's almost all. He knows she teaches. He's not sure what grade. Or even what subject.

He knows she's kind. Or he thinks she is.

"You can't."

"Why not?! Look at what he did to you." Her voice is wobbly, quivering on every syllable.

"Fuyumi you can," he pleads. "They won't believe us. You know that. And All-might is gone. He's the closest thing they have to a replacement." He's getting frantic. His reasons aren't even compelling to his own ears, but all he knows it she can't do this.

"I don't care about everyone!"

If she tells... it'll change everything. "They'll take me away. He said they'll take me away and I won't see you again. Fuyumi please. They'll blame momma. They'll blame me. Tell me you won't!"

"Shouto, calm down," she urges. "No one is going to blame you."

"They will! They won't believe me, they'll think I'm lying. It's just going to get worse and he could hurt you or momma and I can't, Fuyumi. I'm suppose to protect you."

"Shouto, stop. It's not your job to protect me. I'm," she sniffs, tears streaking through the drying salt.
trails, "I'm your big sister. I'm supposed to protect you." She sobs, her head falling in his lap while she cries. His hand goes to her hair, gently soothing her head. "Some job of that I've done," she whines into his thighs.

"I don't blame you," he says softly.

"Ugh," she groans, looking up and wiping her eyes, giving herself a couple quick slaps to her own cheeks. "I'm supposed to be cleaning you up, not crying on you. I'm sorry. I just..."

"You've never seen him do that," Shouto finishes.

"Yeah. Is it... Is it always that bad?" She asks, her voice tentative. He wonders if he should lie. Would that help? Would she see through it?

"No." It is. "That's rare." It's not. "It's usually just some bruising," there have been times I couldn't walk after. "I'm fine." I'm not fine. I feel anything but fine.

"I guess that's a relief." Shouto hates this. He hates everything that's changed in the past few weeks. He hates that he feels disappointed that she believes him when he was the one who chose to lie. He hates that he feels angry she dropped the idea of telling on their father when he was the one begging her not to.

Why does he have to be so conflicted all the time? Why one second does it not bother him anymore than it used to, and others he's a straw away from blowing up the whole classroom or house or wherever is unlucky enough to have him in it at the time.

She starts cleaning the new burn, a cool washcloth wiping away any lingering dirt, soothing the throb on the other side of his face and easing down his neck, lingering at his other recent scarring.

"Do you really want to be a hero, Shouto?"

"You do still want to be a hero, don't you?"

"Yes." I don't know.

"Is it worth this?"

"Yes." I don't think it is anymore.

"Well, I've done all I can do I think. I'll leave you to the rest," she says, gesturing to the running water.

"Okay."

When she leaves, he finds himself walking towards the mirror, his feet dragging on the tile floor. His face looks... horrible.

There's static roaring in his ears, blocking out everything but that damn kettle.

He can see ice start spreading on the mirror, his feet dragging on the tile floor. His face looks... horrible.

As the frost closes in on his reflection, the darkness closes in on his vision, tunneling and muting everything.

For some reason, his mind wanders to Izuku.
He vaguely recalls the hot water.
Did he even take his clothes off?

---

Unknown: Hello

Izuku frowns, tapping out a quick response before Kacchan threatens to make him eat his dice if he doesn't pay attention to the game.

Izuku: Everything ok?

He figures it isn't. She never texts him just because. Never texted for mere pleasantries before. He debates preemptively texting Shouto.

Unknown: ... maybe.

No.

It's not.

Izuku: What happened?

"Deku, you okay?" Uraraka asks from the opposite side of the board.

"Actually, I don't feel good. Someone can take my spot," he says, watching the little white bubble with the dots, waiting for more of an explanation to come through. He can feel his classmates' eyes on him as he leaves but he doesn't even spare a passing glance, taking the stairs two at a time to his room.

Izuku: Is it Shouto?

Unknown: Yes.

It got out of hand today.

He's... not right.

Izuku: What do you mean?

Unknown: He's not talking anymore.

We talked right after it happened,
while I helped him clean up.

But he's not even looking at me anymore.

Izuku: yeah.

He's done that at school before.

Unknown: It's frightening.
I hate to ask this

But I don't want to think about dad finding him like this

I don't think he'd fight back

Izuku lets himself slide to the floor in front of the door. Why is he so useless? He has arguably the strongest quirk in the world and yet, he's still as powerless as when he was quirkless little Deku. He's done nothing to protect his best friend.

Izuku: Do you want him to come back to campus?

I can't leave without permission

But he can stay with me tonight.

Unknown: ...

He's been like this with you?

Izuku: I think so.

It didn't last long before

A couple of minutes

It's gotten worse lately

'And I think it's my fault,' he doesn't write. 'I think I stressed him out fighting with him and telling him he was being abused. I stuck my stupid nose where it didn't belong and made it worse.'

Unknown: He's not responding to me.

How do I even get him to go?

Izuku: Carefully touch him.

Something that won't make him think of your dad.

Maybe touch his hand.

NOT his shoulder.

You can just kind of guide him with that.

Sometimes touch will snap him out of it by itself.

Unknown: He's still... zoned out.

But he's walking with me.

We'll be there in ten.

Thank you.

Izuku lets his head fall back with a thunk, thumping it a couple more times for good measure. Then, someone on the other side kicks it, rattling it against his skull painfully, the reverberations vibrating
"Open up, nerd," Bakugo growls.

"Go away, Kacchan." Izuku wonders how he should get Shouto in. He doesn't think anyone would tattle if he brought him through the front door, but he also thinks maybe Shouto isn't in a state he'd want to be seen in.

The... fugue phases aren't new to anyone. Of course, most of the class just assumes he's being quiet, because Shouto usually is. Izuku is most privy to it, but both Iida and Uraraka are pretty good at noticing when he's not right and help Izuku ground him.

But if he's openly hurt....

*Unknown: Do you have a medical mask or something?*

Izuku thinks he might be sick.

"Open. The door. *Deku.*" Bakugo insists from the other side. Izuku is lucky he doesn't rip the door off its hinges with the force he opens it with, bearing teary eyes to his oldest friend, his jaw locked and fist clenched around his phone.

"What?!"

"Who killed your puppy?" Bakugo grunts, though his expression betrays the barest hint of genuine concern. The tears that had been threatening to fall cascade over the damn, dribbling down his cheeks at Bakugo's words.

He tells himself it wouldn't get that far.

A hero wouldn't do that.

Even Endeavor wouldn't go that far.

He doesn't realize until later, as Shouto's world implodes around him, how close to those fears Endeavor's threats had come.

"It's icyhot isn't it." Izuku doesn't verbally respond, angrily wiping at his tears and throwing his phone somewhat aggressively in the direction of his bed. "What'd the fucker do now?"

"It isn't his fault," Izuku snaps, though its thick and warbly from the crying.

"Alright. What did you do then?" Bakugo is still scowling, or at least Izuku thinks he is. It's hard to tell distinct features through the haze clouding his eyes. "Or didn't do." When Izuku does nothing but sniffle Bakugo forces out an exhale. "Don't make me go get four eyes."

"I didn't do anything." Izuku mutters, the syllables clogging his throat and tying themselves in knots on the way out. If Izuku weren't partially blinded by his tears, he'd notice the darkness that clouds Bakugo's red eyes, the fierce set to his mouth that hadn't been present earlier in their conversation.

"What'd his dad do then?" Izuku's head snaps up almost comically, wide shining green eyes just staring, mouth parted slightly.

"He told you?" The words are a whisper, barely spoken. Bakugo waits for so long to reply that Izuku isn't sure he actually *did* speak.
"Not willingly. I heard you two last year. And he said some shit at our stupid dumb ass extra lessons. That, and I'm not fucking dumb. I don't know how the teachers haven't caught on yet."

"I'm not sure they don't know. Aizawa and All-might have both pulled him aside a couple time but he won't tell them."

"So what happened?" Izuku shakes his head. The waterworks that had subsided in his shock start swimming back, Fuyumi's words flitting behind his eyelids every time he blinks.

"I don't know. But I think it's bad. His sister is bringing him here."

"Why?"

"He's... not doing well and she doesn't know what to do with him."

"And we will? I'm not his keeper."

"Are you here to help or bitch, Kacchan?"

"I'm being honest. What are you, or me, or anyone supposed to be able to do?"

"I help him with this a lot," Izuku mumbles. "Or at least, I think so. Based on what she said he's doing."

"And if he hurts you? You saw that tantrum he threw? I thought you were supposed to be smart. You're going to sneak him in here and he could lash out at you, you dumbass."

"So what if he does?! You did it for nine years and that was just stupid!"

"You're being stupid."

"You're being unhelpful." Across the room, his phone goes off. "Either help me get him in here, or fucking leave. I'm not arguing with you anymore. I don't care if this is a bad idea. I don't care if he hurts me. I should have done something to keep him from going back there!" At some point, Izuku started yelling. His chest is heaving as if he's done some great exertion, which he hasn't, and he can feel his pulse thrumming in his ears.

"Fine you little fucker. Let's go." Izuku looks at the text, types a quick response and then looks at Bakugo, his fingers playing with the smooth edges of his cell absently. "Spit it out before I push you out the window to meet him."

"Do you still have the face mask Recovery girl gave you when you had the flu?"

~

In the end, Bakugo creates a distraction, a very loud very flashy distraction, while Izuku smuggles Shouto up the stairs. Fuyumi had been barely holding back tears when she let go of her brother's hand, had let them fall when Izuku had delicately looped the mask around Shouto's ears, mumbling soft words the whole time.

She'd broken down in sobs on the bench mere yards away when the door clicked behind her border catatonic brother and his friend, tendrils of ice creeping down the legs and crawling up the innocent life beneath her, trapping the weeds and grass and dirt in it's claws. Eventually, even her tears fell to the ground with a clink, frozen to solid ice as they bounced around the concrete edging the ice seat she'd claimed, some remaining and other's rolling into the grass to join the ever spreading patch of
frost.

In that moment, more than any other time abstract thoughts had flown through her head in the wake of their father's brutality, resolve steels itself, forms itself more solid than the ice beneath her or the concrete in front.

This ends now.

"You're not a student here," a very tired, almost bored voice says, black shoes entering her field of vision. When she looks up, craning her neck further than she usually would need to to see beyond the brim of the hat she'd thrown on, her own hair tickling her nearly numb cheeks, threads of crimson inter-spaced between them, she sees apathy fade to something fiercer. She sees recognition light up, followed by something darker.

"You're Shouta Aizawa," she says, her voice hoarse and raspy from her sobs and the cold. She can see her own breath even on a warm night like this. She had met him briefly at what should have been a parent teacher conference, an event Endeavor had deigned himself above attending the first semester. He'd gone to the last one and she'd heard it was as anyone would expect of him. Anyone in their family anyway. "We need to talk."

~

Izuku can barely contain One for all as they climb the stairs. Can barely contain the quiver in his legs, the tremble itching in his fingers. His are laced in Shouto's icy ones, though his own grasp is limp, Izuku the only participant in this affair. Shouto hasn't taken his eyes off the floor at all. He'd had them fixed there when Izuku had pulled open the door to the dorms, shutting it briskly to contain the volume of Bakugo's brilliant diversion. They've barely budged since. The eyes usually fixed on him with intensity, be it fondness or confusion or competition, always so bright and emotive, were dull in the evening light. Wouldn't even look at him as he'd fixed the mask gently on his face.

He'd almost been glad for the mask. The dark ink stain on his left cheek had been painful enough to look at. The blistering wound on his right cheek, extending over the bridge of his nose and down his neck, a painful reflection of a handprint much larger than an average sized person, almost glowing in the amber lights of the UA heights entrance.

Izuku had to physically swallow down bile when he saw what some who claimed to be a hero and is a father did to his own son. Had to force himself not to lose it, not to cry, not to scream, not to blitz across town and end that poor excuse for a human being.

It's scary how completely absent Shouto is. He pulls him into his room, shuts the door and pushes him gently to sit down on the bed all without any form of refusal. Thinks about how easily he could be hurt or taken advantage of in this state. Wonders how many times he was. How many times he retreated into himself and his father kept going.

How many times he was hurt for the sake of being a better hero.

It's shit like this that held you back from ever truly surpassing All-might, Izuku thinks angrily. It's why even now, with All-might retired and crime at a near record low he still can't seem to garner positive marks. All-might would skin Endeavor if he knew what was happening, if he was aware of what Endeavor did in his endless challenge to rise above the symbol of peace.

Izuku has never hated in his life. He never hated his father for being absent. He never hated fate for making him quirkless. He never hated Bakugo for picking on him as a child. But it's reaffirmed now. He hates Endeavor. He hates him so much it makes him want to cry, which is a reason he hasn't had
in the past despite how often he does.

"Shouto," Izuku says softly. He doesn't even get a blink in return. No acknowledgment of any kind.

Bakugo's parting words echo in his mind. *If I hear anything suspicious, I'll tell fucking four eyes."

Izuku isn't sure when exactly he'd turned from someone Bakugo *picked* on to someone he was hell bent on *protecting*, but he kind of appreciates the sentiment either way, misplaced or otherwise. Perhaps it's just one of Bakugo's ways of wanting to be the new number one, by looking out for *everyone*.

They really should figure out a way to share that burden... No one can last long before burning out with that kind of weight on their shoulders. Maybe sharing it would prevent more cases like Shouto's. Prevent the envy and contempt from forming if there were multiple pillars supporting the weight of society rather than a single figure constantly being chipped away at under the surface. Maybe they would seem more daunting to villains who seek to usurp them. Maybe there wouldn't be those within their hero society who objurgate a single figure if there was more opportunity to be on that level. Maybe one day they can edify the new generation with the shortcomings of the past.

Izuku looks at the teenager in front of him. At his vacant expression. At the wounds he can see. Thinks of the ones he can't.

He doesn't want to *ever* have this happen to someone else.

They need a safety net. Something to catch kids that fall through the cracks. Something to help those few unlucky enough to be born without quirks. Something to reassure those who aren't born with obviously heroic quirks.

Izuku knows these items will be on his agenda when he claims his spot as fully fledged Symbol of peace. Or several heroes do.

He just wants to save as many people as he can. in as many ways as he can.

And he'll start with his best friend.

"Shouto," he tries again, his voice gentle. He tucks his finger under the loop of the mask, pulling it off his ear, his thumb brushing the old scar on his left cheek. "It's okay. I'm here and you're safe."

Without really thinking about it, Izuku's fingers gravitate to the new mark on his friend's face, as if maybe if he touches it the illusion will break and he'll have Shouto as he's always known him sitting in front of him. He'll have the one scar but he'll be *Shouto*. He won't be this listless, bruised and *burned* teenager that's so much farther gone than Izuku thinks he's ever seen him.

Before his hand makes contact, the other boy's fingers wrap around his sleeve with surprising gentleness. Izuku looks at Shouto's eyes; they're still downcast, but also no longer flat. They're also rapidly filling with tears, his shoulders trembling and his blinking quickening, trying desperately to hold them back.

**NEXT TIME:**

Dabi arrives, unveiling a secret and a threat that shakes the hero world.

Aizawa uses the confusion to reclaim Shouto to UA's dorm system, knowing far too well Dabi's claims aren't at all unfounded.
Izuku tries to play damage control.

Shouto tries to cope with how quickly the rug was swept out from under him.

Chapter End Notes

Had to update really fast. This was written completely on my phone so forgive any mistakes.
Again, hitting with the overdramatic angst. Festival is next chap I promise!
Merry christmas if I’m not back on here by then,
Jasey
Chapter Summary

The sports festival starts off with a bang and a blast before its unexpected interruption. Hero society faces its pink elephant in the corner and begins to crumble under the fallout.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku and Shouto don't go to breakfast. Shouto is finally responding, but still in no shape to brace their boisterous friends yet. He's not even technically speaking yet.

Izuku misses his voice more than he thought he would.

It had been a long night. Shouto hadn't slept for shit. Which means Izuku hadn't slept for shit. He swears it was every hour he woke up either near to losing a toe to frost bite or to Shouto panting into the sheets and crying.

He is very tired.

It is not a good day to be very tired.

He'd told himself over and over again, this year he was going to make good on All-might's request the first year.

He was going to announce himself. He was going to officially begin his journey as the next symbol of peace.

He was going to actually write his address for the opening ceremonies.

He hadn't made it that far.

And now, walking with Shouto, turning around every couple of paces to see that his friend has suddenly just stopped on the sidewalk and urging him back along, he thinks he's going to have to wing it.

He tugs on Shouto's fingers, lacing their hands together to keep the other from falling behind.

He tunes out the whispers when they arrive at their homeroom class to check in before the festival begins.

All he knows is at least they aren't talking about Shouto's face.

Homeroom is brief. Aizawa gives them his version of good luck and do your best, as well as a threat for everyone to be on good behavior, with a pointed look at Bakugo.

"Todoroki, Midoriya. A moment," Aizawa says after class. Izuku doesn't bother hiding the flinch.

He feels like he's spent more time in trouble than out of it since he got to UA. Izuku stands, pausing
in front of Shouto's desk urging him on. He's responding and sort of doing things on his own, but he's very... delayed without explicit direction.

When Shouto stands, Izuku tries to discretely tug at his fingers, pulling him forward.

"Midoriya wait outside. I'll get to you next," Aizawa says, scrutinizing Shouto, who is not even looking at him.

Izuku does, albeit reluctantly.

He's not sure Shouto is going to say anything at all right now.

Izuku desperately wants to listen in, to try and discern what they're talking about. What Aizawa could possibly want to talk to Izuku about. The only thing he's really done wrong recently is... well... hide that his friend is being horribly abused... Sneak him into the dorms after hours... Lie to his teacher's face...

Okay. He's done a few things wrong lately.

He doesn't end up getting to deliberate eavesdropping. The door is pulled closed before he gets the chance to even try.

Their meeting doesn't last long. Shouto comes out, looking as forlorn as before.

"Midoriya. Now," Aizawa says. 'Yeah, I'm in trouble.' Izuku thinks to himself.

Aizawa seats himself behind his desk, elbows propped up on it.

"Sit." He commands.

Izuku does.

"I'm going to ask you this one time." Izuku swallows. "What is going on?" Izuku pauses. That is... so very vague. Probably intentionally. Trying to get Izuku to spill everything he could have possibly done wrong recently rather than fish for a specific response.

"What did Shouto tell you?" Izuku asks instead.

It's the wrong answer.

Izuku isn't sure there was a right one though.

Aizawa's eyes are onyx, hard and unyielding.

"He didn't say anything. Not one word. And I think you know more than you're letting on."

He does. Oh he does. He would do anything to get this damn wright off his chest. To finally be able to feel like he's doing something for his friend instead of just sitting back and letting horrible things happen to him.

He has an option. Something very obviously tipped their teacher off. Something that maybe Izuku could pawn off on, could allow to take the fall. Could maybe get away with telling without necessarily being the obvious culprit.

And yet...
And yet his tongue is still a rock in his mouth, his throat constricting around the words bubbling up around it.

An iron damn strongholding his will.

"If you know something, and you are deliberately withholding it or worse, lying to me about it, you'll find yourself very quickly expelled from this school."

Izuku's heart drops.

Expelled.

He could be kicked out of school for keeping this secret. The secret his friend entrusted to him.

A secret that if he told, could break what they have.

"I'm sorry, Aizawa. I don't know what you're talking about," he says. Even if they won't see each other anymore, even if this is the wrong choice, it's what Izuku sticks with. Shouto has his reasons for hiding what's happening. It's not Izuku's place to make that decision for him. He's not the one that has to live with the consequences. He shouldn't be the one that sends them crashing down around his feet.

"I'll see you in class tomorrow then. Git," he says and Izuku does his best not to run from the room.

He's unsurprised to see Shouto standing outside, looking out the window, his hands in his pockets.

It's an everpresent position to see him in, but all Izuku can focus on is the dark mask covering most of his friend's face. The burn that reaches his earlobe and pokes out from beneath wild platinum hair.

Aizawa's words feel like they are bouncing around his skull.

How many injuries could he have prevented if he had just told someone?

How angry would Shouto even have been?

Is he a bad person? Is he bad for choosing to keep his friend over prioritizing his safety?

Yes. Yes he is, his inner voice supplies.

The threat of expulsion doesn't actually sound so bad anymore.

It's less than he deserves for sure.

"Did you tell him?" Shouto's voice is raspy and low, thick with disuse and overhanging fear.

"No. I didn't," Izuku says quietly. I wish I had. I wish I had a long time ago. Before he had a chance to hurt you again.

"Thank you." Izuku doesn't say you're welcome.

'You're welcome for holding my tongue long enough for him to scar you further. For letting him get away with this shit for even longer. For putting you in danger because I don't want to lose you. For being a shitty hero and a worse friend.'

Shouto's brow furrows.
"What's wrong?"

Izuku has to fight not to yell. Not to let out everything that's fucked up about this situation on an exhale.

Your dad is a piece of shit.

I'm a piece of shit.

I'm angry and sad and guilty and I hate it.

I hate that you subject yourself to this.

I hate that I kind of blame you.

Izuku doesn't say any of those.

"It just sucks." Shouto pauses before stepping away, sneakers squeaking on their worn soles. "Come on. You have a festival to win, don't you?" He asks.

Izuku can see the outlines of a smile in the creases of the mask, but the darkness in his eyes belittles it.

He's trying to act normal.

Izuku hates that this really is his normal.

Get beaten, go to school bruised, and act like nothing happened. Act like the number one hero isn't more deserving of a villain's title than the one he boasts about so often.

"You better make me earn it," Izuku tries. His face feels wrong. It feels wrong to be laughing after what happened not even twelve hours ago. "No half assing it this year."

"No promises."

--

The start of the sports festival is explosive in both figurative and literal ways. Literal ways mostly accounted for by Bakugo's liberal use of his quirk and the roar of the applause when class A makes their appearance. Between the display their class had made the first year at the festival and the publicity they'd gotten during the villain attacks and more recently with their provisional work, the hype is high.

It's more than enough to get Izuku's heart pounding.

To make him kind of feel the need to pinch himself and make sure this isn't all just one big, elaborate, cruel dream.

Shouto flanks his left side, Uraraka and Iida on his right.

Izuku and Shouto had been the last ones changed.

Izuku had rifled through his locker looking for bandages or a long sleeved shirt that could cover the nasty bruise on Shouto's arm.

Izuku doesn't know how Shouto does it. He's been hiding and keeping secrets for ten, eleven years.
Izuku has been doing it eleven months and he's tired already. Exhausted. Done.

Izuku grasps the tiny scrap of paper in his hand.

Not a speech.

He wishes it were a speech. He's bad enough at public speaking when he does have an outline. He doesn't have a clue what he's going to say when he gets up there.

"And our second year representative, Izuku Midoriya! Come on up and say a few words, yo!"

Izuku winces.

Now or never.

He unfolds the small piece of paper, looking at it, the messy, loopy script.

Good luck.

He looks to Shouto, getting a small nod in response. Then he feels large hands on his shoulders, Iida's authoritative voice urging him forward.

