Roses

by Samnit

Summary

New country, new life and now a new job -- things are looking up for you, retired 'hero' Lionheart, as you take on a position teaching English at the famed UA High School. But any hopes at settling into a much-desired quiet existence are foolish. Since when has a hero's life ever been simple?
Chapter Notes

Hey everyone.
So, as you know, I've been working hard on my pride & joy, Attachment. But for months I've had this story saved away on my computer and I was finally motivated enough to clean it up and post it. It's not in the same vein of Attachment, it was something to let me practice world building and, of course, a more traditional romance with All Might/Toshi (because I love the man.)
Don't worry, this won't interfere with my Attachment work! I have dozens of chapters of this already written up and saved. But as a warning, this is definitely more of a slow burn compared to my other stuff hahaha

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Don't let it be forgot
That once there was a spot
For one brief shining moment that was known
As Camelot."
-- Alan Jay Lerner

Aside from a hushed conversation or two, the train ride was silent.

Gripping a hanging handle, you watched the cityscape breeze by, comforted by the barely-there hum and slight jostle of the train car. The sun had just peeked over the horizon, bathing the sky in a vibrant orange that was partially obscured by the thick cloud cover. The air was already starting to lose its early morning bite.

It was serene.

Having spent your first year in Japan living in the Edogawa ward in Tokyo, you had grown used to crowded train commutes to Shinjuku and back. Although Musutafu was still a bustling city in its own right, it was primarily residential and had an almost lackadaisical nature to it that no Tokyo ward could truly replicate.

The sakura trees planted around the city were already in bloom -- a sure sign in Japan that it was spring. With it, a spring fever had enveloped most of the country, Musutafu included. Sakura teas, sakura candies, pink sakura mochi. It was spring, the world shouted and you listened, enamored.

It was corny and played out, but spring was your favorite time of year because of the blossoms. They signaled that winter was gone or, at the minimum, leaving. There was no more need to be bundled up or rushing from one place to the next because of the cold. The birds were out in droves, their melodies mingling with the sounds of landscaping tools and windchimes. A siren’s song to those sick
of being trapped indoors.

You were glad winter was over, you needed to see more flowers in your life.

The train began to slow, signaling it had arrived at its next stop. A new crowd of people streamed on, ultimately obscuring your outside view. Still, your hum of contentment remained and you busied yourself with your daydreams.

Spring was the season of rebirth, of new beginnings. You were headed to a new job. It was the start of a new chapter in your life.

Since moving to Japan four years previously, you had hit roadblocks. The change was difficult at first, a mixture of homesickness and culture shock, muddled with the need to learn a new language. For so long you felt like an outsider and, although you would always be viewed more as a long-term visitor by Japan’s natural citizens, you were becoming comfortable with your new world. Things were starting to turn around. Having ignored the voice that told you life was too rough and that you should just head back to familiarity, you had somehow powered through.

Your fingers twitched as you inwardly blushed at how ridiculous you felt trying to make your thoughts seem poetic, the urge to look at your phone growing stronger. It was an addiction you had been working to break.

Someone sneezed. Another lightly bumped into you as the train turned.

God, you hoped the kids liked you.

“A new teacher? Seriously? Did someone die or something?”

Iida slammed his hands on his desk and stood, disgusted with how the conversation between Kaminari and Sero had been developing. Although he had been trying to catch up on some much-needed studying, it was impossible not to eavesdrop on his classmate’s idle morning chatter -- especially when he was standing and talking right behind his desk.

“A death of one of our teachers is not something you should brush off so lightly!” Iida scolded, flabbergasted that the death of one of UA’s esteemed heroes could be uttered by a student so nonchalantly. Sensing an incoming Iida lecture, Sero held his hands up defensively and attempted to inch away.

Kaminari, however, stood his ground.

A smug smirk formed on his face as Iida continued to rant and he held up an accusing finger, silencing him.

“So someone did die!” he said victoriously, taking Iida’s attitude as confirmation. “I knew it!”

“Someone died?” Hagakure squealed as she entered the classroom, catching the last bit of the conversation. Kaminari watched as a floating uniform dropped a backpack off at a nearby desk and bobbed over to them.