When he gets up to the small podium he smooths out the note on its surface, letting it look up at him as he takes a deep breath.

He makes eye contact with Shouto across the sea of heads, and then looks out to the mass of indiscernible faces. The people he's supposed to work with. The people he's supposed to protect.

He looks back at Shouto, then at his handwriting scrawled on the scrap of paper.

"I'll try and keep this brief, though not as brief as last year's," he starts, a few chuckles traveling through the crowd, along with a very familiar, indignant scoff. "We are all inching closer to becoming heroes. Some of us you already know, either from last year or from our streamlined progress in our work-studies. Some of us you don't know. But it's all of us that will be the future of heroics.

"All the business class that will help keep agencies running. All the support class that design costumes and specialize gear to reduce the toll on the fighters. All of us that are going to work underground," he happens to spot Shinso's wild hair and tired eyes, happens to catch them widen ever so slightly.

"All of us that will prioritize rescue over flashy villain fights. We'll be the ones you will rely on in the future. So let me say this now," his hands are shaking, legs threatening to give out beneath him. He could back out. He doesn't have to do this now. "As your next symbol of peace, we are here. Get ready for us."

At first, he thinks the noise is just the blood rushing through his ears.

He stumbles off the stage and into the arms of his friends, all in various expressions of support. Kirishima is whooping behind him with Kaminari, Tsuyu and Momo clapping delicately. Kacchan looks grumpy, as usual, and Iida looks close to tears.

And Shouto... someone he's failed to protect, someone the current system has failed, actually looks happy.

"You did good, Izuku," he says quietly, squeezing his shoulder tightly. Izuku tries to say thanks, but
between the dry mouth and the nerves he really only ends up squeaking, which just makes everyone laugh, their mirth mingling with the fading applause.

"Let's begin!"

--

They are two trials down. Izuku is brimming with adrenaline, his veins pumping endorphins. This never should have been possible for him, but here he is. He's neck in neck in the top three leaders for the sports festival. Present Mic's voice is echoing around the arena, chatting about the prior events and the students, ribbing with Aizawa, though that's more one-sided than anything, and Toshinori putting in his two cents every now and then.

He's surrounded by friends, Uraraka rambling happily by his side, giving herself a pep talk to make it farther than she had last year. It's so much different than he thought it would be. It's so wonderful. The warm post summer breeze is blowing through his wild hair and tickling his nose, the roar of the audience a pleasant buzz in the background. The stadium is practically vibrating with excitement.

Present Mic starts introducing the current event.

"And we're back in the studio with those rematches we've been itching to see since we saw these wild kids in the sports festival last year. Our top competitors this year are no surprise given their efforts in their first year. Leading the ranks are these absurdly strong students! All might's newly named successor, Izuku Midoriya! It's no wonder either, their quirks are so similar they could practically be related!"

"Stop it."

"Not far behind the boy who used to break his bones for his quirk, the son of the current number one hero, Shouto Todoroki! And the rising hero we couldn't possibly forget after his behavior at last years awards ceremony, the explosive Katsuki Bakugo!" Izuku is sure Bakugo is seething at being the last to be introduced, though now his irritations are much quieter, his support more freely given.

"All three are also leading the public with their work utilizing their provisional licenses."

"Thanks, Eraserhead! Now, the bracket! Our first match of the first round, our early front-runner Shouto Todoroki." Izuku looks to the screen where his enemy-turned-best-friend is climbing the arena stairs.

"Good luck Shouto!" He yells, and he's sure there's no way Shouto could have possibly heard his individual shout of encouragement, but his heart flutters at the small upward twitch of his lips that follows.

"Deku and Todo sitting in a tree-" Uraraka sings before Izuku turns on her, hand clasping firmly over her mouth.

"Uraraka!" He whines.

"Of course you and icy-hot would have a thing," Bakugo grumbles. "I'm going to put you and your boyfriend in the ground, Deku."

"Yeah, okay," Izuku says. Bakugo’s threats don't contain half the heat that they used to; more violently phrased healthy competitiveness than anything. It's a far cry from the way their relationship had been before UA. A smile plays at his lips thinking about how far Kacchan has come. He completely misses the introduction of the other competitor, only pulled back to attention by Present
Mic shouting.

"Whoa, what the hell is that?!"

Izuku catches a glimpse of black mist before the arena erupts into blue flame. He hears the echo of glass shattering as Eraserhead leaps from the observation deck and down into the arena, his capture weapon readied in his clenched fists. The flame dies down; revealing the two figures standing alone in the ring Cementoss had finished mere minutes ago. Midnight, once again acting as the ref for their class given the explosive power of their students and lack of demonstrated restraint, has her costume pulled tight in her grasp, ready to tear it at a moment’s notice. It’s a little too late though. A familiar figure stands behind Shouto, twisting the student's right arm behind his back with one hand, the other poised at the boy’s throat with a wicked blade.

The once warm breeze feels sweltering, and the buzz of the audience leaves a ringing in his ears in its absence.

"Why are you here?" Aizawa growls, his voice echoing around the stadium, his gaze unblinking as he stares down the intruder.

Dabi looks to the screen broadcasting the events across the globe, a small smirk on his patchwork face.

“I’m here for my little brother.” He says calmly.

Then he utters three words that will change the way people view the hero society for many years.

“I’m Touya Todoroki.”

Shouto’s expression goes from one of contempt and anger to a deathly white, his eyes wide like he’s seen a ghost. His voice is barely a whisper as he repeats the name Dabi had uttered. The stricken expression on his face only seems to fuel Dabi, his staples pulling tight as he grins broadly.

"I’m hurt. Don’t tell me you forgot me already, little Shouto?"

There’s silence around the arena, baited breath as they all wait, shocked into silence.

"You all know Endeavor, the number one hero. If you can call him that!” Dabi, Touya, sneers. "You want to tell them about our dear old dad, Shouto?"

Shouto's face is ashen, and his hand trembles where it tries to pry the marred one holding the knife against his neck away. "No? You don’t want to talk about how dad let me disfigure myself, so desperate for an inkling of his attention? You don't want to talk about him beating our mother, Shouto?"

Izuku watches in horror.

At some point he got to his feet, grasping at the rails separating him from his friend. Shouto's eyes are shining.

"Do you want to talk about your scar?"

“If you know what’s good for you you’ll let him go,” Aizawa says, his voice calm. Pro heroes from the audience are all moving to surround the stage, none making any moves to step in, too afraid of inciting the villain to hurt his captive.
Dabi seems to notice Shouto’s mask then.

“Ooh, he really dug a grave for himself. I knew having Toga slip him something would turn out bad for you, Hey, at least he didn’t kill you right?! I can’t believe he did this though. Why don’t we show everybody,” Dabi croons, his expression one straight out of a horror movie, alight with glee, blood oozing around some of his metal works with the way he pulls at them in his manic fervor.

“Don’t,” Shouto mouths, the words not fully able to squeeze out of his ever-tightening throat.

“Please,” comes out in a desperate squeak.

“Come now. You didn’t make it ten years under him with this pathetic side. Show them!” He says, taking the knife away from Shouto’s neck. “I’ll still snap his neck so don’t get any funny ideas,” Dabi threatens, all traces of amusement wiped clean as he eyes the heroes lining the arena.

“Deku!” Uraraka cries when Izuku leaps over the rail, rebounding off the ground at the last minute with a small smash to keep from hurting himself, shattering a small amount of concrete when he does.

“Baby heroes should stay back too. I’m supposed to retrieve him and not kill him but I’m willing to do both. Don’t try me,” crazed eyes a frighteningly familiar shade of teal glare at him. “I’ll kill you too. That would make Shigaraki very happy. Eh. Maybe I’ll just maim you instead. Can’t get him too giddy.”

“Speak your intentions and release my student,” All-might booms, using his precious seconds of his heightened form to confront Dabi.

“Brave of you to face me without your powers. You truly are worthy of Stain’s approval. And I already said why I’m here. I’m taking my brother. Come on, Shouto. You wanna come don’t you? Why stay with these losers? They never helped you anyway!”

“Shut up.” Shouto seems to be slowly shaking off the shock, his eyes narrowing on the blade dangling in Dabi’s fingers.

“It’s gonna be okay, Shouto! We won’t let him hurt you!” Izuku yells.

“Hey scar face!” Bakugo yells, landing heavily beside Izuku. “You really want to fuck with all of us? Let icy hot go.”

“You really want to stay with these vulgar children? With the heroes who turned a blind eye to dad for all those years? You really think no one knew? You don’t think someone heard mom screaming all the time? They don’t care about you!”

“And you do?” Izuku spits. “You’ve threatened to kill him twice.”

“Whatever. Look into it if you don’t believe me. Or just look at this,” Dabi cuts into Shouto’s gym uniform, leaving the blade there like an impromptu sheathe and threads his fingers through the loop of the mask on Shouto’s right side.

Dabi must know enough about Aizawa’s quirk by now, because he grins wickedly and sparks light his fingers, igniting the mask and letting it fall limply to the side, baring Shouto’s new wound to the world.

“Pissed him off didya?” Dabi mocks, tracing the harsh lines of the burn with his fingers. “Which was worse? When he did this, or when mom burned your eye? Can you see out of it yet?” He teases, releasing Shouto’s arm and smacking him in the side of the head, making him stumble a step before
Dabi snatches the knife and reclaims his firm hold.

“Man I’d love to fight you. See just how daddy’s special boy grew up. You were such a crybaby when you were little. But I’m running out of time.” Dabi draws a vial out of his pocket.

“Ready?” Katsuki whispers from beside Izuku. Izuku doesn’t respond. Fixated on Shouto. On the knife poised to kill him.

“Test this,” Dabi says, whipping the knife around and slicing through his wrist, letting the blood trickle down his arm and fall into the tube with a plink. “Ask my useless sister. See who’s telling the truth. You ready Shouto?” Dabi asks as mist starts to filter back into the arena, a brief flash of blue and an exploding crack as Bakugo leaps across the field.

The next moments pass so quickly and yet drag on, a slow motion nightmare right in front of Izuku’s eyes.

Dabi’s eyes glint, knife poised to throw when he spots Bakugo. Izuku watches it soar on a trajectory towards his friend. Watches as Dabi sinks into the mist, dragging Shouto with him.

He watches Aizawa hurl his capture weapon, watches it loop around Shouto’s free hand.

Sees out of the corner of his eye the knife be snatched away by tape.

“Midoriya!” Aizawa yells, and Izuku leaps. Aizawa pulls, his other hand throwing shuriken into the disappearing villain.

Izuku feels Shouto's body collide with his own, clutches him against his chest and turns, hiding him away from the gate.

If he takes Shouto he’s taking me with him.

There’s a sharp cry and a blast, a rush of water.

And it’s over.

Aizawa and Bakugo stand near the middle of the ring, a spot of blood marking the space between them.

A net of gooey pink wound around their feet, suspending the vial of blood above the ground.

The arena is silent, the screens showing the mix of horror mirrored on all the spectators.

“Someone stop the damn stream,” a small voice, usually so mild mannered but this time biting with venom resounds in the silence.

Shouto trembles in Izuku’s arms.

Izuku clutches him tight. Can feel eyes on them. Sees their images on the big screen, Shouto held fast to Izuku’s broad chest, his legs limp, Izuku’s arms wound around him protectively, then the screen goes dark.

And every screen around Japan lights up with the news of what’s happened.

Next time:
“Get him out of the open. Eraserhead you follow. Lockdown the campus.”

“Don’t fucking touch me!”

“Why are we even looking into this? He’s a known murderer and a psychopath!”

“He’s going to kill me. He’s actually going to kill me,” frantic hands tear through already mussed hair. “He said if I messed up again this year he’d start over. He’s gonna hurt momma and it’s my fault,” words tumble out like a waterfall, panic enveloping the room.

“Give me one reason not to boot your ass out of this school right now. You lied, you put a classmate in danger. How am I supposed to trust your judgment? Tell me.”

“He has no right to do that! He left us. He can’t come back now and do this. It’s not fair!” The air whooshes out of his chest, his anger deflating like a popped balloon. “I didn’t want this,” he whimpers.

“He’s not going home. I don’t care if there’s no official bullshit he stays here.”

“Endeavor... our father... he hurts Shouto... I can’t take it anymore... he’s not right... I’m afraid for him... of him... it’s my fault...”

“Ooh that felt good. They’re going to see real soon just what kind of man their ‘hero’ is. He’s finally going to pay for ignoring all of us.

But this is only the beginning.

Better keep an eye on the monsters under your bed little Shouto. They’re going to chew you up.”

Chapter End Notes

Notes:
Again, I wrote this entirely on my phone so apologies for any typos.
My little one and I are both sick so this week has superbly sucked ass.
For all the hype I feel like this chapter had leading up to it, I feel like it was super underwhelming so... yeah.
Hope it was kind of okay. (Also, if you enjoy fantasy AUs I will have a new fic starting soon that’s a fantasy dragon slayer kind of thing with prince Shouto, slayer Izuku, bandit boyfriends Katsuki and Kirishima, Knight Iida and Momo and sorceress/witch Ochako and Tsuyu along with other stuff. Loosely inspired by the old video game Dragons dogma.)
I also have a time stamp for Stella (which I recently completed the main storyline for) in progress. A three chapter bit with a little angst and little fluff.
And a very rough beginning to a frozen AU.
Find me on Twitter @all-time-low3st
Happy new year!
Jasey
"Get him out of the open, now," Nedzu says, his voice remarkably authoritative for how small and squeaky he usually is. Looking more a predator ready to tear a throat out and less the loveable critter you might see on a kids’ TV program. "Eraserhead, take the children. Mic, initiate lockdown. No one leaves until they've been searched." Then, almost as an aside, he says to Cementoss. "I need a show of force prepared at the front gates."

--

"You're not a student."

"We need to talk."

That was how Shota found himself on a park bench in the middle of the night, sitting next to the sister of one of his most concerning students.

"I don't even know where to start," Fuyumi says, her voice shaking, her breath white in the night air.

"How about you start with why you're on my campus?" She wraps her arms around herself as if somehow the words made her colder.

She may be older than Todoroki, but she doesn't really exude that. Right now she looks more like a scared child than a grown woman.

"He hurt Shouto." He knows. There’s a part of him that’s been thinking it, been banging at the closet door in his mind, an idea begging to be set free; she opens the door.

"Who is he?"

"Our father," she says, barely above a whisper, hardly audible over the poorly timed breeze that threatens to steal the words away on its whim.

Shota feels his stomach sink.

He was right. He often finds himself somewhat prescient.

He's never wanted to be more wrong. Never wished all the equivocation actually lead to nothing.

"He's done it before, but this time was worse. He wasn't... he wasn't himself." She pauses. "Neither of them were. He was so angry. He was yelling about mom and Shouto yelled back and he burned
him..." her breath hitched on another sob.

"How long?" He asks.

"How long..." She says, looking up to the inky expanse of the sky, searching for the answers in the sky. “Too long. I always stayed... Never moved out like Natsuo did. I told myself it was so I could protect him but I never did. Not really. I was too afraid. And it makes me sick. It's my fault... It's my fault he's like this."

"Like what?" She shakes her head viciously.

"Different. He's setting his bedroom on fire, he's cursing and screaming and yelling. He breaks mirrors and hits the walls. I'm scared for him. But I'm also kind of scared of him."

"Where is he now?" Shota has a sneaking suspicion.

"With Izuku." There it is.

"Does he know?" She nods slowly. ‘Of course’ he thinks.

"For some reason, Shouto trusts him. He accidentally told an elementary school teacher once, before dad pulled him out of school. They called dad, but all they did was laugh it off. That night was horrible. Touya yelled, mom screamed, and all I could hear was Shouto crying and asking him to just stop."

Shota stops pressing.

"Come here," he says, standing and walking down the sidewalk. It takes her a second, but eventually, she does scramble up on numbed legs and follows, stumbling slightly.

"Where are we going?"

"Todoroki is here, you said?" She nods, before mumbling a yes when she realizes his back is to her. "Then there's no reason to go back there. You'll stay in a temporary faculty suite. I'll meet with the principal tomorrow and figure out where to go next."

Things fall apart before they plan to meet.

--

Now he's ushering three kids into a locked faculty staircase, herding them down into a bunker below the arena.

When the staircase ends it opens up into a small concrete walled sitting area, small screens covering the far side, displaying various angles of the campus.

It's their effective panic room.

This is the first time since Shota started at this school that it's been used.

Midoriya leads Todoroki over to a seat and guides him to sit down, looking back at his teacher nervously ever so often.

When Todoroki sits, he buries his head in his hands, dropping it between his knees. The little more he had talked with Todoroki’s sister had been… well, frightening. She'd told him one of the worst parts.
“Every time he let me help Shouto, for some reason, I’d ask what happened. As if there were any way to spin the situation into something normal. Every time, my heart would break a little when he’d tell me it was his own fault. Except for this last time. He didn't say anything at all. It was like he didn't even see me.”

"Shouto," Midoriya says, kneeling in front of him.

"Midoriya," Shota barks, making Midoriya flinch back and look up at him, not frightened per say, but definitely cautious, regarding him with trepidation. “Give me one reason not to boot your ass out of this school right now. You lied, you put a classmate in danger. How am I supposed to trust your judgment? Tell me.”

"I know," Midoriya sighs, standing slowly. He walks up to Shota and ducks his head in a bow. "I lied to you. I'm sorry, but I'm also not. I'll take my expulsion."

"What the fuck are you two talking about, Deku?" Bakugo barks, his volume making Todoroki curl in on himself as the blonde stomps across the room and shoves Midoriya's shoulder, sending him stumbling. "Why is he getting expelled?" He demands, staring down their teacher, a challenge in his eyes, daring Shota to say it's actually happening.

"Because he knew about this!" Shota has never raised his voice like this at a student before, but he is angry and he is scared. He turns to Midoriya. "You knew and you told no one. I specifically asked you and you told me you didn't know what I was talking about. I am just," he pauses, takes a deep breath. "I'm disappointed in you. You've had an issue with following rules in the past but I could always see where you were coming from. But this, this just demonstrates you can't make critical decisions."

"I knew," Bakugo says suddenly. Shota groans loudly. "I've known since last year. If you're expelling him you'll have to send me packin' too."

"What is wrong with you two?" Shota snaps. "I get Todoroki not saying anything. He's the one who could get hurt but you two? How can you sit around with a classmate actively being hurt and in danger and do nothing?"

"I told them not to," Todoroki says quietly.

"In less than two years you two will be qualified to become pro heroes. You will have to make these calls and you made the wrong one and neither of you seems to grasp that it's wrong," Shota cracks his neck. He hates to do this. These are two of the strongest, most promising students he's had in a long time.

But if he can’t trust them to make the right choices... he can’t graduate them.

There’s no point in drawing this out.

“I won’t be able to pass either of you at this point. You can contest my decision to Nedzu but he’s never gone against my calls.”

Midoriya is glassy-eyed but says nothing. Bakugo is practically steaming.

“You can’t be serious,” Bakugo hisses out. Midoriya looks to him, trying to urge him with a look to be quiet, but he doesn’t. He opens his mouth to speak again but is cut off.

“It’s not their fault,” Todoroki tries again, slightly more forcefully this time.
“They made this choice.” He knows he should tone it down. That Todoroki has had enough, that it’s been rough on all three of them and technically this could wait but...

But these are his kids. His to protect. His to raise into heroes. He feels like he’s fucked up on both accounts.

“They didn’t! I made them,” he pleads.

“Did you threaten them?”

“No, but-

“Then they made their choice.”

“Aizawa, stop,” Todoroki says, his tone wavering. “I’ll drop out. I’ll tell them all it isn’t true. You can’t expel them for keeping secrets that aren’t real. They didn’t tell anyone because they thought I was lying. They didn’t believe me.”

Bakugo turns his scathing glare on Todoroki, shoulders squared up, muscle rolling underneath his unzipped gym top.

“Grow a pair icy hot. Quit fucking lying,” he barks, then his crimson eyes bore into Shota: no hesitation, no regret. Just fierceness. “We knew. We believed him. I didn’t say anything because the nerd didn’t. I don’t know you, I don’t know your dad, this wasn’t my business.”

“Work with me,” Todoroki pleads.

“No,” Midoriya says firmly, crossing his arms. “I won’t lie. I knew and I believed you. I didn’t say anything and I hated it. I hated watching you walk around like a ghost and I hated seeing you get hurt all the time but this was your life, not mine. It was your family who had something to lose not me. Well… I guess that isn’t true. I could have lost you…”

Shota is at least a little proud at his students’ steadfast resolution. Their standing by a classmate instead of taking the out to protect their futures.

“Gross,” Bakugo gags. He was proud.

“But you had your sister and your mom and yourself to consider. I did what I could when you were here with us but it never felt like enough. But I won’t let you lie for me. You have a chance to get out, take it. Don’t let him hurt you anymore.” Midoriya pleads.

“Okay. Hold on,” grumbles, pinching his nose again. “Your mother doesn’t live with you anymore. I read that on your entrance paperwork.”

“No. She doesn’t. She’s at the hospital.”

“Has he threatened her safety?” Shota asks. Todoroki’s eyes flick back and forth before settling on the ground. Finally, he nods solemnly. “Shit,” Shota curses. He looks at Todoroki, at his trembling hands, every muscle in his body pulled tight, his jaw clenched in what can only be a painful manner.

He really would damn himself to keep his friends out of trouble. “Todoroki, just breathe a minute. Let’s talk this through before we make any rash decisions,” he barely holds back a wince when Todoroki unleashes like a spring, shooting up out of the seat, his voice cracking with volume and ferocity.
“He did something rash!” Todoroki shouts while Shota punches a message in on his phone. “He could ruin my life! I didn’t get a god-damn choice about that! And he had no right to do that! He’s not in our family anymore. He left us. He can’t just come back and do this. It’s not fair!” The air whooshes out of his chest, anger deflating like a popped balloon. “I didn’t want this,” he whimpers.

Izuku Midoriya, his problem child of all problem children, is at Todoroki’s side in an instant, leaving gentle touches on his shoulder and squeezing his fingers.

“We’ll figure it out.” Midoriya mutters. “I’m sorry, Shouto,” he says, sad green eyes on the large scar over Todoroki’s right cheek.

Shota practically sees the moment a gear flips in Todoroki’s head. Something connects, something snaps like an overstretched rubber band. His eyes widen, mouth parting slightly, frost crawls up his neck and Shota cancels it before it has the chance to get too far, to the point it could hurt Midoriya who doesn’t seem to have the sense to move back.

“Shouto?” He asks quietly, looking at his friend, watching him pull back and hunch over, taking quick heaving breaths.

“He’s going to kill me. He’s actually going to kill me,” frantic hands tear through already mussed hair. “If I messed up again this year he’ll start over. He’s going to kill me and hurt momma and it’s going to be my fault,” his words tumble out like a waterfall, his fear and turmoil enveloping the room.

Midoriya reaches out to him and Todoroki snaps, lurching back and stumbling into the table, sending it screeching across the cement floor.

“Don’t fucking touch me!” He shrieks. Shota has to blink, overwhelmed by everything that’s unfolded in the last couple minutes and fire explodes from Todoroki’s side, licking up his hair and charring his gym sleeve.

“Get a grip,” Bakugo growls, grabbing Todoroki by his flaming shoulder. “You think anyone here is going to let that piece of garbage near you?” He asks, practically growling into Todoroki’s face, though Todoroki still seems intent on looking anywhere but at the blonde. “You think the teaches won’t figure out something to help your mom? Are you that damn dumb?” Then he looks back to Deku. “You’re both idiots. I thought you were supposed to be smart,” he spits before zeroing back in on Todoroki. “You’ve worried and freaked most of us out since we met you. And you’re just standing there taking it like some fucking martyr. You think your mom or sister wants to see him beat the shit out of you? You think any of us want to see it?”

“Kacchan back up,” Midoriya says, tugging at the other’s collar from the back. Bakugo shrugs him off.

“You wanna be a hero right asshole?” He barks. “Then start by saving your own ass.”

The next time Shota has to blink there’s no flash fire to follow.

There is, however, a typically stone-faced student sobbing into his classmate’s shoulder, his angriest and usually most crass student standing by almost like a sentry.

Midoriya’s mouth is moving but whatever words he has are for Todoroki alone, too quiet for anyone else to hear.

His phone buzzes in his hand.
“What is it?” He asks, unable to quite control the wear in his voice.

“I’ve moved the sister. I called the hospital too. I was assured they would have that floor locked down with added security.” Toshinori’s voice warbles over to him, the connection poor considering the concrete they’re surrounded by. Honestly, the only way they’re connected at all is the wiring through the campus that only links U.A. faculty phones.

Even if the kids had their phones they’d be useless. A bonus, considering the outbursts they’ve already had. None of them need to see the headlines cropping up either. Or respond to them.

They need to play this a certain way. This isn’t just going to be a legal fight. It’s a political one. It’s about timing and behavior and saving their kid.

“I’ve got the involved three down in the sub level. You need to have a serious talk with Midoriya.”

“He’s involved,” All-might states.

“More than that.” He can hear the weary sigh in the slightly tinny speakers. “Has Nedzu said anything?”

“Not really. He’s observing the searches from the stadium. The media is having a hay day.”

“Of course they are. Tragic situation but hey, let’s get viewers out of it. It’s disgusting.”

“They’re spreading it at least.”

“I doubt it’s accurate.”

“Take care of them. I’ll be down soon with Nedzu. We’ll figure something out.”

“There’s not much to figure out. He still has a room here.” All-might pauses and Shota can hear his own knuckles pop with the strain he’s putting on the phone. “What?” He growls.

“Well, technically we only have speculation. I’m not sure it’ll be enough to go against his legal parent’s wishes.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Just hold tight. We’ll be there soon.”

“Hold tight,” Shota grumbles, shoving the phone back in his pocket.

He keeps his eyes on the multitude of screens for the next few minutes, the only sound in the room is Todoroki’s heavy breathing and Midoriya’s gentle shushing.

He has a lot he wants to say to the teen, but for now, his problem child seems to be doing a decent enough job at consoling Todoroki, so he lets it be.

When Todoroki finally pulls away, Shota approaches them.

“I’d like to talk a minute,” he looks at Midoriya, still standing close, his leg brushing Todoroki’s where he sits. “Alone.” Midoriya looks to Todoroki, waits for the other to actually look at him and only steps away once Todoroki gives him a slow nod.

”Todoroki,” he says, squatting by the seated teen. At first, he thinks he’s being ignored. The kid doesn’t move. Doesn’t say anything. For a while, he doesn’t even look at him. Slowly, like a
For all the intensity he usually holds, he suddenly looks very meek. So much more the child he actually is rather than the adult he tries to be.

“Whatever happens,” he puts his hand on Todoroki’s shoulder, “we’re going to protect you and we’ll be on your side.” Shota, for all his years of hero work, has never been good at comforting victims. He’s just never had that sense for it. That instinct that tells charismatic heroes what to say to those frightened faces just isn’t in him.

Up till now, he’s not had much of a desire to learn. He does his job. He’s good at it. He lets people who have that reassuring aura do their job. He does his the way he always has. From the shadows. As minimally interactive as possible.

For all he had been doubting Midoriya earlier, he obviously has that supporting, ‘it’s going to be alright’ face and feel to him. When he says something, no matter how inane it may seem, you just want to believe him.

He wonders how much that presence has helped Todoroki get through these months.

He should probably take back a couple of the harsh things he said to those two later.

But for now... he tries to be what Midoriya can be. What All-might is to so many people.

He tries to instill hope.

“Nobody is going to blame you either. This isn’t your fault. Anything he has done is not your fault. It doesn’t matter what he’s told you or what you think you’ve done. There is always a way to deal with things that doesn’t involve violence. And we’re going to help. No one is going to hurt anymore. Okay?”

Todoroki’s eyes are swimming again, his eyes and cheeks still red from the last crying session, but it doesn’t stop the tears from flowing again.

Shota puts his hand on his own knee, ready to push off of it to help him stand up when Todoroki grabs his sleeve.

At this point, with his lip trembling and chin puckered, he doesn’t even look sixteen. He pulls back, looking ashamed at the action.

Shota does something else he’s never done in his career.

He pulls Todoroki down to the floor with him and presses his tear-streaked, running nose to his shoulder, his hand at the back of the boy’s neck.

It’s horribly uncomfortable.

He’s got his knees in the concrete now and he’s far too old to be in this position with no cushion on his beaten joints but here he is.

Holding a student who’s arms hang limply at his sides like he doesn't know how to hug back.

“We didn’t find any intruders,” All-might says when he walks in, shutting the door as quietly as possible. “Young Todoroki,” he says quietly.
Todoroki lifts his head from Shota’s shoulder and his teacher is relieved to notice he’s responding faster now though he still says nothing as he pulls away completely and stands up.

“Hi All-might,” Midoriya greets, sad green eyes watching his friend.

“Midoriya my boy. Young Bakugo. You two both did well getting Young Todoroki to safety, though I wish you would have stayed back and let pro heroes handle it instead of endangering yourselves.

Midoriya at least has the decency to apologize, though he doesn’t look like he regrets his actions.

Bakugo doesn’t pretend to be remorseful.

Toshinori walks up to Todoroki and Shota sees something in his angular face shatter like glass when the teens head twitches away, not quite a flinch but definitely *something*, as the former symbol of peace raises his arm.

Todoroki grimaces and looks down when he realizes what he did.

“I’m sorry young Todoroki.”

Todoroki shakes his head. Midoriya makes his reappearance, ghosting up to Todoroki’s side and brushing his fingers gently.

He knows both of those two well. His crooked fingers and scarred arms gather both of them in a somewhat awkward hug that has more than one set of trembling shoulders.

“This is touching but I do believe we are on somewhat of a schedule,” Nedzu says finally.

They all end up spreading out, taking seats around the stainless steel table in the center of the room. Well. The teachers spread out. The students are somewhat clustered. Midoriya and Todoroki so close they could be touching and probably are with Bakugo not far off, feet up on the table, eyeing the screens again.

Waiting.

He seems to know what kind of schedule they’re on.

“I apologize it took us so long to get down here but I felt I needed to oversee our lockdown. Now. How we proceed from here.”

“Not really a question,” Shota grumbles. “He stays here.”

“It’s a bit more complicated than that.”

“The hell it is.”

“So far, the only word we have is from a notorious villain. Even if the claim he’s related comes through we can’t prove anything else he said. Not unless Todoroki makes a statement,” Todoroki stiffens, “and do you want that pressure on him?”

“I want him safe. Why aren’t you saying anything?” Shota seethes, crossing his arms and sitting back, eyeing Toshinori.

“I don’t know what to say. I feel responsible. He was my colleague and I never saw anything.”
“I’ll be clear. I assume by your behavior there is truth in what Dabi claimed.” He pauses, beady eyes focused intently on the teen, his nose twitching when Todoroki refuses to answer.

“I already have confirmation,” Shota says. “I spoke with his sister last night. Awfully convenient but nonetheless, she painted a thorough picture. And these two,” he says, looking at Bakugo and Midoriya, “told me it’s happening and that they withheld it from teachers.”

Midoriya winces, drawing Todoroki’s worried eyes to him.

“Though it does seem there were considerable circumstances that made them make that choice,” Midoriya looks like a 100 watt light bulb that was just twisted in, aglow with hope. “I rescind my expulsion. I add remedial courses in ethics,” he adds before his problematic broccoli child can get too excited. “You still should have let adults and heroes handle a situation where people are in danger. You are in training and children. That’s why we’re here.”

“Shape up or you’ll get cleaning duty again, Bakugo.”

“Shape up or you’ll get cleaning duty again, Bakugo.”

“Yes, Aizawa,” he grits out.

“No.”

“Hmm.”

“Look. I don’t care if there’s no official bullshit. He’s not going home. He stays here.” Nedzu eyes him, his black eyes gleaming.

"You better be prepared for a fight." Shota raises his eyebrow. "Not from me," Nedzu amends, smiling, though it looks anything but joyful.

"What are the circumstances you mentioned?" Toshinori speaks up for the first time since the meeting started.

"Apparently he feels his mother is in danger," Shota says.

"Is," Midoriya barks, eyebrows drawn down, his face severe. "She is. He doesn't feel she is. She is. He's threatened her."

"Midoriya," Shota groans. "You are going to make this a painful two years," he mumbles. "His mother is in significant danger. I wasn't saying she isn't, you need to calm down."

Midoriya just glares.

"Your wording was shit," Bakugo adds. "Just sayin'."

"Boys, what has gotten into you?" Toshinori asks, angular jaw slacked.

"I'm not letting anyone talk down what's going on," Midoriya says. "Not even Shouto."

"Too many grammar drills," Bakugo grumbles, looking back to the screens. "We... have a problem."
Black mist swirls, churning around the concrete hideout, bringing back their missing member.

"Have a little fun there did'ya?" Shigaraki mocks from his slouched position, a PSP carefully balanced in his eight-fingered grasp.

“I did, I really did,” Touya cackles as his boots thump against the concrete. His old wounds ache and the seams of his scars burn but it's perfect. "Ooh, it felt good. They're going to see real soon what kind of man their hero is. He's finally going to pay for ignoring all of us."

“I thought we were gonna kill him,” Toga pouts, sharpening a knife cross-legged on the floor.

“Pull down your skirt at least,” one of the others hisses at her, which only makes her grin widely.

“Better keep an eye on the monsters under your bed little Shouto. They’re going to chew you up.”

After all.

This is only beginning.

Next time!

"I'm pulling him out of this pathetic excuse for a school. Three, three, villain infiltrations. I'm sending him to Shiketsu and getting him away from the incompetence," he glare at All-might, "and poor influence," his eyes, burning like the flames Dabi throws around freely, the ones that burned Todoroki, land on Midoriya.

--

"Why are we even looking into this? He's a known murderer and a psychopath. Their organization has notoriously looked to taking down heroes it's just another ploy. There's no merit to this."

--

"You'll hear from my lawyer. Let him home today or don't. He'll be under my roof by the end of the week."

--

"What do you mean he's gone?!"

--

"You nicked him right? Tell me you nicked him! I wanna watch the pretty boy bleed."

Chapter End Notes
So... the art for last chapter was ready to murder me. Like, drawing on the wrong layers, merging the wrong shit, saving as the wrong file type. I was so done. (And now I looked at it to post it and I HATE it.) It can be found here and I have apparently been working on since NOVEMBER. Fuck me.

You can also pinpoint exactly when my motivation died this chapter. I was going to write the endeavor UA confrontation but I just ran out of steam. (TMI but I'm angry/sad: for some reason my mother and sister think it's cool to say I have no maturity or responsibility and spend all day putting me down when they know I struggle with BPD AND then insult me cause I 'can't take jokes.' My sister's boyfriend made a 'joke' at the table tonight that I take care of my son an hour and then pawn him off to his grandma. So I've been bummed out all week. And my husband tunes me out when I get mad because he 'doesn't know what to say when I get upset.' So yeah. sorry if it's not my best work, I've been in a pretty rough sport since pretty much the start of the chapter.

Also, I made this, feel free to drop in, it's a discord for TDDK and writing and stuff. Come say hi or yell at me or whatever. Feel free to come chat or message me on tumblr (which is increasingly irritating about flagging my art posts - not even the risque ones!) or on twitter.

Love ya,
Jasey (wow overshare much, sorry) <3
Shouto doesn’t know what to feel. He feels like he remembers anger. Maybe even fear. But right now, if anything, he feels the impression of those emotions. As if they are gently brushing his skin, but not actually impacting him.

He can feel Izuku's hand brushing over his knuckles. He hears voices but can't distinguish the words.

There's a...bubble around him. It feels like-

Softening everything.

Shouto feels... numb. Distantly, he recalls feeling the sharp licks of rage and briefly the ice cold tendrils of fear. Can remember the thunderous beating of his heart in his chest. Not for fear of the knife that had been pressed to his skin, but of the secrets the villain who claimed to be his brother was unleashing on the world.

He doesn't even remember Touya. Not really. He remembers he was there the night his mother went away. After that... not much. Fleeting glimpses of his white hair and blue eyes around corners. Then... nothing.

All of his siblings have only been ghosts flitting through his life, hauntings of people he understands exist but that's he's never had the chance to know.

The only one he even really has an impression of is Fuyumi. That's only even been relatively recently.

Now that he knows what to say to get Shouto to behave.

Now that he knows she's too feeble a presence to cause any real trouble.

He thinks he's frightened now, wondering what his father is thinking as he approaches the gate to Shouto's school but all the signs of fear are absent.

—

They had all watched as the press who had been around for the festival gathered at the gates but they’d paid it little mind.

Now though, Izuku watched Enji Todoroki, clad in his hero suit, flames adorning his face, casting all the harsh angles into shadow and bright highlight, the contrast sharp and unnerving.
He’s a hulking figure.

Izuku swears his thighs are bigger than his head.

Shockingly, he doesn’t look any angrier than usual. He approaches the gate slowly, folding his wide biceps over his chest when he stops.

Izuku looks at Shouto, still glassy-eyed, not really taking anything in.

His fingers twitch in Izuku’s grasp.

Maybe he hasn’t noticed his father is here yet.

Aizawa certainly has.

He looks like a barely contained storm as he stares down the on-screen display of the other hero.

The hero that they all know has terrorized a friend, a student, a kid. His own family.

Izuku wonders how terrifying growing up around that man was.

His own childhood around Bakugo had been bad enough. Always waiting for something, a burn, an insult- something worse?- and not knowing was sometimes the worst part.

Not knowing if it would be a good day or one where he spent time holed up in his bathroom slathering burn cream on himself.

He hates the smell of that shit.

But at least he could get away from Bakugo.

He could go home to his mom and know he was safe. He had someone to hold him and make his favorite dinner and run around the living room with.

Shouto lived with his demon.

Izuku strokes his thumb over Shouto’s knuckles.

He doesn’t care how outmatched he’d be.

If push comes to shove he’s going to shove.

Nedzu hops out of his chair and over to the wall, pressing a small button.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?” His voice masks the displeasure Izuku can see in the way he bares his fangs as he talks.

Just what is Nedzu?

“Spare me the pleasantries. I’m here for Shouto.”

At the sound of his name, Shouto’s eyes seem to clear, turning to see the blazing man on the screen.

Izuku feels the tremble in his ever warming hand.

“I’d like to discuss this in private,” His tone is cool, though the harsh slant of his eyebrows and tightness of his mouth suggests otherwise.
“I’ll send an escort. Please hold,” Nedzu quips, breaking the connection.

“You’re not bringing him here are you?” Aizawa is as close to gawking as Izuku has ever seen him, his eyes wide and critical, the angry vessels crisscrossing their surface bulging.

“I have very few people on this campus I feel could subdue that man should he unwisely decide to fight.”

"Then send the kids somewhere else." Aizawa's fists are clenched as he gestures, every muscle in his arms straining. Trying to reign in things he so badly wants to let out.

“Not with villains on the loose. Besides, that is his child.”

“I don’t give a fuck,” Aizawa’s teeth are bared, sharp canines grinding, creaking as he snaps his jaw. “If he even makes a move towards Todoroki I’m stringing him by the balls.”

“Am I to stay or leave?” All-might looks unsure of himself, hovering in the middle ground, his posture unassuming.

“You’re not leaving them,” Aizawa turns his head sharply, messy hair flopping over his eyes, none of the strain receding.

"Endeavor and I don’t have the best history. I don't want to add tension," he starts but holds his tongue when Aizawa glares at him.

Aizawa gets up in All-might's face, standing up to his full height.

“Those kids look up to you. They idolize you. Even if you can’t fight you have a purpose here.”

All-might’s bright blue eyes soften, glistening under the shadows of his face, all the weights of his years of heroics showing in the way the skin pulls tight and his sockets sink in.

Even for such an invincible man, it could be too much.

It was too much.

He'd just never let anyone see it.

The impenetrable U.A. gates slide open, an unexpected duo stepping through, Lemillion’s cape swooshing with the wind beside Nighteye’s lanky build.

It’s subtle, the brief touch Nighteye uses to guide Endeavor inside.

Mirio’s face, that Izuku has only ever seen bright and bubbly, has an edge to it.

At a passing glance, he could be mistaken for friendly, but there’s a sharpness in his eyes and a tightness in his smile that sends a mild chill down Izuku’s spine.

If Endeavor is concerned he doesn’t show it.

Most likely, in the brief glance anyone with a camera had time to catch, the short interaction looked almost normal.

Almost like a simply concerned parent being escorted to see their frightened kid.

But Shouto wasn’t frightened by the villain.
He wasn’t scared until Dabi said why he was really there. When he cracked the door on the closet Shouto had locked everything up in.

Even now, watching the screen, watching his father enter the campus, Izuku doesn’t think he’s frightened.

Because if Endeavor is here, he’s not with Rei. If Endeavor is here, his mom and sister are safe.

Shouto never has had much self-preservation.

He wonders if he ever will. If he’ll ever learn to realize he’s just as important, that people would be just as hurt to lose him.

That some people would be devastated.

That Izuku would be. That all of their friends would be.

Sacrificing isn’t saving.

His two-toned eyes follow from screen to screen as the trio navigate through the campus.

Izuku is pretty sure there’s a better way to get to where they are...

Considering they just made a full circle around a couple of buildings.

Izuku just wants it all to be over.

His heart is thrumming in his chest, his brain conjuring up every possible scenario, every way this meeting could go.

Are they going to have to fight the number one hero?

Is he just going to leave his son behind?

Which would be worse for Shouto, honestly... For his dad to fight for him, or to give him up.

Endeavor has been invested in Shouto for a long time. One could even pretend his focus is because in some twisted, despicable way he cares. Even thinking it, Izuku feels it’s spurious. But... But what if Shouto does think that?

That Endeavor does what he does because he cares? Because he actually wants him to be a good hero. That he isn’t just acting cruelly. That his censure is for a reason.

Is that why he was so adamant his father wasn’t abusing him?

Would it break him further if his dad didn’t fight? If he didn’t care?

When did things get so messy?

Finally, Mirio’s cape and Endeavor’s flame disappear in a door disguised in a stone enclave.
Izuku is certain you could hear a pin drop on the concrete floor.

He isn’t positive Shouto can’t hear his heart hammering from his place at Izuku’s side.

It takes the tightening in his chest and dizziness in his head to make him realize he isn’t breathing.

On his quick exhale, the door swings open.

Aizawa and All-might, dilapidated as he may be, stand in front of the tables, a clear barrier to what Endeavor is here for.

“Do you have anything to say for yourself?” Deep baritone floods the room, drowning it in the pitch and in the stress. Suspense.

He hears Katsuki mutter something under his breath, but the words are meaningless compared to the way Shouto stiffens at his side, and the temperature of the hand in his rises, more effective than a heating pad in milliseconds.

Izuku is ready to throw words when he realizes Endeavor isn’t actually talking to his son. But their pocket-sized principal, stationed between the two heroes at the front of the room.

“I don’t,” Nedzu’s hands fold pristinely behind his back, relaxed and professional, though Izuku is pretty sure his ear gives a passive aggressive flick.

“Really?” Flames lick higher, heat radiating off with the grit of the word.

“It’s a shame we had to postpone our festival, but if anything hinted at during that little spectacle has any merit, I can’t say I’ll be sorry about it. Rest assured, we’ll be looking into it.”

“Into what he said or how he got in?” In the brief wake of flame as he breathes, Izuku sees Endeavor’s locked jaw, the vein in his forehead almost always swathed in fire pulsing dangerously.

“What he said has me more concerned,” his high voice devoid of all its usual mirth. "Until the warp gate is apprehended I'm afraid their presence is somewhat unavoidable."

“You’re going to look into what a known murderer and psychopath said. Really? Their organization has notoriously looked to take down heroes. This is just another ploy. There’s not just little merit, there is no merit. You’re wasting time and resources and I’ll be no part of it. I have actual work to do. Shouto,” his tone is authoritative. Demanding. Hand extended outwards. He doesn’t look like he expects a rebuttal. “Come on.”

“What happened to his face?” Izuku feels iron flood his mouth, his tongue and unfortunate casualty in the harshness of his words. His grip tightens on Shouto’s hand when he feels his friend shift.

“How am I supposed to know what he does in his free time?” Endeavor’s hands fall to his side, unconcerned, unbelievable.

“Are you kidding me?” Katsuki’s voice is harsh, nearing shrill, his brows drawn down sharply, shadowing over his red eyes. “That’s your excuse?”

“Boys,” All-might warns.

“Shouto, tell them this is nonsense and come on. Some of us have actual hero work to do.” Nothing in his demeanor changed. It’s as if he’s discussing dinner plans being delayed, all the while glaring mildly at Aizawa before pointedly looking at All-might, “no thanks to you.”
Izuku wishes he were on the other side of this. If the twitch of Aizawa’s fingers is anything to go by, he’s pissed.

Izuku is too.

He's beyond pissed.

Shouto opens his mouth, his lips sticking together, pulling apart as he gapes.

“You don’t deserve to be called a hero.” Izuku’s jaw clicks shut, surprised at his own sudden outburst. He’s just too far incensed by the accusations the brick of a man has been throwing since he walked in to stay quiet.

“Shut up about things you don’t understand.”

“I understand enough.” Izuku feels saliva seep through the cracks of his teeth, his jaw straining with the effort of trying his damndest to be the bigger person, of pushing back every insult that’s been building behind the dam of his throat.

He doesn’t know why. He’s looking at a shit-stain personified- why does he have to be the bigger person? He’s a kid looking at an adult who’s been a monster.

But his mother’s words hold his tongue.

For now.

"You don't understand a thing," Endeavor punctuates the last word with a step forward, recrossing his massive arms, eyes narrowing, irises burning like lasers as they bore into Izuku’s own.

Aizawa's hand makes a quick movement for his neck, grasping at his scarf in a motion that could almost be conceived as casual.

Just not to another hero.

"Are you people serious?" He asks incredulously, eyeing Aizawa's readied arm.

"Deadly," Aizawa's hand doesn't move from its primed position, his tone flat.

"You really think I would hurt my child." Aizawa doesn't answer, but his silence seems to irritate Endeavor further. "You'll see soon enough this is nothing. It'll blow over and you'll look like fools. Shouto, come on," again, commanding, as if he were talking to a misbehaving dog, an understood don't make me say it again hanging in the air. Shouto stands, robotically and Izuku stands with him, bringing their clasped hands into view.

Endeavor's eyes hone in on it and Izuku feels his palm burn.

"I'm afraid I can't allow that," Nedzu’s words along with his unfazed positioning soothe Izuku’s concerns like water over scorched earth. "Under these circumstances, we've decided to reinstate our mandatory dorm policy for the students' safety." Thank fuck.

"Your transparent excuses aren't working on me. This isn't about the villains. This is about your deluded thoughts that I'm hurting my spawn."

"Because you are. Look me in the eye and tell me you didn't do that to his face. That you haven't beat him. Do it," Izuku can feel One for all thrumming alongside his blood, pulsing in his veins, sparks dancing across every nerve and muscle, making his eyes glinting dangerously, practically
glowing in the ugly fluorescent lighting though he hasn't actually activated it yet. It's as if his very power is angry at Endeavor. Appalled he has the gall to deny it. To make his son out to be the bad guy. The liar.

"I don't know what happened to his face. I have trained him to be a hero the way I see fit. And now," he glowers at Nedzu. "I'm pulling him out of this pathetic excuse for a school. Three, three, villain infiltrations. I'm sending him to Shiketsu and getting him away from the incompetence," he turns his vicious gaze at All-might, "and poor influence," his eyes, burning like the flames Dabi throws around freely, the ones that burned Shouto, land on Izuku. "Say goodbye quickly. I'm done stalling with this farce."

"You see," Aizawa starts and Izuku longs to see his face because he knows that tone, knows the malicious smile that goes with it, toothy and frightening, "you signed a contract that you can't abrogate. Only at the beginning of a school year. It's too disruptive to drop and add students mid-semester." Endeavor is simmering, bubbling over in a barely controlled rage.

Izuku can imagine the temperature. He thinks he feels something similar blistering his palm but he won't let go. He likes to think he's helping Shouto, but Shouto is helping him. Grounding him. Keeping him from leaping across the room and bludgeoning the poor excuse for a father on the other side.

"You'll hear from my lawyer. Let him home today or don't. He'll be under my roof by the end of the week. Keep quiet or you'll be fighting slander charges too. That boy is my legacy, he's my blood. I'll mold him into whatever I want to and you'll do well to keep your nose where it belongs."

"I've had enough," All-might growls, steaming and smoking, the seams of his clothes pulling as he puffs up. "Enji, Shouto is his own person. Not a word out of your mouth have I liked- now get out before I do something we both regret."

Endeavor turns around swiftly, the heat of his flames sending a ripple through Mirio's costume, gleaming off Nighteye's glasses. They've both been remarkably quiet.

Izuku wonders if they're privy to what's going on at all.

He doesn't think either of them is the type to speak on something they don't understand.

The door at the top of the stairs slams, it's harsh clang echoing and building as it resonates down the narrow space until it opens up to the cavernous room.

"I take it we suspect him," Nighteye says coolly, taking a seat and crossing his legs, long bony fingers curling to rest against his cheek.

Mirio remains standing, his gaze still turned towards the exit, mouth parted slightly.

Aizawa nods. "He's guilty."

"Seriously?" Mirio’s head snaps towards them, eyebrows shooting up along with his volume. "You've got to be kidding- and we just let him leave?"

The heat becomes too much and Izuku pulls his hand away, tries to do it subtly, tries to slip it behind his back before it's seen.

He can tell by the look on Shouto's face.

He failed.
Any semblance of reaction to the situation falls off his face.

He's a porcelain statue for all intents and purposes, his eyebrows carefully level, his mouth a sculpted flat line, his eyes dark.

He doesn't hear Izuku say that it's okay.

Doesn't hear him say he's had worse, that it's not that bad.

It falls on deaf ears. As if there's nothing there to receive those signals at all.

He's just... shut down.

--

Shouto doesn't look like anything outwardly.

But internally he's maudlin.

He's looking at the door his father had disappeared through, but laid over it is the image of Izuku's blistering palm.

The palm that Shouto had been holding.

The palm he had burned.

What kind of monster is he?

Izuku stood by him, lied for him, stood up for him and he burned him.

Breaking everything he touches.

Hurting anyone who dares come near him.

He's his dad.

He's worse than his dad.

At least when his dad hurts, he means to. He's trying to.

Shouto wasn't doing anything.

It was subconscious. Uncontrolled.

How much worse could he do if he tried?

What if he burned down their whole dorm?

What if he killed someone?

Are his classmates going to pay for even knowing him? Is Shouto really that much of a curse?

Is his father's influence that strong in him despite everything?

There are things happening around him. People talking, moving about. He notices touches on his shoulder, his elbow, but he feels like by the time he acknowledges them they're long gone. Faint remembrance of contact that's too far past.
Bright light hits his eyes but he doesn't remember climbing the stairs. Wind tickles his hair but he can't recall when they left the stagnation below ground.

All he can think is why?

Why do I have to be like him?

Why am I poison?

Why does me loving someone make me hurt them?

Is he going to hurt me too?

--

"Do you think he remembers scarring his favorite kid?" Dabi asks, swirling around a small glass of water.

"Why are you ruminating on this so much?" Kurogiri's shadowy silhouette flutters as he speaks, his tone mellow mannered as ever.

"I want him to remember. Serves the bastard right."

"Aw, is ugly scar-face not as pure intentioned as he wanted us to think? How sad," Shigaraki sing songs, kicking his foot against the wood absentlly, a steady think, thunk, thunk, the best of a drum, the pulse of a heart. "Little vengeful beyond Stain's ideals? Knew you were full of it."

"Does it fucking matter why? Give them a week. He'll be behind bars ready to be arraigned."

"Will their dumb justice system even convict him? They're so ready to suck their heroes' dicks, maybe they won't even care about your stupid bully-of-a-dad story!"

"They'll care. And if not, little Shouto and I will just kill the bastard ourselves."

"Hah!" Shigaraki barks out, an ugly stilted thing of a laugh, hoarse and hollow. "Like he'd help."

"He'll help if I want him to. The old man thought he was creating a master hero. All he did was make a time-bomb. Fortunately, I know how to read the instructions for it."

"Hmph. I'll believe it when I see it," Shigaraki mumbles, scratching at his neck, dead skin cells flaking off and settling on their dusty surroundings.

God, they need a maid.

"Will he bleed? I want him to bleed! Did he bleed at the festival thingy? You knicked him right? Let's watch it again! I wanna watch the pretty boy bleed!"

"He'll bleed. Just maybe not the way you want."

"What does that mean? Don't be cryptic. If I don't understand it you're the stupid one. You're a jerk! Shigaraki let me kill him! He's a bad villain, he should die!"

"I hate you all."

--
“Shota, Yagi,” Nedzu calls back once the kids have left, departed for the safety of their dorms.

Shota turns, rubbing weary eyes. Toshinori doesn’t look any better.

“They confirmed it.”

“You’re kidding,” Toshinori’s sharp jaw is slacked, almost unhinged with the way it hangs like a bare skeleton’s devoid of muscle and ligament would.

"It's Touya. He really is Enji's missing child," Nedzu's nose twitches and beside him, Toshinori almost gives off the same intimidating aura he did when he reigned as number one.

The same righteous fury and overpowering strength.

And Shota... just feels ill.

—

NEXT TIME: DRAMA! FEELINGS! FEARS.

"What do you mean he's gone?!"

"We are coming to you live at the Endeavor estate where many notable figures are making an arrest on the number one hero."

"It started when I was five..."

"That kid is nothing but a no good attention seeking brat. Supposedly ten years this has been going on, but only now that his father is the top hero and busier he says anything? bullshit."

"I hate it! I hate my quirk, I hate my life, I hate myself!"

"You're a monster, Shouto.

I hate you."
NOTE:
So here is this. It’s a little bit of a boring chapter but I felt like there were things that needed to happen before we moved forward and it would have like doubled the length for me to go into the next piece.
If you enjoyed it please comment and let me know. I’m trying a slightly different writing style thanks to advice from one of my favorite FF authors.
I’m linking the art I did for the other chapter again cause it took me forever to do (even if I’m not happy with how it turned out). You can see that here and I have apparently been working on since NOVEMBER. Fuck me.
.
So... the art for last chapter was ready to murder me. Like, drawing on the wrong layers, merging the wrong shit, saving as the wrong file type. I was so done. (And now I looked at it to post it and I HATE it.)
Here’s the discord for TDDK and writing and stuff again. I post snippets sometimes and talk about what I’m doing so come say hi or yell at me or whatever. (We had a great convo on there recently that motivated me to finish this chapter.)
ALSO
My friends on another server have started TDDK NSFW month which will be in March and I WILL be participating. I already have one artwork almost done and part of a fic. I will also be sprinkling the prompts I got on tumblr forever ago into that so look forward to it (or don’t).
ALSO! Stella is going to be getting some revamping shortly.
I also have a couple of WIPs that I’m going to start drafting I’m very excited about.
Lots going on very soon. <3
ILY all. Thanks for all the support thus far.
Until next time,
Jasey
"Todoroki? Todoroki, come on," Shouto hears his name. Can hear a snapping sound that changes from being really loud in his left ear to being really loud in his right.

Slowly, the swirl of color in the right side of his visual field clears, the murky blacks and blues and viridian taking the form of his teacher and Izuku, the former crouched in front of him, the latter hanging behind him, brows trying to become one singular feature with how closely they're drawn together, his bottom lip being worried between his teeth.

"Todoroki, focus," Aizawa's tired voice says again, a fleshy colored blur peeking in and out of his remaining field of vision. He's got maybe two thirds he can see. Most of the time, it doesn't really bother him. Considering he's been living with the deficit longer than he lived without it; he's pretty well used to it at this point. The only big issue is the enormous blind spot on his left side. Something his dad continuously took advantage of during their training.

"Are you ever going to figure out how to compensate for that?" Shouto can't see him, stars still skittering across his eyes in spirals, darkness pulsing as they strain to focus on the man growling at him, heat beating down near unbearably. His hair is damp with sweat, his shirt sticking to him and his socks slick with the water from his melted, obliterated, ice attacks.

"I'm trying." Shouto spits through gritted teeth, hands slipping off his knee and the floor as he tries to stand despite the ache in his head and the weakness in his right leg. "Anyone else and my ice would work."

It's the wrong thing to say and Shouto knows it. He barely has the chance to react before the tell-tale heat overwhelms him, the heavy thud of his father's footsteps as he stalks up to Shouto, fast for how large he is. The heatwave blisters his right side, making even his left uncomfortable and then he's gagging again, acid burning his throat so sharply it takes a second for him to feel the actual impact in his gut.

"If you can't defend against me how are you going to defend against All-might? Or someone stronger than him? I didn't raise you to give up like this. Stand up." He's so tired of hearing his father's voice. Tired of looking up to see the angry slant to his brows, the pinched corners of his eyes and sharp angles of his downturned mouth.

Can't someone for once be happy with what he does?
"Are you even trying?" Shouto forces down the bile, trying not to wince as it burns its way back down his throat. His teeth crunch together, biting down on the words he wants to say but that he knows will only make his father angrier. "Get up. Let's go again."

"Fine," lingering stomach acid sprays the floor, mingling with the muddled reflection the ice already shows, sending small ripples through his mirrored self.

He watches as the waves distort it, pulsing outwards, towards the dry section of the floor.

If there really are other worlds in mirrors... Other dimensions you get a glimpse at... Is his other self this miserable too?

In another life... Does he have a father that tells him he's doing well, that he's going to be a good hero instead of belittling him at every opportunity? Does that version of himself hold his breath every time the man opens his mouth, just waiting for something cruel to be flung at him the same way that damn hellfire is?

Does the other him have a mother still? Is his face disfigured, marred and marked as the monster he is?

He spends too long contemplating, an impatient huff the only warning he has before another blow strikes his left cheek, sharp pain exploding outwards on impact, a pain he's certain means his cheekbone is fractured again.

He stumbles, taking stuttered steps before his vision blacks out and he collides with the puddle that caused this, falling into it, but unfortunately, not into the world he hoped it led to.

--

"Shouto," the voice is echoing. Bouncing off the insides of his skull. There are warm hands over his, trying to coax them out of the grip he has on his own hair, tugging at the fringe in his bangs.

He can see scars, pale skin, rough and uneven twisting over knuckles.

Izuku.

It hits him, the pain in his scalp and he relents his hold, lets Izuku guide his hands down into his lap. Shouto can see his own hairs caught in the creases of his fingers and the sharp indents in his palms from his nails.

His breath stops when he sees the bandage on Izuku's hand.

Monster.

Useless.

A sob catches in his throat as he snatches his hands away, immediately longing for that warmth again, for the comfort Izuku brings.

Selfish.

Destructive.
"Todoroki," it's Aizawa now, looking at him with concern practically carved in his dark eyes and worn face, the bags under his eyes more pronounced than usual, hanging dark and heavy above the scar from their first villain encounter.

'Maybe it's villainy that's in my blood. Not heroics.'

"I know this is a lot right now, but I need you to tell me something."

Shouto pointedly does not look at Izuku.

Of course, he's sitting on his right side. He couldn't conveniently be on his left, where he'd be almost completely obscured by the dead cone and rod cells.

No, even trying to ignore his friend, his eyes still wander, still hone in on the parted lips and affronted expression, at the hurt that Izuku has never been able to hide.

He's an open book.

'He's the opposite of me.

He's kind and soft.

He's helpful.

He's good.'

"Do you want to go through with this?"

Shouto opens his mouth but his tongue and voice wilt, leaving him to just close it and sigh.

"Do you want to write it?" Izuku asks, his voice hesitant and uncertain.

'You did it again. You hurt him.

Monster.

Evil.

Villain.'

"Shouto?" Izuku asks again but this time he doesn't move to touch him, though his hands do these little-aborted movements, as if, of their own accord, they want to reach out to him.

Shouto nods though he's not quite sure he remembers what he's agreeing to.

There's a tear, shuffling, then a crooked sheet of notebook paper is handed to him along with a pen.

For a second, Shouto just stares.

If anyone said his hand was shaking, he'd deny it.

Or at the very least, blame his quirk. Somehow affecting both hands...

His handwriting is sloppy and slants despite the neat lines telling him where to cross his curves and strokes.

What was the question
Aizawa looks at it with squinted eyes for a moment.

"Do you want to go through with this?" he repeats, no frustration with having to repeat himself, not really *any* obvious emotion, good or bad.

*What?*

Aizawa takes a deep breath, his hand migrating to the back of his neck.

"Pressing charges." When Shouto doesn't move, doesn't acknowledge words were said to him, Aizawa adds, almost as an addendum, but with finality, a push, giving his dark eyes a fierce glimmer. "Against Endeavor."

--

"Be still," it smells of smoke. Dad's breath always smells like smoke. Not like cigarette smoke, not even like a wood fire. It's... cleaner somehow. But he always smells it when he's close.

*He's sitting in front of Shouto in their bathroom, huge hands rested on knees that are probably larger than Shouto's whole head, a different angle to his dad's face, not anger this time, not as harsh and steep as that, but confusion, maybe even a little apprehension.*

"I don't want to do it. Just leave it."

"Quit whining." There's no spit, no lash of teeth. There's barely any heat behind it as he reaches out again, towards Shouto's bandaged left eye.

"I don't want you to do it," Shouto knows he's whining and he's not likely to get his way acting like he is but he's five and he's scared. *It hurt so much when it happened; he doesn't want it to hurt anymore. He doesn't want to see it. Doesn't want to see the monster he knows is there.*

*He already looked like that Frankenstein's creature. His brief farce in kindergarten had lasted long enough for a kid to make the offhand comment that he looked like a science experiment, like two people that got 'smashed' down the middle. Now he's got a horrid scar to match his horror movie antagonist appearance.*

"Do you want me to make your sister come change it?" There's the fire, the swell of heat and the downward turn of his features. He pinches his large nose, taking in a deep breath, dark plumes puffing out his nostrils and when the tendrils clear so does the harsh slant, leaving something softer, something Shouto hasn't the slightest idea what to do with.

Shouto thinks of Fuyumi. How she'd cried when she stepped into that kitchen. How she'd sobbed into him like she'd been the one hurt as she held him, tried to shush him through stuttered assurances and labored breaths as he screamed.

Shouto tucks his legs beneath him and wedges his hands between his calf and thigh, pinches his eye shut tight.

"I'll be still," he mutters quietly.

"I'm not going to hurt you."
With his eye closed and the other bandaged, Shouto didn't see the expression on his father's face. Can't fathom what could have accompanied words spoken softer than he thinks he's ever heard and will ever hear again.

Sometimes he thinks his subconscious imagined those words to comfort him.

To this day he can't decide if they were real or not.

--

Shouto feels his eyes burn, having gone too long without blinking and tears spring up, desperate to replenish the lost moisture.

He doesn’t know what to do.

Why is he making this choice? Why does it have to be him?

Can't you ask Fuyumi? Or momma.

"Todoroki, this is only going to stick if you go against him. Your sister never mentioned that he hurt her and he'll tear away your mother's credibility. But this is going to affect you. More than you even know." Aizawa's eyes feel like they're burning a hole through his soul; they feel so much more powerful right now than even when he's used his quirk on Shouto. His teacher is sincere, painfully so. He can almost see the thoughts running circles in his head, the urges to try and convince Shouto to lean one way or the other, but he won't do it.

Because this has to be Shouto's choice.

Shouto already threatened to call it all a bluff once.

He could do it again.

Make this all just a bad dream. A bad memory.

Or...

His heart flutters at the idea. Not even a thought, he's almost too scared to actually think it. To actually let that long forgotten shard of hope breathe.

This could be over.

He wouldn't have to live under the suffocating pressure of his father.

His mother wouldn't have to live under his thumb anymore, might not even have to live at that hospital anymore.

They could be a family again. Broken and warped, but together.

"Whatever you choose, we'll stand behind you," his teacher's voice is severe. "But if you don't want to pursue this, our ability to help you is going to be limited."

"Please, Shouto," Izuku's eyes are shining, his bottom lip jutted out in a pout.
Shouto... doesn't know what to do.

He's not the only one this is going to affect.

Natsuo is going to get swarmed at his campus.

Fuyumi will get hounded, hell, even her school could get harassed, begging for information, for a statement, for a reason why no one else said anything.

Begging to know if Shouto is a danger.

He looks down at his own hands, sees Izuku's own scarred and bandaged one in the corner of his eye.

He is. Izuku's hand is crooked, forever marked by Shouto's actions.

The burn is less permanent, but only the physical mark of it.

How is he supposed to be around people he likes, people he cares about when he can't even trust himself to be in control of his quirk?

Who else will he hurt?

How badly?

"My hand is fine." Izuku, so gently it makes Shouto want to cry, rests his hands on top of Shouto's where they hold the paper and the pencil. "I trust you."

You're my savior.

"With my life."

And I'll be your downfall.

"So for once, protect yourself. Let them help you."

—

"As much as I’d like to let this day be over, there are some things I think we need to go ahead and do to start building a case."

"Does it have to happen today?" Izuku’s voice is quiet and Shouto can imagine the pleading look he’s probably giving his teacher but all he can see is the warping wood grain, blurring and swimming as he fights tears.

When has he ever cried this much?

Not in a long time.

—

"Have you ever seen All-might cry?" His father is angry. He’s always angry. Shouto sniffs, his arm trembling violently.

They’ve been at this so long.

He stopped being able to feel his fingers half an hour ago.
"I'm trying to help you, boy. With that pitiful ice, you aren't going to stop any villains. And if you cry like this you'll be lucky if all they do is kill you. It's disgraceful. Weak and pathetic just like that defense you just showed me."

*Fresh tears fill his eyes.*

*He just wants his momma...*

*He feels exhaustion in his bones, fighting for room along with the pain that’s settled there.*

*“You won’t even try and use your fire.”*

*“It burns!” Shouto cries, shaking his head fiercely. His dad’s monster hand grabs him by the neck, fingers overlapping as they squeeze, pulling him off the ground.*

*“You know what’s going to hurt worse? When a villain burns you alive or peels the skin off of you. Do you want that?!” Shouto can’t stop the sniffles.*

*He doesn’t want to die! He doesn’t want to hurt. He just wants things to be normal again...*

*“Do you think your mother wants to hear you were too weak and got killed by a villain?”*

*Tears slide down his cheeks, gathering in the creases of his father’s grip.*

*The heat makes his skin tight and the anger that burns in those blue eyes makes him instinctively want to shrink back.*

*“Do you want classmates to laugh at your weak little quirk when you get to U.A.? You aren’t the only child of a hero out there. They may even stick you in the support course where you belong, despite my influence.”*

*Shouto tears at his dad’s forearms.*

*Is this nightmare ever going to end?*

—

“I don’t think he’s in any shape for that,” Izuku says.

“Midoriya, I get you’re close to him and all, but maybe it’s time for you to go back to the dorms with your classmates.”

Shouto looks up, his neck cracking with the sharp movement.

Izuku’s expression is firm, unyielding as he stares down their teacher from beside Shouto.

Shouto, with a shaking hand and a heart determined to break out of his sternum and into the floor, reaches out and grips Izuku’s shirt like a lifeline.

Almost instinctively, Izuku’s other hand folds over his, the warmth of it almost searing but so so welcome.

Shouto looks between them, hoping to convey that he *needs* Izuku.

He’s not sure if his expression is pleading or crazed right now, or somewhere in between, but Aizawa is the one who breaks the state, blinking and sighing heavily.
"He wants me here," Izuku says, no hesitation or question, none of the cracks or stutters he is still somewhat prone to.

Aizawa looks to Shouto, eyebrow cocked, giving him a chance to say Izuku has the wrong idea.

He wishes that were true.

Wishes he could do this alone.

Whatever this is.

But he can’t. Not today. Not right now. He feels like two pieces of himself only held together by a couple of threads and Izuku is one of those. One of the tethers that are keeping him from completely losing his shit right now.

He doesn’t know why it’s Izuku.

Why he’s the one Shouto has always gone to.

Maybe it's the lack of judgment he always puts forth when he tells him how much he's messed up. How many people he's inadvertently hurt.

How weak he is.

He’s staring at his friend he realizes, noticing Izuku’s waiting face, patient, but still letting his concern shine through the layers.

Shit.

They must have asked him something else.

Izuku looks kind of smug when he turns to their teacher, cocking his head.

“See?”

“Well maybe if I were more informed on the situation I would know these things,” Aizawa snaps, making Izuku shrink back slightly. The bravado fading as he ducks his head.

“Todoroki,” Aizawa waits for Shouto to look up at him, “we should get you to a hospital.”

Shouto’s grip on Izuku tightens, the thought of a hospital immediately bringing back every threat, indirect or otherwise he was given about getting public treatment for his injuries.

They won’t understand. You’re different from other kids.

We have a perfectly good healer here. You don’t need a doctor to charge me a fortune to tell me what I already know.

They’ll take you away and you’ll never be a hero. I’ll have to find or make a new successor.

Do you want people to see how much of a failure you are?

Shouto is snapped back to reality at the sharp pain on his arm. He lifts his left hand, the air stinging the fingertip-sized burn on his right elbow where his hand had rested.
It’s not a bad burn by any means. Will fade in an hour or so.

But his head feels so much clearer now...

“- Tsukauchi will be helping build the case. There’s not much law enforcement I trust. There’s no way to know how far Endeavor’s influence goes.”

“And this can’t wait a day?” Izuku asks, looking between Aizawa and All-might, who Shouto hadn’t even noticed enter the room.

“It’s really best to get started before he has a chance to do much damage control,” All-might looks uncomfortable, his spindly arms folding and unfolding, feet shifting.

"You need to relax," Aizawa says, taking hold of All-might's ever-shifting arms and pressing them to his sides, his neck craned back to look in the other's shadowed eyes, abnormally tall even now.

“Sorry. I-"

“I know what you feel. It’s written all over your face. I don’t understand how you feel, no. But right now, your kids need you. So put the guilt on the shelf for a while.” Aizawa's tone is sharp and quiet, he's hissing out like a snake as he stares down the taller hero. The taller former hero.

The door opens again then, a large shadow casting over the floor that has Shouto instinctively straightening, his heart thrumming in his chest, pulsing in his brain and putting pressure behind his eyes.

—

The taste in his mouth is horrible. Copper and acid mingling on his tongue. His cheek stings where he’s bitten it over and over, holding back whimpers and screams.

His chest feels like a bruised banana, marred black and ready to spill its innards if it’s touched too much.

His father’s shadow comes over him and he turns, looking back at the man and hoping the apprehension in his gut isn’t plastered across his face.

The tick at the side of his mouth makes Shouto think he’s more transparent than he wants to be.

A sharp kick to his side has copper flooding his mouth, coating his teeth in red. Marked by violence and pain.

Shouto rolls with the impact until he settles on his back, clutching his stomach and curling in on himself.

He’s what... ten?

He’s not sure.

It could be a memory from almost any day. They all blurred together. Just another point on the timeline, another day of the same. Pain and frustration, isolation and barely suppressed tears. Limping down the hall until his dad gets too frustrated and lets their on staff healer help him.

He’d almost prefer she didn’t.

The searing pain as skin and bone stitch themselves back together is almost worse than when they
Shouto pinches his arm hard and it’s not quite enough. The haze lingers, slowing and muting things, but he’s present enough not to jerk away when Mirio walks by, Nighteye following.

“What’s the plan?” Mirio asks, leaning against the desk, arms folded over his chest.

"We were just discussing-" All-might starts when Aizawa throws his arm out, making a bar in front of his barely-there chest.

“You should be in the dorms Mirio,” Aizawa says, pointedly looking at Nighteye.

“He’s my intern. He could be useful.”

“He’s a student,” Aizawa’s losing his patience, moving towards the other hero with purposeful steps.

There’s too much tension in here.

Too much antagonism.

Shouto feels Izuku squeeze his hand then he lets go and Shouto’s eyes widen, looking to his friend in barely concealed panic, his chest contorting painfully as his lungs refuse to refill until he feels the shift in weight, Izuku sliding closer, his arm looping around Shouto’s waist, tapping his thigh and wiggling his fingers.

“Can you fight somewhere else?” Mirio says lightly, blue eyes on the pair in the corner. Drawing the rooms’ attention just as Shouto lets out a shaky breath.

“I-“ Aizawa starts but is cut off.

“Somewhere else, Sensei,” Mirio repeats, lowering his hands, the large number across his chest catching in the light.

"The plan?” Nighteye repeats, glasses glinting, long fingers tapping rhythmically, almost as steady as the hands on a clock.

Shouto watches them, up and down, up and down, listening to the soft shift of fabric as the pads of his fingers brush, memorizing the ridges in Izuku's hand, how the bench feels beneath his thighs.

They're stupid things, little things, but those are the only things he has right now.

Stupid, little things.

That's all he is.

"We need to go get him evaluated before Endeavor has a chance to do any damage control," Aizawa huffs, still stubbornly glaring at Nighteye through his mop of hair. "Midoriya has worked valiantly on stalling, but the sooner we start this the better."

"This is a mess," Nighteye is unflappable despite Aizawa's disapproving aura. "He won't do anything drastic. Not today. That much I could tell."

"Thank you, Sir," if All-might looked awkward before, he certainly does now, unwilling to commit to making eye contact with his former partner.
Nighteye sighs deeply, shoulders dropping as he flexes his fingers.

"I knew if it was worth breaking your years of silence it must be awfully important. And to insist I use foresight in the same breath."

Shouto still doesn't like being in here. There's so much tension, hanging in their air like static, just waiting for something to brush the wrong way and let it spark. Each word seems to seep gasoline, edging into the room, sliding under shoes and furniture, waiting for that coil to light, or the last straw to fall.

Shouto is annoyed. Suddenly, just pissed off.

He's angry. At them, at himself, at his father, at his sister. At Touya. He's not a glass with that spider web fracturing. He's a person. He's a hero in training. He's not some scared child. He's frustrated with the itch under his skin, he's done with the tremble in his hands.

This is his body.

Why the fuck is it working against him?

Why all of a sudden does he have this sensitivity to everything. Why won't his heart just take a chill pill?

Chill pill.

_Huh._

Shouto shakes off Izuku, pointedly ignoring the concerned and mildly hurt look he's giving, those wide round eyes that always seem to find him at his lowest.

Shouto drops his temperature.

The heart slows down when it's cold. Conserving energy.

He'll force the annoying organ into submission.

At least now he can blame the trembling in his fingers on chill instead of weakness.

Shouto pushes, trying to force the cold into his fire, embed it in the core.

The teachers are still taking, still debating. Izuku looks torn between watching them and Shouto.

Shouto shoots him a sharp glare. He feels like his skin might shatter with the way he's contorted it.

Shouto's heart does slow. He feels... lighter.

"It's cold," All-might, closest to the kids, says quietly, watching the visible exhale swirl in the open air of the room before turning shadowed eyes on Izuku and Shouto.

Shouto's head swims.

He doesn't expect to pass out.

But his vision goes spotty and black all the same, toppling over regardless of what he'd wanted.

Another fucking betrayal.
Chapter End Notes

This is officially my longest fic ever. Wow.
Loved reading all your sweet comments, hope to have time to reply to them someday!

You know where to find me :)  
Jasey <3
No act can change,

Chapter Summary

A routine exam and some much needed cuddling...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The ride to the hospital is quiet. The only sound the quiet purr of the engine. Izuku watches as the cityscape goes by, as the colors of the buildings sweep into an indistinguishable blur as his eyes lose focus.

He blinks, pushing away the burning behind his lids, letting his gaze fall on the friend beside him, a shiver running through Izuku at the chill of the other's touch. Shouto's mouth is parted ever so slightly, small puffs of breath pushing winter into the cab of the car, a blanket rather uselessly thrown over him and his seatbelt, tucked hastily behind his shoulders. Shouto trembles, knocking free one of the corners of the blanket.

Izuku doesn't think it's really doing any good, but he reaches for the soft fleece and tucks it back where it belongs, trying not to jostle the boy plastered to his side.

Siphoning the little warmth Izuku has left.

When Shouto had passed out, the hospital was no longer a question. Aizawa had all but shoved them inside the car he apparently owns, his questionably clean blanket thrown over Shouto in a minor attempt to warm him, Izuku herded into the seat next to him to provide his own heat, anything to prevent hypothermia from progressing.

Izuku's leg has been restlessly bouncing since the engine turned over twelve minutes ago. His left hand is curled around Shouto's icy right, fingers dancing idly over the cold and ever stiffening skin of his knuckles.

Shouto almost doesn't look real. The fading sunlight casting an amber glow over his pale features, setting the red of his hair ablaze and the lingering water streaking by on the window is sending a cascade of colors dancing through the silver strands of hair. His skin is pale, far more than his usual ivory tone, almost translucent, like if he looked close enough he could see the web of veins and arteries spiderwebbing beneath the surface.

Never in his life did he think he would describe Shouto Todoroki as fragile, but in this moment, it feels like if Izuku touched him too roughly he might shatter beneath his crooked fingers. Break into a million fractals and glitter in the cracks of the leather in the backseat.

He's broken out of his reverie by the vibration in his pocket, a quick staccato against his thigh. Despite how mundane of a thing it is, his heart leaps up into his throat, trying to damn near jump out of his mouth, as if somehow that would stop the visual his mind created.

He fishes his phone out carefully, shimmying it out of the too deep pocket while trying desperately not to jostle his sleeping, passed out, best friend.
It's his mom again.

What he also notices are his twitter notifications.

His finger swipes over the touchpad without thinking, bringing up the annoying blue site.

Trending:
#f***endeavor
#istandwithendeavor
#whatishappening?!
#todorokishouto
#proheronews

EndeavorStan102 @therealendeaman

Ok. Srsly? Wtf. You're going to slander your number one hero?? Your top crime fighter for 20+ yrs?? Bc a VILLAIN said he hits his kid?? Bc said bratty kid didn't say oh I love my daddy we're fine here. Y'all on crack. I can't believe this is even being CONSIDERED. WTF UA. 1/2

Y'all graduated Endeavor and you bein quiet now? We all been known that kid was trouble. How does a top hero's son fail a provisional exam and lose to a middle school nobody at their top tv fest? Bc he tryin to make his dad look bad. Honestly, have some class Shouto. Drop the act already. 2/2

I-stand-with-lil-todoroki @protectmyboiss

Have we learned nothing?? Stain wasn't all bad. Heroes aren't all good?? They're still people. They can do bad things. But again, we're burying victims beneath their prominent abusers. I though society had grown past this but I'm consistently being disappointed by people 1/2

blaming a child or calling him attention seeking. I don't care if there's no evidence, his silence is evidence enough. Need I even mention the bizarreness of the fest?? There's evidence if you people would open your eyes. This is what's dangerous about society. Blindly following people. Smh. 2/2

HeroNews @officialheronews

Stories are spiraling after the oddity that was the UA year 2 Sports festival. Official sources have yet to make a statement on the bold claims brought forth by the self-proclaimed estranged son of top hero Endeavor. Follow us for further updates as the story unfolds.
An anonymous but verified source has announced blood collected from the departed villain has CONFIRMED his relation to Endeavor and Shouto Todoroki. The claims of abuse are still unconfirmed or discredited.

DekuStan#1 @Iamhereandsmol

#IstandwithTodorokiSHOUTO honestly, I can't believe you are siding with someone who is KNOWN to have a temper in the PUBLIC over a teenager with some obvious signs of trauma. #downwithendeavor. I don't blame Shouto for keeping quiet when you are all behaving like this. 1/2

Would you tell the world your sensitive past if you knew people were ALREADY calling you a liar? I know I wouldn't. 2/2

EmoBird22 @livininthedark

#F***Endeavor This is insane. I never liked the guy but I respected him for the work he did for us but this? Is unreal.

FireQuirkKing @bigmenstopenme

I can't believe how many people are jumping on this prematurely departed train. A VILLAIN made an outrageous claim that no one seemingly has any evidence regarding and you are all ready to lock him up. You want an innocent hero in jail? 1/4

You want the man that protects you all in prison for nothing? This is so fucking ironic. The people he's given up his life to protect are throwing him under the bus. He's saved you and your kids and you won't even stand up with him on social media. I am disappointed in all of you 2/4

You would never turn your backs on All-might like this. If some rando villain claimed he'd assaulted women in an alley you would tear that shit apart. Why is it so different because it's Endeavor? Because he's a little crass? Because he WAS number two? 3/4

Would you do this to best jeanist? Or Deku? I am enraged. You all are terrible. I hope you feel bad when someone finally calls this what it is. AN enormous pile of horse **** dont' @ me 4/4
I'm not one to psychoanalyze, except I totally am. Can those who blindly want to follow Endeav*r at least acknowledge some things? Mrs. Todoroki hasn't been seen in YEARS. Shouto Todoroki spent three-fourths of his first sports festival adamantly not using his fire powers until 1/?

view thread:

the terrifying fight with Izuku Midoriya (don't make me pull receipts on what was said in this match). Then, his immediate next fight he starts a powerful fire move and immediately shuts it down, throwing the match. Perhaps cause there is something profoundly negative that fire triggers??? 2/?

I'm just saying there could be something there. His hero name literally has no connections to his family (almost as if he'd not like to be associated with Endeav*r, gee wonder why). As much as we'd like to believe it, heroes aren't perfect. They're people just like us. 3/?

Which means just like in the general population, there will be abusive heroes. Maybe acknowledge that possibility before you start throwing a sixteen-year-old boy under a bus. This habit of blaming victims has GOT to stop. You terrorize them and then wonder why it 4/?

took years for a woman to say a man took advantage of her or a boy to say his top hero father abused him (HE didn't even say it leave the kid alone!). People act like they know how they would act in these situations. Let me tell you, from experience, it is terrifying to even 5/?

THINk about telling on an abuser. Someone you know can hurt you and WILL. Do you have any idea the kind of impact this could have on a professional career? On a heroic career? Can you use your one brain cell and consider what this family might be going through and have an ounce of respect. 6/?

Goodnight. 7/7

"Are you going to get out?" Aizawa asks, his dark eyes and haggard expression peering at him from where he's twisted around in the driver's seat. Izuku startles, knocking Shouto's cheek against his shoulder.

Bleary eyes blink open, turquoise and gunmetal peering out from heavy lids.

All-might is sitting nervously in the passenger seat, sliding his seatbelt back to its resting position as quietly as he can, the strap slipping through long, bony fingers.

Izuku isn't sure why they brought the most high profile teacher with them. Even in this form, All-might is recognizable now. No longer able to slip through the cracks, to be normal at any given time
of the day. Even quirkless as he is now, he's still their symbol of peace. More than Endeavor ever could be.

Shouto is confused when he steps out of the car, a subtle shiver running through him in the night air.

Izuku's hands don't twitch, aren't eager to lay warm hands on chilled skin if only for menial comfort.

Izuku remembers emergency rooms. Remembers being rushed in for burns when he was really little, before he learned to hide them under his sleeves until they were healed enough for his mother not to rush him to their antiseptic smelling white hallways.

As much as his mother ever insisted that Izuku needed urgent care, it always felt like they sat there forever waiting. Giving the bleached floors plenty of time to singe his nose hairs, for him to notice all the dirt in the cracks despite the awful smell of potent cleaners. For the over bright lights to give him a pulsing headache that throbbed behind his eyes.

Hiding his injuries was as much for his mother's sake as it was for his own.

He hates hospitals.

Though he realizes pretty apparently this visit is going to be much different.

There's no entry paperwork to begin with. Aizawa walks to the front desk, All-might following in his shadow and Izuku sees recognition light up the woman's face as she looks up.

Izuku has barely gotten Shouto to sit down when they are being ushered down the hall, down the scuffed floors and nondescript 'soothing' paintings on the walls. Hears the harsh beep of the doors as a young man he thinks is a nurse swipes a keycard through the double doors.

They creak as they push open. Shouto flinches slightly when they bang closed behind them. Izuku can't help but brush their hands together.

It makes his heart stutter in his chest slightly when Shouto's fingers chase his as he draws back before Shouto stuffs the hand in his pocket roughly as if it's offended him.

Izuku falters when the nurse opens the door to take Shouto to an examination room, eyes falling to his well-worn red sneakers, suddenly feeling quite out of place.

"What's wrong with me?" the next time he hears Shouto's name it's more urgent and spoken in a voice he doesn't know. It's barely concealed concern, accompanied with a flurry of shuffling and the cringey squeak of old wheels dragged across the tile.

As with many other times in his recent life, moving isn't a conscious effort. His feet carry him long
before an actual impulse reaches the muscles in his legs.

He isn't able to see Shouto until he's in the room, the other having taken his spot in the corner by the wall, seated on that same awful paper covered table that permeates Izuku's childhood memories.

He’s ashen when Izuku turns the corner, chest spasming beneath the fist clenched over his heart, fingers sparking, shirt smoking and coming apart under his touch. The machine is hissing beside him, a dark blue sleeve around his right bicep. His gym shirt is letting off dark puffs of smoke and his hair is fraying in the ambient heat.

“Shouto,” Izuku breathes, stepping forward. It’s like looking at a wild animal when Shouto looks up, eyes wide before they dart away again, eyeing the exit behind Izuku. “Hey, no. We have to do this. You want this right? You want it to stop?” Shouto’s lip is shredded as he drags it between his teeth again, chewing relentlessly. “We are all here for you. I’ll stay. If you want me to stay I’ll stay.”

Izuku closes his hands around Shouto’s right hand, the cold biting as he laces their fingers. Shouto looks at him, lip still a captive of his teeth but says nothing.

“It’s okay to want things. It’s okay to need people,” Izuku says softly, watching as his shadowed eyes slip closed, his brow pinched and warbled with all the weight of the feelings dragging him down. “It’s okay to cry.”

Shouto sniffs loudly, a wet, gross sound, the barest of nods shaking his two-toned hair.

“I’ll stay.”

Izuku is tired of seeing his friends like this. He didn't like seeing Iida cry after Hosu, or Kacchan break down after Kamino.

He's tired of seeing beautiful, innocent, kind (mostly) people be dragged through the mud.

At least the others had villains at fault.

Now it's the top hero, the man the country is relying on that's to blame.

To blame for making the boy who always stood so tall and so strong, who held up his classmates and occasionally made them laugh so conflicted and hurt. So unsure and frightened. He’s angry at the years of experience that have him crumbling at the thought of having to truly face it all. Reduced to raw panic at the idea of facing the man if this falls apart over their heads.

There are so many things he wants to do, to say, that are not legal… Retribution he wants to personally deliver.

But for now… He stays where Shouto needs him.

He stays even as he loses feeling in his fingers.

The only time he lets go is when they remove the charred remains of his top, replacing it with a periwinkle scrub top that looks very out of place coupled with his gym pants.

He holds a feverish hand through menial questioning.

The nurse seems to gather quickly that open-ended questions aren't going to go very well, and phrases as many as he can as yes or no ones.

“Have you ever been hospitalized?”
A nod.

“Are you allergic to anything?”

Headshake.

“Have you ever had a broken bone?”

A nod.

After about ten questions the nurse pauses, shuffling his feet a moment before pressing the clipboard to his chest. “Would you be more comfortable with a female staff member?” Izuku has to give him credit. He’s been patient with Shouto, with his nonverbal and slow responses. Never been harsh or irritated to the teen.

Izuku knows for a fact there are some that would not have behaved with such courtesy.

Perhaps it’s the restless symbol of peace in the back of the room. Or the harrowed look in mismatched irises when Shouto does make some sort of eye contact. Or maybe he’s a rare, genuinely caring individual.

Izuku thinks that one is much less likely.

Shouto sneaks a glance at his teachers, then one to Izuku, pursing his lips, tugging the abused skin between teeth before nodding again, a blush disappearing in the harsh rose hues of his scar.

The nurse flips his papers over and leaves, closing the door gently behind him.

Across the room, Aizawa has his arms crossed over his chest, bloodshot eyes tracking every twitchy movement All-might, Toshinori, he mentally corrects for the millionth time, makes.

He turns to Shouto, twisting on the horrid paper, half tempted to rip the shit off and let Shouto burn it, waiting for tired eyes to meet his.

"You told me once, what your new dream was," Izuku says quietly, a quick look showing him Aizawa and All-M- Toshinori, aren't paying them any more attention than a moment ago. "That you want to save your mom."

Shouto's eyes swim and Izuku is quick to continue, not wanting to let his overworked mind jump to more wrong conclusions.

“I think this is going to help her. When it’s over, I think it’ll help all of you.” Shouto’s next breath is shaky and warm, making stray hairs dance around his face, overgrown, one too many hair cuts missed.

Izuku slides a little closer, presses his side against Shouto's, against the pleasant heat drifting off of him in the just on the side of too cool room. Wraps his arm around his waist, feels the muscles twitch with every minute movement, every shudder, every breath. Feels where the temperature shifts, drawing goosebumps up his forearm.

They don’t stay in silence long. The next person that comes in is a middle-aged woman. Her badge has a blue stripe on it like the male before so he assumes she’s the new nurse. She has long dark hair tied back and streaked with grey, her bun bobbing when she turns to close the door, gently, twisting the knob before turning towards them, eyes just a couple shades warmer than her hair.
"I'm Haruka. I understand we have a sensitive matter that brings you all in today?" her eyes only briefly touch on the boys, lingering more on the two heroes in the corner.

"Here I thought we could avoid you," Aizawa mumbles.

"You know her?" Izuku watches Aizawa give the nurse an insufferable look, but it's more reminiscent of the one he gave Ms. Joke at their exams. Mildly fond even if he pretends it's not.

"You could say that." Haruka moves on, ignoring Aizawa's words and turns to Shouto. She sits on the rolling chair, wheeling over on a wide arc before she's sitting right in front of the teens basically at their eye level.

"Hello, Shouto," Izuku swears he sees a flash of pink over her irises as she looks at him, but when he blinks, it's nothing but hues of chocolate and honey.

Maybe it was a reflection?

Shouto's eyes are down, fingers twitching idly against Izuku's, his left leg restless, making the seat crunch every time his calf swings.

"I'm going to ask you some questions and then I'm going to do a physical exam. Now, I want you to listen and this is important. Right now, that information will only stay with us. My priority is your safety and whatever steps need to be taken to make that happen we can talk about before we do anything else. Do you understand?"

"Yes," his voice is quiet and hoarse, frankly terrible. But it still opens a can of fireflies in Izuku's chest.

She doesn't look at the clipboard, keeps it face down in her lap as she talks to him.

"Have you ever been hit by someone close to you, Shouto?" She waits patiently as he picks up the pencil, struggling slightly to settle it properly in the crooks of his fingers without letting go of Izuku's.

Yes. The letters are shaky with the jitters in his limbs. Haruka nods at the response.

"Within the year? You can point if it's the same answer."

He does.

"Has it been going on a long time?"

Yes.

"Do you feel like you are in danger at home?"

Shouto hesitates here, faltering several times before he writes.

No.

"Let me ask something different then. Do you feel safe at home?"

No.

"Do you worry for anyone else in your home?"
"What about outside of your home?"

Izuku doesn't miss the flash of teal as Shouto looks at him before answering again.

Yes.

"Have you ever been in a position at home where you feared for your life?"

As antsy as Shouto was before, he's a rock now. His leg stops, momentum pushing it to swing aborted little movements twice more before it falls still.

"Shouto?" She asks and it's there again, that glimpse of color.

Shouto doesn't write or speak. He just nods.

The rest of the series progresses similarly. She'll ask a couple of things that seem fairly obvious considering previous answers, then she'll say something that has him locking up again.

"Have you ever had thoughts of wanting to be dead or wishing you weren't alive?"

Shouto pauses, perhaps for the longest since they started questions with Haruka, but eventually, he points to the yes he'd written earlier.

Izuku feels his stomach drop. Almost has whiplash back to those days when he was younger. When there wasn't a kid around that didn't think he was an absolute waste of space.

To that day in middle school when Bakugo told him to do the things the dark corners of his mind whispered to him.

Who would miss you anyway? What could you accomplish?

"Have you had these thoughts in the last week?"

Shouto's fingers dance where they're perched on his knees.

His nod is slow and near imperceptible.

Maybe... Just maybe... Izuku is part of the reason Shouto is here now. Talking about what he's been through. Alive...

"Do you feel like you would act on these thoughts when you go to the dorms?"

Shouto's rebuttal comes quicker.

The questions get easier for a minute, less heavy, less painful. But it's only a brief respite.

"Can you tell me about the burn on your face?" She asks.

"It wasn't normal," Shouto's voice is barely above a whisper. "He's done a lot of things... But never just to hurt me."

"And the 'he' here, can you tell me who that is?"

Shouto shakes his head.
"It's alright. We can come back to that. Can I please get everyone to wait in the hall while I do a physical?" Shouto's hand tightens around Izuku's ever so slightly, so barely there it could have just been a tic. But Izuku sees the way Shouto's jaw locks, sees the concerned looks Aizawa and Toshinori both send their way.

"That's for your own comfort, Shouto," she says gently. "If you would prefer someone stay, or that we call someone to come be with you first we can do that."

For a moment, Izuku thinks he'll say to call his sister. Shouto has mentioned he's not exactly close with any of his siblings because of his father, but surely she would be a better pillar than Izuku. Than just Deku.

"Zuku," Shouto's looking at him, hesitant. Begging him mutely to understand without having to say it.

"Course," is the word that leaves his dry mouth.

He's not sure if he should feel special, or if the bitter taste on the back of his tongue is rightly placed. He can't even feel happy, his heart doesn't warm that Shouto is choosing him over his sister. He feels like someone dropped him in a lake in the dead of winter, the ice sealing seamlessly over his head, chilling his bones and diving down his throat, flooding his lungs and veins with icy claws.

Izuku always turned to his mother. Always had her to pick him back up and dust him off.

Shouto's been without his longer than he knew her.

"Oh, before you go," she says, scribbling something down before acknowledging the teachers. "Do we have concern for sexual assault?"

Izuku feels queasy.

Aizawa looks to Shouto, likely having not even thought of it. The same way Izuku hasn't. Shouto tilts his head, making the nurse repeat the ugly words. Shouto's eyes widen in a way that almost looks comical on his usually mild face before shaking his head. Haruka looks between each of them, studying them in turn before waving off the adults.

Aizawa and Toshinori leave silently, though Izuku is certain they won't wander far.

Once they're gone, Haruka asks Shouto to undress down to his boxers.

Izuku isn't sure where to stand as she checks circles the small table, checking his reflexes, shines a light in his ears and eyes, looks over every inch of his pale skin.

She uses the clipboard now. Making marks and notes.

She measures the burn on his face, the marks that curve around his jaw. Scrutinizes the angry coloring over his wrist. Every scar, every burn, she puts her pencil to the clipboard.

It's a long process.

They changed around each other near every day but Izuku never noticed the small things before. Not the light scars that litter the teen's body. Between the light color of the scarring and Shouto's complexion, they're easy to miss and Izuku doesn't often stare at his undressed friend. Never. Never stares at his undressed friend.
Never studies his ankles to see the roughed and slightly darker skin there. Or his wrists, often under his armbands or school sleeves.

Izuku doesn't want to be here anymore. His stomach has been uneasy since the sliding doors at the entrance but he's downright nauseated now, uneven and choppy waves of acid roaring in his gut.

"You can put the scrubs back on," Haruka says, graphite scratching on paper. "And you'll be happy to know we're almost done here."

Izuku sees Shouto slouch, a soft huff escaping his lips. He dresses mechanically, pulling the light top over his messy hair, slipping slender legs through his gym pants.

"Last thing we'll do in here is a vision test and then we'll go on for some x-rays and I should be able to let you go after that. We may have to follow up after the initial information is processed."

Shouto looks mildly like he's been electrocuted when Izuku looks back to him, fingers digging into the fabric of his pants.

"Shouto?" The worst seems to be over, so he's not really sure what in the blurb the nurse just said set him off again. Maybe the reality of it all is setting back in, that they are really going to do this.

"All right bud, just stand over here, cover your left eye and read these lines for me." Shouto does as she says, bare feet twitching on the cold tile, fingers restless on his right hand as it hangs by his side.

Shouto's voice is quiet as he recites the letters to a T. When she tells him to switch sides, Shouto just stands there.

"Shouto, I need you to do the same thing but with your other eye," Haruka says patiently.

He gets through two lines before he starts struggling. After the third, it's clear he's just guessing.

"Have you seen an optometrist recently?" Shouto shakes his head. Izuku shrugs out of his jacket when he notices Shouto trembling, draping it over the other's shoulders. "Well, I'm going to give you a referral. Have you noticed changes in your vision recently?"

"It's been like this a long time," Shouto says quietly, deliberately not looking at Izuku.

"Does your school know?"

"No. My father didn't want any special accommodations."

"You'll need a more thorough exam and by a specialist, but you seem to have a pretty serious deficit in your left eye. I'd have it looked at as soon as possible. They may be able to give you some kind of corrective aid. There's no need to make things harder on yourself."

Izuku slinks closer to Shouto, gently resting his hand on a warm shoulder. He doesn't miss the way Shouto jolts under his touch. He turns his head, peeking up at Izuku briefly before diverting his eyes again.

Izuku can't believe he never noticed before. The way he has to turn so far when anyone is on his left, the vicious way his father had attacked that side when he'd done his 'special appearance' at the school.

The time Izuku nearly gave him a concussion by kicking at his head from that side.

"If you'll just come with me we'll get some x-rays and then we'll get you guys out of here," she says,
opening the door, gesturing for them to walk out.

As he'd suspected, Aizawa and All-might did not go far, hovering at a bench not far from the exam room.

Shouto does not take his hand this time. Izuku doesn't press either.

Shouto is quiet and passive as Haruka asks him if he has any metal plates or screws anywhere. He's compliant, like a puppet doll having its strings pulled as she positions him in front of the machine.

Haruka pulls him into the observation room, closing the door tight behind them.

"He looks sad," she says quietly as the machine hums to life, the mouse making quick staccato clicks with the clack of the occasional keyboard press.

Izuku doesn't say anything, his bottom lip caught between his thumb and forefinger as he looks. Watches as she turns him again, raising his arm to get a view of his torso.

He doesn't look sad to Izuku. Not in the profound way he has in the past. Not even in the forlorn way Izuku has seen when he talks about his missed childhood or unforged bonds with his siblings.

He looks resigned. As if he's just given up. It's a blankness that's so far removed from the mask he plasters on when he's faltering.

"Have you known him long?" She asks after the third image.

He kind of wishes she wouldn't try and fill these spaces. He doesn't feel like making small talk.

"A year." She looks up at him after the last mouse click, mild surprise on her features. She looks younger, hunched over the desk, eyebrows arched and eyes wide, her pointer finger hovering the mouse.

"He trusts you a lot for such a short time," she straightens, not giving him time to affirm or deny the statement before the door is swinging behind her as she aligns a new shot.

Is it trust though?

When Shouto had first opened up, they'd been strangers. It had been expounding on his challenge, on his fixation.

But then it continued. It developed.

Their shadowed tunnel talk turned into a friendship. Turned into late nights where Shouto sat in the living room with his pillow clutched to his chest, talking about the few good memories he remembers of his mother.

How much he wants to be able to make more.

How afraid he is that he won't. That he'll forget what he does have.

Does he say these things out of trust? Out of a lack of options? Because Izuku is the only one who has an inkling of what happens when he's at home?

There was no reason for it to be Izuku in the beginning. Nothing about Izuku himself anyway.

Can he really say he's here because Shouto trusts him? Is that it? Why trust Izuku? Why trust
someone who's technically made all the wrong decisions regarding helping his friend. Who is fifteen years quirkless and barely controlling what he has.

He can't protect him.

He'd go down trying but he wouldn't succeed. Not against the league and not against Endeavor either.

Why should Izuku be trusted?

Shouto has bared his soul, raw and mangled by abuse and fear.

And Izuku lies to him. Everyday.

About who he is.

About why he and Katsuki had such issues at the start of term.

About his own childhood.

How do you explain being bullied and ostracized about being quirkless when you won't admit you're quirkless at heart.

What would he think of Izuku? Having not one, but two strong quirks, raised in a household where all that was valued was the strength of a quirk.

How would he feel to know Izuku didn't have one of his own? That what he does have is borrowed.

That he's been lied to, that while Shouto was letting go of secrets he's held in his heart for a decade, Izuku was clutching his with bloodied fingers.

Izuku knows he won't be able to keep it a secret forever.

Knows at some point the glass ceiling will break and all his classmates will know.

He's afraid at what they'll think too.

But for some reason, he's petrified of what Shouto will think.

Can almost feel his blood pressure rising thinking about the other boy shunning him the way Bakugo had when they were kids. Belittling him as the others had.

Of them telling him what he already thinks.

That he's not good enough for All-might's quirk. That if he wanted to do anything good, he'd give it to someone worthy of that power.

Someone like Mirio. Or Shouto. Or anyone.

He tries to think of the times Toshinori has reaffirmed that he made the right decision in choosing Izuku, that he valued something far more than just power, but it's drowned out by the negativity. By his long instilled doubts.

"We're done," Haruka says as she stands, sliding back in the rolling chair she hadn't sat in once.

She leads the way out, holding the door open for the two boys.
Shouto doesn't look at either one of them as he steps back into the light of the hallway.

They circle back through the maze of hallways until they see their teachers, bright blonde and faded black, perfect conflict sitting side by side, both morose.

"Can I talk to your teachers about your exam?" Haruka looks to Shouto, though Shouto makes no move to look at her. He shrugs at her but she shakes her head. "I need a yes or no." Shouto nods, slumping down onto the bench opposite the teachers.

"First off, I'm not sending anything anywhere yet. Give him the night to think this through--wait," she says, cutting off Aizawa before a syllable leaves his mouth. "I know. But this needs to be his choice. A high profile thing like this, it's going to get ugly fast. If he's not completely on board with everything that has to be done, this won't get anywhere. If he's not committed, they'll find some scapegoat and you'll have started something he won't ever outlive and for nothing. That's all I'm saying."

Aizawa doesn't say anything, just scowls at her. It's Toshinori who nods in understanding.

"Thank you for explaining," he says, pointedly nudging Aizawa with his bony elbow.

"Now, I'm not a specialist but I can say this, you have a lot of evidence. But, a lot of it is also circumstantial. There are pretty extensive burn scars on his wrists and ankles. Some light scarring over the expanse of his back.

Now, the key here is that the scarring is all extremely light. Indicating it was taken care of medically. Otherwise, they would be very red and angry.

"But, he doesn't have any admissions aside from the facial wound at six. If you can find whoever has been healing him off record and get them to testify, you'll have a much stronger case.

"Other things that need to be considered. He needs an ophthalmology consult as soon as possible. He's definitely got diminished sight in his left eye. I gave him a referral sheet, see that he gets that appointment. Now, what kind of supervision do you have in the dorms?"

Shouto shrinks in on himself, bringing his left foot up to rest on the bench, tucking his knee under his chin.

Toshinori looks confused, but Aizawa's charcoal eyes fall on Shouto. He's not angry, not even reproachful. Izuku isn't sure what he is.

"I live on the campus. Not in the dorms directly." Haruka taps her pen to her lips a few times.

"Well, if he's not fairly supervised, I'm tempted to admit him. Physically, he's fairly fine. Psychologically, I'm concerned."

"I'm not gonna hurt anyone," Shouto says quietly. Almost pitifully. The adults seem to share a look, but Shouto doesn't see it.

They're to his left.

"I was planning on moving his room regardless. I can take up temporary residence in the dorms. The right side of the second floor is unoccupied. I can move myself and Todoroki there. That way, his father doesn't know where he is, and I'm around should me or my quirk be needed. I don't think a psych admission is necessary."
Haruka pockets her pen, hands on her hips, clipboard held fast in one hand. "With all due respect, you aren't the professional."

"Neither are you. Either you're worried enough to have a doctor see him or he's fine to go. Pick."

"Drop your attitude with me Shota Aizawa. I'm not the one you're angry with." Aizawa glares at her, arms crossed, but says nothing for a good minute, Toshinori and Izuku look between the two, waiting for someone to tell them what's happening next. Shouto stares ahead, leg bouncing anxiously, but staying quiet. Subdued.

Izuku longs for the boy that spits foul words when things seem wrong, who isn't afraid to shut down bullshit, who can go toe to toe with Kacchan's attitude any day. Who always stands there protecting his friends, doing for them what no one did for him.

This Shouto... isn't who he knows. Almost a stranger wearing his friend's skin.

When Shouto looks at him, though. When he really looks, pleading with eyes whose colors don't match but whose needs do, he sees the shadow of the hero he's grown close with. Hidden behind the walls of fear and hurt.

Izuku will do anything to help pull him out again. To keep anything from shutting him behind those barriers. To never let him be hurt again.

"I trust you'll take care of him. I'm writing a psych referral as well. I think it would do good for him to see a therapist. Talk through some things before everything hits the fan. Our psychologist here is very good. If you have an outside one that's fine as well, but I can pull strings to get an appointment sooner if he chooses to see ours."

Izuku looks to Shouto who... doesn't seem to be listening. Maybe it's a good thing she's talking to Aizawa instead.

Maybe that's why she's talking to him instead. She can see Shouto has mentally checked out of this affair.

Toshinori looks concerned. Deeply shadowed eyes watching the two boys. Izuku wants to offer him some semblance of reassurance. Some note that they're okay. But... he can't lie. And he isn't sure.

Aizawa gives them both long looks before sighing deeply. If possible, it seems Aizawa aged a year for every hour they spent at this place. Perhaps two. At this moment, in this poor lighting and discrepant backdrop, he looks more Toshinori's age.

He comes to stand beside Shouto, stepping between the two teens, in front of Izuku, standing watchdog over his friend.

"Let's go home, kid," he says, resting a hand gently on Shouto's shoulder.

Izuku wishes for a moment he wasn't observant. That he could be oblivious for once in his life. That he could let some things slip. Things like the way Shouto jerks under the touch, despite how gentle it was. Or the tick in Aizawa's jaw, the hard glint in his dark eyes that Izuku knows is reserved for someone else, but that Shouto doesn't. Wishes he doesn't see the way Shouto shrinks back slightly before his back straightens, his spine stiffening beneath the weight heroes and villains and heroes who act like villains have placed on his young shoulders.

If only the world could have remained the way Izuku saw it when he was five.
Black and white and oh so simple. These were bad guys, these were good guys. The good guys didn't hurt their families and the bad guys didn't drag children into their feuds. Perhaps the latter had never been true, but when you're a child those things don't occur to you. When Izuku saw All-might saving people all those times on the television, he never thought of those he was too late for. Of those who never were reunited with family. Of the few who perished beneath the train, forgotten with the rubble.

Sometimes it's easy to forget, or to not notice.

He no longer has that luxury.

The ride to the dorms is quiet. Solemn. The city passes by in shadows and bright lights. Floodlights and inky darkness.

Occasionally, headlights will flood the cab, shedding light on Shouto, slouched against the side of the car. Still as a statue, the only give that he's awake the small glint Izuku sees pass over his eyes in these moments. The bright light makes his skin glow and it's almost opaque with its brief intensity, the flash of a ghost, a specter across the back seat.

Izuku does not touch.

He feels Shouto doesn't want it now.

Izuku does. Does as he suppresses a shudder with each passing car, each glimpse too close to a future that could have been.

Shouto, brave, strong, unshakable Shouto, feared for his life in his own house. From his own father, though he never spoke his name.

In another lifetime, in a place where Toshinori didn't choose Izuku, where he never made it to UA. Where Kacchan wasn't kidnapped and All-might's name carried on, persevered through more years, did Shouto as well? With a lifetime without respite, a timeline without Endeavor's rise to number one, what would his friend be? Would he be anything?

Izuku sucks his bottom lip between his teeth, fingers dancing across leather until they find warmth, tangling in its tendrils. The pads of his fingers tracing the slope of Shouto's palm, the flutter of his pulse on his wrist.

Izuku has drool leaking from the corner of his mouth when the front door slams, jarring him out of his half-asleep daze.

His fingers are still tangled with Shouto's.

Unfortunately, Shouto breaks the hold to unbuckle himself, stepping out of the car quietly, the door a low thud behind him. Izuku scrambles to not get locked in the vehicle and be forgotten.

Shouto hesitates at the doors, their wide glass panes reflecting the stars rising in the sky, glittering in the panes.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa's voice catches him, holding him in place like he'd used the capture weapon he’s so adept with, though when izuku turns he notices the item is absent completely. “Gather some things. You're moving too.”

“Me?” Izuku points at himself dumbly, eyes straining to look at Shouto, to seek the other’s gaze and opinion but he holds them straight. Keeping his gaze focused on their teacher.
“Haruka suggested it. Since you seem to be in the middle of this anyway,” he says pointedly, making Izuku want to shrink in on himself. He fights the instinct, squaring his shoulders and setting his jaw.

He’s still not sure he did the right thing, but if he hadn’t, he’s almost certain Shouto would be trying to deal with this alone right now.

For that alone, whatever punishment or berating he gets, he’ll take it.

“So we’re both moving?” Aizawa nods.

“Get your stuff and meet us in the lobby.”

"Are you going with Shouto?” Izuku asks, not failing to notice the rise of Aizawa's eyebrow.

“Hadn’t planned on it.”

“I’ll go with him,” Toshinori pipes up from where he’d been hanging back. Uncertain of his place now. “You can gather your things, Aizawa.”

“Right,” Aizawa drawls. Pulling his phone from his pocket, making a call as he walks away, his other hand fiddling with something in the pocket of his pants.

Izuku hesitates. Toshinori is a lot of things, but he’s basically quirkless now. Quirkless and new to dealing with teenagers. Much less a rather distraught one.

“All-might,” Izuku says quietly, catching the tall man’s attention before he passes. “It’s not your fault. What’s happened. He needs support right now. Not pity and not to shoulder your misplaced guilt.”

Toshinori’s eyes, shockingly bright beneath their shadows and the veil of night widen, bright cerulean shining with barely held tears.

“So wise for your age, Young Midoriya,” Toshinori says quietly. “In some ways,” he adds, patting his back gently.

Izuku nearly rolls his eyes. Even now, without his quirk, without his strength and muscle, he puts Izuku at ease. Even though truly, Izuku knows in the case of an emergency or of a villain attack any one of his classmates, himself included, would be more capable of defending.

But still.

There’s something in his presence, in his aura and his smile, that makes Izuku think it’s going to be okay.

Something he, nor anybody else, got from Endeavor.

Least of all his own family...

Izuku trudges up the stairs, the common room surprisingly empty, almost ghostly in its quietness.

“So you two didn’t die, huh?” A phone flashlight gleams in his eyes, making him squint and cringe away. The light disappears. A blur of a shape slips over the back of the couch. Izuku rubs at his eyes, trying to force away the lingering glare. “How’d it go?”

"As well as you can guess,” Izuku mumbles at Bakugo's familiar voice. Gruff irritation masking the small semblance of concern he's willing to show.
"Where is he now?"

"With Toshinori," Izuku grumbles, the stars finally receding, showing him Bakugo's shadow-strewn face, the pout of his mouth and notorious slouch of his shoulders.

"The fuck is he doing with All-might?" Izuku frowns, pushing his lower lip out.

"Can you chill for five minutes. He's helping him get his stuff."

"Is he leaving? Don't tell me the fucker was serious about dropping out, I'll kill him for being a sniveling shit," Bakugo growls, moving to step past Izuku. It speaks loads to their relationship that a simple warning touch to the blonde's shoulder makes him stop, crimson eyes sliding to look at Izuku out of his peripheral, eyebrows arched in question.

That he stops before he gets an answer. That he doesn't immediately demand it.

"He's moving rooms. He's not leaving UA."

"Why?"

"The nurse we saw wanted him near a teacher."

"Are they worried Endeavor is gonna storm the place? He may be a brick shithouse but he ain't stupid." Izuku chews his cheek.

It really isn't any of Bakugo's business.

Also knowing Bakugo though, he'll just harass Shouto until he's given his answer. Izuku huffs deeply.

"It's... not that."

"But it's something," Bakugo's gaze is intense, analytical. For all he acts like a meathead, he's incredibly bright. Observant.

The only one he seems unable to read well is Izuku himself.

"Yeah," is all Izuku ends up offering, eyes roving over to the stairs, wondering how Toshinori is doing with Shouto. If Shouto's okay.

"Do they seriously think he's gonna kill himself over this? Icyhot's dramatic but he's not... He wouldn't actually.." His confidence falters, words fading off into question.

"I don't know. His whole life is upside down. I don't know what I'd do. He's a mess, Kacchan."

Izuku sounds pitiful and he knows it. He's not the one who's been through the wringer today, what right does he have to cry?

His tears don't care though, the first falling to the tile, shining dimly in the poor light.

"He's stronger than that." Bakugo's voice is firm. "You know it. And if he goes kickin' the bucket I'm gonna kill him twice."

He's wrapped in strong arms that smell faintly like gasoline and smoke, dry, stiff hair scratching at his cheeks.

Izuku doesn't know when Bakugo hugged him last.
He's not sure there ever was a first time.

"I don't know how Kirishima stands your hair," Izuku says quietly. He doesn't get a reply though. Not to what he said.

"You are too. Stronger." Izuku hears Bakugo swallow, feels the deep inhale against his own chest. "And I never should have told you to jump off a building."

"You were an ass," Izuku's voice warbles, tears streaming freely now. Bakugo makes a disgusted sound in the back of his throat and let's go, punching Izuku lightly on the shoulder.

"Don't push it. And you're gross. Wipe your snotty ass nose before you go cuddle your boyfriend."

"He's not my boyfriend," Izuku says through his sleeve as he cleans his face.

"And I don't make Kirishima hard."

"Kacchan!" Izuku squeals.

"His quirk," Bakugo clarifies, heading up the stairs. "Maybe," he adds before jogging up the rest. Leaving Izuku to sputter in solitude.

"Gross."

--

Todoroki is quiet as they climb the stairs, shoulders set in a slump far steeper than his usual slouch. His hands fumble with his keys when they stand outside his dorm door. The boy spits a curse as his fingers continue to fight him, uncooperative and shaky.

Toshinori extends his own slender hand.

"Let me help," he offers, hooking the ring between a bony finger, pushing the key in. He's surprised when it doesn't turn.

"The other one," Todoroki mumbles.

Toshinori looks at the key as he pulls it out, noting the small 'I' scratched on the smooth silver metal.

Young Midoriya... Will you ever stop breaking rules?

The second key turns the lock.

Todoroki hangs back when Toshinori opens the door.

His hands fist and relax three times before he steps in, kicking off his shoes in the entrance. He stares at them a moment before sweeping them haphazardly aside with his foot.

The boy looks around for a moment, eyeing his things.

His phone is on the nightstand. A small light at the top flashing.

Messages perhaps?

Todoroki walks over, his steps silent. He dodges one spot just beside his closet, a quick sidestep before picking up the device.
Curious, Toshinori wanders casually to that area, lets his weight fall on the flooring, a loud creak sounding as he does.

Todoroki's shoulders twitch.

Not three seconds later, Todoroki rears back and launches his phone into the wall, the glass front shattering on impact and clattering to the floor.

Toshinori does not jump. He does jolt.

Ice creeps up the boy's cheek, dulling the color of the fresh burn at the edges.

He walks swiftly, calmly, past Toshinori. His face would give nothing away at a glance, though Toshinori can see how tightly his jaw is clenched.

He slides open the doors to his closet, reaches to the top where a duffel sits and slings it over his shoulder, snatches up his school bag by the futon and heads for the exit.

He has his shoes on and is out the door before Toshinori has a mind to follow.

He picks up the boy's phone on the way out, catching young Todoroki on the platform between floor five and four.

--

Aizawa is already in the lobby when Izuku makes it back down with his bag of belongings. So are Shouto and Toshinori, Izuku notices when he descends the final step.

Shouto looks utterly dejected and Izuku thinks Aizawa might be giving his best impression of a disappointed mom to Toshinori.

Aizawa huffs a breath before addressing him.

"Are you both ready?" Izuku nods, Shouto... does nothing. Aizawa leads them up the stairs, around the bend of boys' rooms, unlocking a door that hangs open on every other floor.

"Midoriya, you're in 2A, Todoroki, 2B, I will be in 2C and tomorrow Amajiki Hadou and Togata will be taking up temporary residence in the case of another villain or civilian attack. Midnight will be taking up 2D," Aizawa hands them each a key as he states their respective assignments. "You don't officially live here, no school record will show your rooms anymore. No one is touching my students again."

Shouto purses his lips but doesn't say anything.

Izuku... is a little shell shocked. He's not sure he's ever heard his teacher so vindictive.

"Todoroki," Aizawa says, standing outside his new residence, a dark military style bag over his shoulder. "I'm a light sleeper and I don't sleep much. You won't bother me. Remember that." Shouto nods quietly, though Izuku is ninety percent sure the last thing Shouto is willing to do right now is wake their teacher for emotional support.

Izuku opens his own door, peers inside to see the same furniture he has in his room on the other side of the building minus the All-might comforter that's hung over his shoulder that delightfully no one commented on.

He supposes there are much bigger things going on than his obsessive tendencies.
Izuku turns around, sees Shouto staring at the key in his palm and Izuku extends his hand, holding it out to the other boy.

Shouto is hesitant to take it, but once his hand slinks into Izuku's his grip is ironclad and desperate. Clinging to Izuku.

"Come on, we can watch a movie. I brought my laptop."

Izuku walks them in, heaving his comforter onto the bed and shucking his bags. Unfortunately, getting rid of his backpack means letting go of Shouto's hand.

Izuku reclaims it when their bags are shed haphazardly in the floor. Izuku climbs into the bed, higher than his he notices and starts pushing up the blankets, throwing his comforter behind him. Shouto clammers in beside him, his thigh cold even beneath his gym pants.

"Is that comfortable?" Izuku asks, pointing at the scrub top Shouto has on. The other boy shrugs.

Izuku hops out of bed, tearing off his stupid gym top because the zipper without fail makes a mark on his face when he sleeps in it and shucks on a hoodie, tearing into his bag for a shirt for Shouto.

He settles on a long sleeve baby blue shirt with a hood and silly little drawstrings.

It's always been a little big on him so it should fit Shouto's taller form fine.

Izuku climbs back in the bed, failing once, making Shouto grab his shoulder and help haul him up. Izuku flops down, shaking them both and places the shirt in Shouto's lap.

"It's more comfortable than that I promise. If I'm wrong you can braid my hair."

A smile tries to overtake Shouto's face, but it doesn't quite make it.

It's... uncomfortably disappointing, to watch the rise but not see the crescendo.

Shouto pulls off the scrub top by the neck, his back stretched out right in front of Izuku, inches away. Pale skin crisscrossed and speckled with scars.

Izuku reaches out, brushing a line of thicker scarring that goes across his rib and around his front.

"You're so strong, Shouto," Izuku whispers, lets his head drop onto the other's bare shoulder. "I'm proud of you. What you did today. What you do every day."

Shouto sniffs, long fingers wrapping around Izuku's and tugging them away.

He pulls the shirt over his head, tugging the hood up and over his hair.

"I'm not."

"You should be." Izuku laces their fingers together.

"Do you hate me?" Shouto's fingers twitch between Izuku's, a pulse of warmth darting along his freckled skin.

"Never."

"I can't even fucking see right. I-I look like I've been mauled. I feel angry and scared and sad and I don't know why. It's like something in me snapped. I'm just fucked up and broken now." Drops of
sapphire stain the hoodie, tears saturating the color as they fall.

"I don't care. You're still beautiful to me. I'll bet you my... six dollars and eleven cents that every girl in our class will still have a crush on you whether you come in with glasses or shirtless or anything." Shouto shudders as Izuku wraps him up in his arms, slouching to slot them together more comfortably. Izuku tugs on the comforter, no small amount of effort to pull it free and toss it over their heads, making their own space. Their own corner of the world. Untouchable. Safe. "You're allowed to feel. All of those things. I'm sad and angry and frustrated too."

Shouto scoffs.

"I am. I'm sad to see you sad, to see you hurting. I'm angry someone you should be able to trust is the reason you're sad. And I'm frustrated I can't just make it better. I can't use my quirk to push it away or punch it off of you. But I can be there for you. And I'm gonna. Until you tell me you've had enough of my mumbling and my hair in your nose."

"I like your mumbling," Shouto says, relaxing against Izuku's chest. "It's soothing."

"You're amazing Shouto. You really are. You're trying to be a hero. You're kind and sweet. You're strong and you listen. You learn and adapt. You're gonna get through this." Shouto snuggles in closer, breaths cool against the hollow of Izuku's neck.

"They say pressure makes coal into a diamond," Shouto makes a tired, inquisitive sound. "It's the same with people. If you have the right stuff going in, you're gonna be breathtaking when it's over."

"That's bullshit," he slurs.

"Maybe. But I like to believe it."

He talks awhile longer, meaningless, mindless things, steering clear of anything even vaguely related to Endeavor or Shouto's recently found brother.

It still amazes him, how brothers from the same household, same parents, similar circumstance turned out so different.

How one can raze forests without blinking, threaten children and incinerate people in alleys on the spot and the other...

The other is so... amazing. Won't back down from helping someone, won't take shit from people who want to belittle others, won't even hesitate to give a friend his all. He's the most selfless, pure, beautiful, moral person Izuku thinks he's ever known.

If Shouto ever gets in trouble as a pro, it'll be for stuff like Stain. Helping someone even if the law wasn't technically on his side. That's just how he is.

Some of that may have been mumbled against Shouto's forehead, he's not really sure. Izuku feels exhaustion in his marrow at this point.

Does exhaustion give you rose colored glasses too? Does it make things inherently more lovely? Because Izuku doesn't think he's ever seen anything lovelier than Shouto, mouth parted with small snores passing, eyelids fluttering gently and brows relaxed, curled in sleep on Izuku.

Izuku falls asleep like this, with Shouto pressed against him, his right side curled into him, Izuku's All-might memorabilia comforter over their heads, legs tangled together. The lights aren't off and
they are both in their gym pants, but it might be the best sleep either of them has had in weeks.

Next time:

"Todoroki," Aizawa says calmly, beckoning him back to the classroom. "You're under a lot of stress the faculty think it's best if you take a break from hero studies or awhile."

"I don't need a break," he hisses. Aizawa sighs, flattening his palms on the desk.

"The district gave us an order. You can't return to hero course work without a course of therapy. I'm sorry."

"You can't keep doing this! It's not healthy!"

"No one said you had to watch!"

"Fine!"

"I don't need you, Midoriya."

"I just, need some space for a bit, Todoroki."

"How do you lose a teenager?!"

"I'm here to see my son."

Chapter End Notes

I'm gonna start by saying these chapters are probably gonna stay coming out at a slower rate. I've hit the part of this fic where things start getting really tedious. I've already done a ton of research but putting it all together and navigating the timing is going to be
difficult for me. On top of that my mood has been very odd lately. I thought this entire chapter was some of my worst work and was shocked when my beta told me this chapter came back strong and was really good.

So, you know. Let me know what you think, things are sort of going to get better at this point for Shouto, but he has a lot of healing to do before he really FEELS any better. Thanks all who have stuck around, I can't believe we're almost at 80k. I treasure every comment and kudos dropped here <3

-Jasey
(tumblr is now protect-baby-shouto@tumblr.com, twitter is still all-time-low3st, feel free to drop by)
When Shouto woke up in the morning, or at least he thought it was morning, he felt like shit.

His head pounded and his tongue was sticking to his mouth, dry and overlarge and *annoying*.

He rolls over, or rather, he tries to, immediately halted by a retaining wall of muscle laid out beside him. He forces his crusty eyes to open, the light piercing his brain and making him wince before his pupils adjust.

He leans back on his elbow, letting his right eye focus on the sleeping teen beside him, mouth open, a bit of drool leaking out of the corner. 

*Izuku.*

This room lacked Izuku’s trademark memorabilia and clutter, but they *were* wrapped in his comforter.

It took too long to remember, for his brain to piece together the fractured bits it had tried to shield him from.

*Enji.*

*The festival.*

*Touya.*

*The hospital.*

He shoots up in bed, hunching over his knees. He can almost feel his blood slow in his veins, each cell freezing and congealing, clogging his vessels and leaving his fingers numb and his face hot. His breath is stolen from him, engulfed by the burn, for once not a quirk, but despair. All consuming and unyielding, unforgiving and unrelenting.

*Everyone knows.*

His heart does a stutter step, too reminiscent of the days he’d tried to starve himself when he was younger and his chest would feel like it was crumbling in, a black hole opening in the back of his
spine and sucking in everything inside him.

Movement beside him has his hand reflexively pulling up, guarding his face.

“Get off the ground before I give you a reason to stay down.”

“Useless boy. You won’t even make it as a sidekick. You’re weak. Pathetic. A waste of my time.”

“Shouto?” His name snaps him like a rubber band. Yes, Shouto is his given name. But no one ever calls him that. Classmates and teachers call him Todoroki.


Never Shouto. Not at home.

Shouto’s stomach feels hollow, flipping and groaning.

“Hungry?” Izuku asks lightly. Shouto makes a conscious effort to drop his hand, arms wrapping around his chest, trying to reign in the flutter of his ribcage, at war with the heaving breaths and skipping heart that pounds in his ears, threatening to drown out the soft whispers. “Hey, what’s wrong?” Izuku scoots closer, his thigh pressing against Shouto’s, his breath blowing the wild strands around Shouto’s face.

They stick in the sweat that beads on his temple. Every organ feels like it’s attacking him.

His stomach cramps and his shoulders ache; his neck strains with every desperate heave but nothing alleviates the burn.

“Everyone knows,” Shouto manages to wheeze out even as his throat spasms. Rough hands cover his, almost burning him with their heat.

“You need to breathe,” Izuku says quietly, shuffling so that he’s sitting in front of Shouto, his collarbones peeking out from under the faded nightshirt at the center of Shouto’s view.

Izuku pulls Shouto’s hands away from the clawing grip he has on his own arms, maneuvering so that they’re pressed against Izuku’s broad chest instead.

“Feel?” He urges, ducking his head to try and catch Shouto’s eyes.

Shouto just drops his gaze lower.

He doesn’t need the confirmation he’s been seen as this weak, inconsolable lump.

He feels like an infant.

“Can you feel my breathing?” Izuku takes a deep inhale, his chest expanding beneath Shouto’s numb fingers, spread out as they are under Izuku’s palms. “Try and match it for me.” Shouto keeps struggling, his chest fluttering under the weight of an invisible anvil.

It’s impossible.

His skin feels tight, his bones ready to pop through at every point and crease.

This is hell.

He’s known panic.
He's usually had it stomped out of him. Sometimes literally.

But he just can't seem to reign anything in. The heart he'd locked away is ready to burst through his ribcage, his lungs that have so often panted and gulped on the floor of their dojo are shriveled like old balloons, his stomach has lead in his gut, bile climbing higher with every failed gasp.

He feels like crying or screaming or dying. Maybe all at the same time.

"Come on Shouto, look at me," Izuku urges, rough fingertips pressing under his chin, making his head raise, gaze meeting blobs of green, color swimming in the tears clouding his eyes.

He blinks them away and they burn as they fall down his cheeks, flaring the same way his shame does.

Earnest green comes into focus, darker than jade in the dim light, curls in a mad halo around Izuku's head.

"Keep my pace, you can do it. It's your breathing, you can control it. I know it doesn't feel like it but your lungs will listen. I promise." Izuku squeezes Shouto's hand, his skin warm and shirt soft.

Black spots creep into his vision, blacking out the blur that's perpetually the left side of his sight, each pulse of shadow spiking like a skewer in his brain.

Izuku squeezes again. Shouto's hands feel cold, even his left.

*It hurts.*

His head feels light and bright stars dance around the dark blots. He feels like he's floating and being crushed at the same time.

His legs are numb, dead weight below his waist. He couldn't run from this if he tried.

He's *useless*.

His fingers are tingling and he still can't breathe.

"Shouto, come on. It's going to be okay. You know everyone, no one's going to think differently of you."

*They will.*

"I don't."

*Not yet.*

"Shouto come on, you're scaring me," edge creeps into the soothing tone, sharpness on the other side of kindness.

*Yesterday I burned him.*

*Now he's scared of me.*

*He'll hate me.*

*He'll leave. Like everyone else.*
"Don't hate me for this," Izuku's voice echoes. Tossed and turned with the waves roaring in his ears, pounding on his eardrum.

He's not even sure if it was spoken or not. He can't tell.

His senses are overloaded with too much and not enough at the same time, expanding and shriveling.

The image of a star exploding comes to mind, unstable and volatile and doomed to end.

He barely registers Izuku's hands leaving his chest.

He feels them like ice trailing over his cheeks, fire ravaging in their wake.

“Don’t hate me for this,” its sturdier this time, or closer.

The ghost of a syllable is on his tongue, a breath or an exhale.

But he doesn’t think it’s his own.

Then dry lips press against his mouth, cracked and sticky as it feels, grinding everything to a halt.

Izuku’s knees bump his own and his thighs are white hot where they meet Shouto’s.

_Did I die?_

Izuku’s hands cradle his jaw, his own heavy pulse pounding beneath the scarred fingers.

_Is this mouth to mouth?_

Shouto’s chest burns.

He’s not gasping anymore.

But he still feels like he’s drowning, just in a different sense.

In seas of green, fluff, and softness. In tenderness instead of despair.

Izuku moves away, sitting back on his heels, face twisted up in nerves.

An exhale whistles past Shouto’s lips, his right hand touching his mouth, chasing the phantom tingles that fade with each beat of his heart.

“It was all I could think of,” izuku says quietly, cheeks kissed by angels and airbrushed by scarlet.

“Why?” Shouto’s voice is hoarse and the words scratch painfully as their dredged up.

_Why did you stop_ is a thought he immediately stomps on, grasping it by the neck and burying it somewhere it can’t possibly slip out.

"You're going to laugh," Izuku settles back, resting on his heels. "I saw it on tv once. A bad American drama." Izuku's face is blood red, his freckles standing out in sharp contrast.

"Which one?" Shouto doesn't know why he asks. He's barely watched TV in his life. His father rarely allowed it and when he did it was news programming, not entertainment. That was a waste of time to his father.
"Teen Wolf," Izuku mumbles, eyes downcast. Shouto watches his lips, watches them shape the syllables and watches his teeth worry the bottom one. He doesn't know what to say.

All he knows is he can breathe.

"Thank you." Green eyes shadowed in blown pupils shoot up to meet Shouto's gaze, eyebrows disappearing in his hairline before settling into something soft and fond.

It's seconds, maybe minutes, Shouto isn't sure, that they sit there, just looking at each other. Shouto tries not to stare, letting his eyes wander over the expanse of increasingly tan skin and ever-multiplying freckles.

He thinks he could pass hours making up constellations in those angel kissed cheeks. Maybe Izuku could make up the stories to go with them, lord knows Shouto has no imagination.

His was squashed as a child. As was any artistic inclination.

Where other kids painted and drew and parents hung their, admittedly, crummy art on the fridge or in frames, the first and only picture Shouto ever did draw went up in flames, laid to ash in the floor of the kitchen.

"Heroes have no need for art, boy. Support will design your costume, your job is to fight. Come on."

Shouto's blinks, his feet coming into focus, still blanket wrapped and tangled in warmth. Comfortable warmth. Not oppressive heat... just warm. He rubs at his left eye, vainly hoping that at some point he'll know the rods and cones back into functioning, that maybe he's just had tears or sand blocking it for years and one day he'll be able to just... see again. To not have a third of his eyesight diminished to blurs of color and incoherent blobs. To have peripheral vision on that side again.

He tries not to sigh when blinking doesn't fix the resolution in the world.

When he looks up again, Izuku is still watching him, something unfamiliar on his face.

Shouto doesn't ask, doesn't have a chance to because his own stomach growls, making Izuku chuckle softly.

"Hungry?" Shouto vaguely remembers him asking before he'd lost his shit. Before he'd made a fool out of himself in the bedroom.

Will he do that downstairs too? Will everyone in the dorm have to see what he's fallen to? The mess he's always been on the inside, laid out for everyone to see?

He can feel his heart thrumming, each thought sending it revving into a higher gear.

"Hey, I can bring something up if you wanna stay here?"

A lazy thunking draws both of their attention to the door, not even able to call out for someone to come in before the knob turns and Aizawa peeks through, his eyes somehow even redder than the night before.

That's my fault.

"Are you two going to stay in here all day?" His voice is gruff and worn, shoulders carrying every hour he'd stayed up during the night as a ten-pound weight.

"I was going to get us some food," Izuku says, hopping down off the bed, his feet hitting the ground
softly. When he reaches Shouto's side, he takes his left hand, squeezing softly. "I'll be back."

Shouto doesn't know why he's saying that. He's not a child. He knows when Izuku leaves he's not disappearing from the earth. He tries to ignore the heat building in his chest, red hot and fierce, flaring and lashing, making his eyebrows draw down and his hand pull away not all that gently.

Izuku's lips purse, but he says nothing, the door clicking shut quietly behind him.

"That was friendly," Aizawa says and Shouto doesn't look up, doesn't care enough to see if he's talking about the familiarity or Shouto's temper. "Have you thought about what we talked about last night?"

"No," Shouto answers honestly. He hasn't thought of anything except how much of a fucking embarrassment he is. How he's not even sure how he's going to go to class on Monday and face his classmates. How he's supposed to act like his life is normal when everyone knows it's not. How he's supposed to look at people with confidence when all they're going to see is a broken, beaten child. How he's going to keep from lashing out when he sees pity in every pair of eyes that look at him. That head tilt and fake frown, the shoulder touches and well wishes.

The strangers on the busses will have a whole new reason to gawk at him. No longer because they expect him to be strong and great because of his father, but because they expect him to be unhinged and damaged because of him.

At this point, Shouto isn't sure what he is. If he's either of those things, if he's anything at all.

Aizawa grunts and drops himself heavily on the edge of the mattress.

When did he cross the room?

"I know a lot has happened, and that right now you probably just want to hole up and pretend it isn't happening, but it is. And there are some things that, if we're going to do them, we need to get the wheels moving for." That burn flares again.

"I don't want to do anything. I just want things to be like they were." He sounds petulant and he knows it, knows this is the kind of thing his seven-year-old self said, knows it's the kind of thing he got a swollen cheek for.

"Sorry kid. I won't let that happen."

"Why do you care?!" Shouto snaps. "It's been eleven years and I survived. Just send me back." He doesn't really know where this temper, where this anger has come from but he feels like he's being incinerated from the inside. Every bit of him that's left, that hasn't already been gutted and thrown on the floor is crusting up and melting, turning to ash and cinder in his torso.

"Put yourself in my place. Would you send Midoriya to a home where he was being beaten? Or Iida? Kirishima maybe? Anyone in your class? In any class?" Shouto clenches his fists, nails carving crescents into his palms. The pain makes him squeeze harder, teeth grinding because of course, he wouldn't. He wouldn't wish what he's been through on anyone. Not even Bakugo who's always rubbed him the wrong way, or Inasa who told him he was like his father. Not even on Shigaraki or Stain. "Would you?"

"No, okay?! No. I wouldn't, but I'm not them," Shouto doesn't remember standing up but he is. His hands and feet are tingling and cold, heart racing and he's angry. They don't know him, none of them do. They don't understand.
"Why? You're my student, you're a hero in training. How are you fundamentally different?"

"Because I'm not worth anything. I break everything and I'm doing it here too." Hot tears tumble down his face. He still feels the furnace in his gut, the anger simmering yet he's crying. Am I just completely broken now? "Everyone is going to come down on this school."

"Let them. We failed you. We did. That's on us. We should have seen this sooner but we didn't. And I'll be damned if I let it continue. You don't have to help us arrest him, you don't even have to let us do it. But come hell or high water you aren't going back to that house. I've already talked to Nedzu and most of the faculty. We'll find ways. We're creative."

"You don't need to be creative. Useless talent."

"No one listens to me. I want to go back!" He's full on yelling now and he's still god damn crying.

"Do you? Do you really want to go back to that man? I can't make you do anything. I really can't. It's not in my power and it's not ethical. But look me in the eye and say that's what you want."

Shouto can't. He can't even meet the man's eyes while he's acting like this, crying and throwing a tantrum over nothing. Because he's right. He doesn't want to go back. But he doesn't want this either. He doesn't want to live under a microscope and he doesn't want to be in the spotlight. He wants to be normal again, as normal as he ever was.

His legs feel like jello beneath him and in the first step he takes he buckles, sinking to the floor in a heap, sobs wracking through him, rattling his ribcage and tearing through his throat.

"We just want to help you."

"I'm helping you. Quit being an ungrateful brat. You'll thank me someday."

"Shouto?" Izuku again.

Ice crystals climb up his arm, flames lick at his cheek for an instant. The power swells inside of him, filling the bubble in his soul until it's ready to burst, and then it's gone.

If he could see beyond the haze of tears and destroyed vision he's sure he'd see his teacher using his own quirk to suppress the violence that was about to burst free.

"I can't do this," he says quietly, his voice breaking.

How is he supposed to stand up to his father? To anyone?

"Yes you can," Aizawa walks up, crouching in front of Shouto. "If you want to, you can. Look, kid, I don't know how hard this is for you, but I know you're strong. Stronger than he is. And you're not alone."

Tears dribble onto the carpet, his lungs stuttering in his chest.

"We're gonna help you, Sho," Izuku says quietly, his weight settling next to Shouto.

They must make a picture, huddled on the hardwood floor instead of any of the reasonable sitting surfaces.

"The others... in class... they know." Izuku's hand rubs up and down his back, gently, slowly.
"Yeah." A low whine forces it's way up from his chest.

This isn't how he wanted things to happen. How is he supposed to face them all?

"Not pressing charges isn't going to make that go away," Aizawa says lowly. "It just lets him get away with it."

It's harsh, but Shouto knows it's true. The topic may piddle out quicker if he lets it drop, if he chooses not to try and convict his father. But it won't stop what Dabi said. It won't stop media or classmate speculation. It won't erase anyone's memory.

It won't.

What it could do...

It could free him. It could let him finally breathe.

It could save his mother.

It'd stop the awkward long sleeves and making excuses for injuries he got at home. It could stop all the lying...

"Can I talk to my sister? Can she come here? Please?"

No matter what he chooses, he's not the only one that this is going to affect.

"We aren't trying to pressure you kid. You can talk to her, we should probably talk to your mom too. I just want you to understand inaction doesn't make it go away."

"Why momma?" Shouto doesn't want to involve his mother. She's been through enough with that man. She doesn't need to have to deal with this too. He doesn't want people to blame her. It wasn't her fault.

"Because," Aizawa rubs his hand over his face, the increasingly puffy skin dragging. "We want to stack as much stuff on Enji as possible. They may not take her word for much unless we can somehow discredit the eleven years of hospitalization, but it could happen. Or she could be called as a witness. It's going to be complicated and it's going to get messy."

Shouto feels his lips pull down, feels Izuku's hand still against his back. His chest tightens again, his rib-cage shrinking around his lungs.

"Toshinori is having Tsukauchi gather a task force of people he can trust. If you do want to do this."

Shouto doesn't know what to do. Either path sounds horrid. He doesn't even have a guarantee that on the other side of dragging his family through hell is a good outcome. That courts would actually do anything. Who's going to prosecute the number one hero? Is he selfish for wanting that? For taking away a good hero?

"I'm going to go get your sister. Midnight will be here in my stead. Don't break anything." Aizawa stands then, but not before putting a gentle hand, far softer than Shouto could have thought possible, and squeezing. The door clicks shut and Shouto's hand drifts to trace the lingering tingle.

He feels like he's adrift at sea, being bashed between emotions, fear, and sadness, brief moments of joy and pain.
The touch felt nice when it happened, reassuring, kind. But now it feels like withdrawal.

"Do you want something to eat?" Izuku's voice sounds just beside him, on his left, his hand moving from Shouto's back to his shoulder, twitching slightly when it makes contact with Shouto's fingers, but staying there, overlaying his own. "Please?"

Shouto can't speak. His lips wobble, oscillating between a grimace and a smile, tears threatening to overrun again. He can still taste the salt on his lips from earlier.

*When did I start crying this much?*

*He would kick my ass if he saw me like this.*

Shouto's shoulders shudder, a combination of Izuku pulling away to get the breakfast he'd abandoned when he'd seen Shouto in distress and the thought of being home with that man again.

Dabi - Touya - mentioned Toga had 'slipped' Enji something.

He wonders if that's the push behind his face being marred. The anger that had been out of place even on the most aggressive hero society has seen.

If maybe things can be his old normal again if he just lets this all go. Blames the villain and halts it all in his tracks.

Or Shouto will take the brunt of any frustration Endeavor has that Shouto even considered dragging his name through the mud. That he'd be punished for not stopping Touya before he was able to say any of that. That he'll be 'trained' out of the weakness that had him freezing in the face of a known enemy. Standing there like he hasn't had a full year of advanced hero course work. Like he hasn't been preparing all his life for those kinds of moments, only to flounder miserably.

His father is going to be so angry.

The door opens again as Izuku sits cross-legged in front of Shouto, a forkful of eggs held out in front of him.

"How are we doing?" Her raven hair is pulled back more than Shouto has ever seen it, her crimson framed glasses perched on her nose, a loose long sleeve sweatshirt and jeans on her thin frame. She's also not wearing shoes as she walks in his, Izuku's, whoever's room this technically is.

"Not the best..." Izuku says quietly, lowering his forkful, his mouth turned down. Shouto can't stand the sad slant to those serphenite colored eyes. Even in the midst of his life literally falling apart he can't stand to see Izuku upset over something he can so easily fix.

Just like that morning that feels like it belongs in a different lifetime but that Shouto realistically knows was only a few days ago, he bites down on food that tastes like ash and swallows past the bile that creeps up his throat.

"Quite a rough few days, huh." Shouto doesn't quite resist the urge to snort at her glaring understatement. Well, it's not like bad manners are going to make this any better or worse for him.

He swallows another bite of food. It sticks in his throat and fights the whole way down, aching as he dry swallows around it.

"Have you thought about what you want to do?" She leans against the wall, slides down it until she's sitting at the baseboards, her legs crossed Indian style, hands folded placidly in her lap.
"Of course," Shouto's voice is raw when he speaks. Izuku presses a cold cup in his hand, nudges it forward even as the condensation slips in Shouto's grasp. He takes a deep gulp, barely not choking on it, his esophagus spasming around the poorly swallowed sip, sputtering in his pitiful attempt not to spit it out.

"I've thought it over and over and over. There doesn't seem to be a right answer." Shouto knows there are right answers depending on who you ask, but he thinks each one will give him a different one. He knows Aizawa wants him to press charges, knows Izuku probably agrees, but his sister? His elementary school sister who's never liked confrontation or admitting there's something wrong with their family? How can he ask her to go through this? Or Natsu who ran away from the family to be dragged back in by every nosy reporter and newscaster in the area? And his mother? She would do it for him but he can't ask her. He can't make her relive all the things that made her miserable.

"There isn't. But there are answers you can live with, and ones you can't. Consequences you are okay with, and ones you aren't."

"But this isn't about me!" He's hoarse while he talks, tone desperate, begging them to understand what seems to be slipping past them all. "Why doesn't anyone get I'm not the only one who has to deal with this shit?!"

"Sweetheart, we do. Do you think anyone here or in your family would think twice about helping you? If it was your sister in your place if she was the one getting hurt would you even hesitate to help her?"

"That's different," they don't get it. It's not the same.

"How?"

"Because I deserve it." He doesn't look up, keeps his eyes steadfast on his trembling hands. He can't meet their eyes. Can't watch them light up with the realization that he's right. That he deserves every last bit of what he gets. That it's different.

"Sho," Izuku's scarred knuckles come into view, tentatively reaching for his own. Shouto stuffs his hands between his thighs, his face burning. "No one deserves this," he feels the lightest touch brush against his right cheek, against the burn. The mark that makes the one he's had for a decade look like a scrape from the sidewalk. "Or this," he trails his fingers up the expanse of Shouto's forearm, the infinitesimal bit of the scarring that layers over his wrists, the small burns that spatter his skin, inconsistent and as random as freckles, but its no angel kiss that left these marks.

"I did. I do," god he sounds like a child. Like when he was seven all over again. Pitchy and whiny, arguing over everything and nothing.

"Why?" he can hear the congestion in Izuku's voice, can picture his eyes filling with tears the same way he's seen it happen dozens of times in the months they've known each other.

"I don't know. But it's me. Momma, she used to be happy. He wasn't bad until me."

"Sho, none of what happened is your fault," Izuku tries but Shouto snaps at him quickly.

"He's right. You've seen how we handle unruly children here. It doesn't matter how bad they're being, there is always a solution that does not involve violence. Always."

The door opens but Shouto doesn't look at it. He doesn't care. He's too tired.

Cold arms are flung around his shoulders, momentum forcing him forward, his palm catching
roughly on the ground to keep them both from toppling over.

"I'm so sorry Shouto, I should have said something earlier. It should have never gotten this far," her voice wobbles and her shoulders shake, rattling Shouto's teeth in his skull. "I should have protected you," she's sobbing against his back, deep gasping weeps that put even Izuku's tears to shame.

"What did you say?" Shouto didn't know she said anything to anyone.

"I talked to your teacher. After dad burned you. I should have done it forever ago. I was so scared though," she clutches him tighter, cinching his torso like a corset. "I was scared he'd hurt you worse. I was scared he'd hurt us both." Her words devolve, becoming something Shouto can barely even understand.

"I hate to break this up, but we have a situation," Aizawa's voice is bland, but his expression is pinched when Shouto looks up at him. He's gazing at his phone, a tick in his eyebrow as his eyes rove over the tiny illuminated device. Midnight makes a frustrated sound, unlike anything Shouto has ever heard from her.

"It better not be."

"Endeavor is here trying to collect you," Shouto can see the effort it takes Aizawa to say that sentence even remotely diplomatically. He's not sure what words he wanted to use but he's pretty sure Shouto would have liked to hear those more.

"He can't!" Fuyumi shoots up, jolting Shouto forward into Izuku. He falls into him, strong arms encircling him like they belong there. Like he belongs inside them.

"He's not getting on campus," Aizawa mutters the words, pounding furiously at the phone, baring his teeth when something doesn't go how he wants it to. "The only question is if either of you have anything to say to him."

Shouto could say a million things to that man.

But he doesn't think even one of them would leave his mouth right now.

"Toshinori has already told Tsukauchi to arrange guards at the hospital. In case you were worried about her. We don't have an official arrest so we can't exactly remove him from the sidewalk, but he's not getting on campus. Nedzu confirmed it. UA officially has temporary guardianship over you due to reasonable suspicion of mistreatment. The bullshit Nedzu spouted after the festival doesn't matter anymore. This is legal stuff he can't buy his way through."

"You-you got that?" Shouto feels like a fish, his mouth hanging open, air drying out his tongue and cheeks.

They did something against him?

"Yeah. Wasn't too hard either. Kid, I wouldn't be suggesting we fight him if I didn't think you had a chance. We may not get what we all want, for him to go away forever, but I don't think you'll leave that with nothing." Aizawa slips the phone back in his pocket, dropping to his knees in front of Shouto with a grunt.

"Sho, please," Fuyumi sinks down beside Izuku.

He has entirely too many people looking at him... Green blue and black all bearing into him, studying him, waiting for something.
It all blurs together into murky turquoise, into the last color he often saw before passing out in the training room at home, from exhaustion of oxygen deprivation, both, neither.

He loses track. He quit caring.

Sometimes he just hoped he wouldn't wake up. That he wouldn't have to do it all over again.

Izuku reaches out to him, presses his hand over Shouto's heart, his scarred hand. He's worn and scarred from trying to help people. From saving me. And the little boy. Rescuing Eri.

Shouto doesn't want to think about his own scars. How he's pretty sure there's more marred skin than not anymore. Doesn't want to think about how he got them.

You protected me. I'm supposed to protect you. I'm your big sister...

"I want to see him." Shouto's words are far sturdier than they seem. He feels like an old abandoned barn on the side of the road like any small hit will send him crashing down. Have everything crumbling and crushing him.

Izuku's lips are pursed when he helps Shouto stand on wobbly legs but he doesn't say anything against the choice.

It's almost like a police escort the way they walk to the front gate.

Izuku laces their fingers together, squeezing tightly. He's standing on Shouto's right and he can see the way the shorter boy is looking at him, studying him. Trying to see if this is going to be a closure or another chapter. A beginning or an end.

Shouto tries to square his shoulders, to use every inch of height that horrible man graced him with.

If he doesn't look strong, if he doesn't feel strong, he's going to crumble. He's going to blow away like confetti in the wind. It'll take a miracle for someone to find all the pieces, impossible to put them back in their right order.

He starts to notice how many sets of footsteps there are, how there are more shadows dancing around them than he'd thought. When he looks up he sees they've acquired additional people. All-might is standing among them, Mirio flanking the sides along with Nejire. Tamaki is lurking in the back, directly behind Shouto.

He feels like this is unnecessary. It's his father, not a terrorist.

Though, this may be more for if Dabi, if Touya shows up to make good on his threat to take Shouto with him. If he's seen by a reporter, if that's broadcast, they could very quickly end up in hot water. If they let Endeavor further into the campus, they could end up burning.

It's another no-win situation. Shades of grey imbuing Shouto's life.

Mucking it all up.

He sees his father long before they're close enough to speak, his flaming suit a dead giveaway. Shouto can feel his muscles tense, his gait stiffening. His fight or flight kicking in, acid leaking from his fibers.

Izuku squeezes his hand again. He knows he can't actually feel the flames from here, there's too much breeze and too much distance, but regardless, he feels heat flare on his skin. If he closes his
eyes, he could picture the mountain of a man staring down his nose at him, the steep slant of his brows and harsh lines carving grooves in his face.

Shouto refuses to blink. When he does he sees it. Every time he blinks his heart stutters. His breath quickens.

He doesn't know when he got so scared.

Maybe when his father stopped pulling punches. When it all stopped being predictable. When it went from training to 'abuse' in his head. When it went from bruises to quarter face burns. To threats of death instead of vomiting.

"This is excessive," is how his father greets them, his massive arms folded over his chest. Shouto doesn't miss the way his apatite eyes flick down to where Shouto and Izuku's hands are joined, doesn't miss the way the color dulls and burns, even more, the flare of his nostril.

Part of Shouto wants to let go, the part that's always tried to appease the man. Shouto glances at Izuku out of the corner of his eye sees the way the face that's almost always lit up in smiles is twisted with anger.

Shouto has to remind himself Izuku isn't angry at him. He's angry with Endeavor.

He thinks.

Maybe he's angry at Shouto. For messing up the sports festival. For overshadowing his announcement. For dragging the whole school through another ordeal.

_He's not angry at me. Izuku wouldn't be angry over that._

Enji looks ready to open his mouth again when their side says something, stalling the words in his overly massive throat.

"It's a precaution for the villain that attempted to kidnap your son," Nedzu pipes up, perching himself on Aizawa's shoulder. Aizawa leans away from the furry principal, folding his arms to match Enji's pathetic display of dominance.

"Well, you can dismiss them. I'm taking him home. That 'contract' you tried to intimidate me with isn't binding." Aizawa goes to open his mouth but Shouto speaks first, feeling slightly bad that he has to steal the thunder on the smirk working its way onto his tired face.

"I'm not going." He can feel Fuyumi's cool presence flanking his left, feels her fingers snake around his wrist, a gentle pressure on his pulse.

"Now is not the time for your childish displays." Shouto barely catches the flare of quirk and temper that ignites at those words.

"When is the time? It wasn't when I was a child. It's not now." Izuku's grip tightens on him. He's not sure if it's warning or support. He's too afraid to look at him to check. To lose the focus, the confidence he has in this moment.

"You're coming with me. It wasn't a question."

"I'm not." Shouto catches Izuku step forward out of the corner of his eyes, his jaw raised defiantly. Has it always been that sharp?
"UA has filed and been granted temporary custody of Todoroki Shouto. He's not going anywhere." This time the flare of heat Shouto feels isn't his imagination. His fringe blows up and out of his face, the light strands dancing in the rising air, amber glowing on his platinum hair.

"I'm not coming back. Neither is momma."

"You are my child and you will listen." The facade of control is slipping. Shouto can see the Endeavor that usually is reserved for behind the thin dojo walls coming out, it's ugly face cracking the mask that's hanging in shambles.

"I'm a person." Shouto isn't sure if it's all the people behind him, if it's the gate in front of him that keeps Enji from being able to touch him or if he's just abandoned restraint in the face of the rest of his walls being bashed down with hammers and mallets that has his tongue so loose all of a sudden. He's not in the mood to analyze it. He may not have a chance to do this ever again. "I'm a person and you never treated me like one. You took everything from me. I didn't have a childhood, or friends, or even momma. I don't even know my sister," angry tears well up and his throat feels like there's a baseball wedged in it, making swallowing near impossible. He's not crying in front of his father. Not now. Not again. "I'll see you in court."

He turns on his heel, static buzzing in his ears, blocking out whatever his father is barking to him. The soft touches on his wrist and hand feel like fire but he tightens his grip on Izuku's hand, he doesn't shrug off his sister.

They don't make it all that far. Shouto's feet are numb and he feels feverish, his clothes itching his skin with every shift in fabric. He slumps against the nearest building, drops his hands to his knees and hangs his head.

Spots of water, sweat or tears or both he's not even sure at this point, fall to the concrete, splattering softly, tainting it darker.

He did it.
He's going to do it.
Whatever food Izuku got him to eat comes back, burning his throat like acid, the taste bitter and acrid.

It off sprays on his shoes, tainting the white toes of his converse with the pinky orange vomit.

He can see his sister's tennis shoes, her shuffling movements, not moving closer or farther, too unsure of what he needs, of what he wants from her.

They're a really fucked up family.

Izuku's clunky red shoes inch closer, gentle hands running up his back, brushing his hair back. Shouto is pretty sure he's not going to throw up again but the warm press of fingers against his face as they gather the sweat heavy strands isn't something he's going to stop prematurely.

"Let's go home," the words are breathily spoken, a hand tucking itself under his elbow, trying to help him straighten.

Shouto looks up, meets tearful, viridian eyes, shining in the afternoon sun.

Fuyumi steps closer now, her face splotchy with tears, her glasses fogged.
"I'm going to call Natsuo, I'll see you later okay? Be careful," it's awkward and stilted, the hug she pulls him into, full of not quite right angles and stutters of whose arms go where, but he sinks into it all the same.

Her hugs are so different from the ones he shares with Izuku, from the burning grasp he's been choked in by his father.

She's soft and cold and it almost reminds him of those few memories he has of his mother. Of how nice her hands felt over bruised skin and not quite healed fractures.

"I love you," he says it into her neck, spoken against her skin, his fingers clutching at her sweater. He loves her. He wants to like her. To know her enough to like her. To be able to take Iida and say he can't study Thursday he's having dinner with his sister. To have something of a family, something like the other kids have had.

He wants that for them both.

"I love you Shouto." Her voice is thick with emotions, with the other words she wants to say but that she holds back, ready for another time. Shouto is grateful when Mirio escorts her even though no one asked him to.

Izuku wraps his hand around Shouto's waist when he seems ready to move, guiding Shouto's left hand around broad, muscled shoulders.

It had been so gradual Shouto hadn't really noticed how Izuku had grown, how he'd buffed up and gotten taller. How his face is just a little longer, his jaw a little sharper.

He's growing up.

And Shouto... Shouto is stunted. In his schoolwork, emotionally, probably physically. He's not sure he's changed much at all since he got here. His quirk isn't any more under control, possibly has deteriorated since the year started.

He's sure his other classmates are like Izuku.

They're all ready to leave him behind. To go on to better things while he's stuck with his head held underwater by his past.

Their party of two is starting to feel like too many, his clothes in too many layers, his shoes too tight on his feet. Every brush of his hair against his neck fans the flames forming at the base of his sanity.

When the cool air conditioning of the dorm hits his face, so does the onslaught of sound, the whispers and mutters, the newscaster.

"Continuing developments in the shocking allegations against number one hero Endeavor. In an attack earlier today, notorious League of Villain murderer Dabi, now claiming to be the long since missing Touya Todoroki, has dropped even more details.

There are claims of a 'quirk marriage' between Enji Todoroki and Rei Hitsuhaya. Along with-"

There's red writing at the bottom of the screen, the word MUTE flashing even as the reporter's lips keep flapping.

Thirty-odd eyes are staring at him, various expression coloring their faces, mixed horror and aghast shame, some turning away the longer he stands there, the longer his brain repeats they know they
know they know.

He doesn't have a god damn secret anymore. He's like a cadaver, cut upon with his skin flips pinned to the side, all of them free to poke about his insides, peek behind all the dark shadows and swirl around his shame, his fear, his guilt.

"I'm going to my room," he feels nauseous, his stomach churning as he snatches his hand away from Izuku, clasps it over his mouth as he turns for the stairs. The footsteps that follow him are daggers in his eardrums, piercing pressure that stabs his temporal cortex.

"Shou-

"I don't need you to babysit me!" He snaps, turning cold eyes on Izuku. When he sees the way Izuku's steps falter, his mouth parted on words that fall dead in the air, hand hovering in the air where he tried to reach him and his eyes... the way he's looking at Shouto. "Get out of my face." His mouth stings of ash and copper, flooding his tongue and biting at his cheeks.

Every footfall is heavy, his legs aching as he moves, muscles protesting his actions, his dismissal. His knee flares pain, trying to buckle beneath him before he coats it in ice, forcing it to be stable the same way he's forced himself to be stable all his life. How he's tried so desperately to function so no one knows the hell he lives at home. Doing anything, everything, to keep it all a secret.

And it was for nothing.

The ice shatters.

He drops to his knee on the third flight, slippery fingers catching the edges of the stairs, the corners biting into his joints.

He ices over his door when he slams it, barricading himself inside. He drops into the corner of the room, his arms folded over his knees, his head buried in them.

The first tear falls and ice erupts an igloo around him, cocooning him in cold, making his cries echo against the unyielding surface, bouncing back to him, reverberating. Resonating.

He thickens the layers, throws his fists against them, bruises his knuckles at the slick reflection of himself he sees as the layers warm beneath his temper.

He crumbles when the contorted features on his face get too close to looking the way his father does when he rears back to hit him.

He stays in his little sanctuary, past when his limbs start shaking and stop, watching his breath flutter and dissipate in the air, staring at the fractals until it all blurs.

NEXT:

"We are coming to you live at the Endeavor estate where many notable figures are making an arrest on the number one hero!"

--
"Wake me up with a fire drill again and I'll blow your head off. Some of us need sleep!"

--

"Todoroki," Aizawa says calmly, beckoning him back to the classroom. "You're under a lot of stress the faculty think it's best if you take a break from hero studies or awhile."

"I don't need a break," he hisses. Aizawa sighs, flattening his palms on the desk.

"The district gave us an order. You can't return to hero course work without a course of therapy. I'm sorry."

- 

"You can't keep doing this! It's not healthy!"

"No one said you had to watch!"

"Fine!"

- 

"I don't need you, Midoriya."

- 

"I just, need some space for a bit, Todoroki."

- 

"How do you lose a teenager?!"

- 

"You're a monster Shouto. I hate you."
Chapter End Notes

One of these days I'll update in a timely manner again... Tell me what you think!!

			tumblr -- twitter -- curious cat

End Notes

Edit: Just a note that I forgot when i published this.
What Izuku does to stop Shouto's panic attack is NOT a good idea. Shouto very well could have lashed out and seriously hurt him, and the same can happen in real life. This is fiction and what's done in fiction shouldn't be practiced at home.
Google can give you a lot of safe methods for talking down panic attacks. Simple reassurances and trying to get the person to breathe with you are GOOD things to try. Doing something out of the blue and unexpected can make it much worse.
Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed, come yell at me. <3

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Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!