“Yeah, Iida said one of the teachers died!” the blond responded, looking to where he assumed her face would be. He wished Hagakure wore glasses or a bow or something -- it wasn’t until Kaminari met her that he realized it was hard to talk to someone who didn’t have a face.
“Damn Iida, how did you find out?” Kirishima called from his seat, the talk grabbing his attention as well.

A few more heads turned their way.

Iida froze, mouth agape, as horror passed through him. He had only wanted to stop the disrespectful talk but now his name was being attributed as a source of the rumor. And if it started to spread outside the classroom...

“No, no, no!” he shouted, arms swinging wildly.

Damage control, he needed to do damage control.

It was the start of the second week for Class of 1-A. Although some trepidation still swirled around the first years, a comfortable routine was beginning to form. They were becoming familiar to the layout of UA’s main building, they were recognizing their teachers more as instructors than idolized heroes, and they were becoming more at-ease around one another.

By passing the entrance exam, a bond of camaraderie had formed between the students (save for maybe Bakugou). There was a rivalry to be the best in class, sure, but friendships were forming quickly and easily. No one had any trouble turning and starting a conversation with a neighbor during a free minute.

Unless that neighbor was Bakugou.

“No one died.”

An annoyed voice arose from behind the desk in the front of the room, though it was loud enough to abruptly end Iida’s tirade. With the rest of his students filing into the room, the cocooned body of Mr. Aizawa rose from where he had been lying dormant.

Kaminari shuddered -- he had made it a point to glance behind the desk when he had entered that morning. This wasn’t the first time Aizawa had caught the class by surprise by camping out in the room. But he had seen nothing.

‘How did he get in!? ’ he marveled.

“None of the teachers are dead,” Aizawa continued. “But Iida is correct --” the bespeckled boy went rigid, “-- we do have a new member of the staff. You’ll be meeting her later on… She’s teaching English.”

“What about Mister Present Mic?” Asui asked, a soft ‘ribbit’ tacked onto the end of her question.

“He is still here and will be teaching some of the other first years.”

“So we still have English?” Kaminari asked before lowering his head at the glare he received from Aizawa over the idiotic question.

It did not warrant a response.

A low groan escaped several of the students. Another boring regular class. UA was surprising -- one minute they were training with All Might and working on strengthening their hero skills, the next they were holed up in a room memorizing math equations.

Aizawa glanced at the clock. That was his only announcement for the morning, he probably should
have waited. He supposed he could do attendance…

No empty seats.

Ok. Looked like everyone was there.

A hand shot rigidly in the air and he sighed again, eager to descend back to the darkness that awaited him underneath the desk.

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The UA campus.

It was a massive complex that took up several acres of land in the middle of Musutafu. It’s towering main building, clearly visible from beyond the barrier, was a national and international symbol recognizable to even the most uninformed. It had such a level of secrecy and security that you believed rivaled, if not outperformed, some of the protections surrounding various world leaders and military locations.

Yet underneath all the fanfare and acclaim, it was just a high school.

The morning started with your first official staff meeting where you were formally introduced to a bulk of the teaching staff of UA. Some faces you met during the interview process, one of which was radio-jockey-and-hero Present Mic, who immediately attached himself to you and informed the room that you were ‘Team English.’

Then came the condensed tour of the grounds -- although you had visited the campus several times already, Principal Nedzu had been hesitant on allowing you to get too familiar with the layout of the campus before you became an actual employee.

“Most things are only shared with staff when they officially come on board,” Nedzu had told you cryptically with a pleasant smile.

The small creature had been acting as your guide for the morning. After several meetings in-person and by-phone communications, you felt yourself growing comfortable around Nedzu and his appearance. The only awkwardness that remained was the height difference and walking speed. You had to make a conscious effort to shorten your stride in order to keep pace with him.

As a junior staff member, there were some things you had to put up with: in the staff room you didn’t have your own computer station, you had to share with another junior teacher Hound Dog, whom you had yet to meet.

“But there’s plenty of lounges around campus if you need space to do work or a free minute to think,” he suggested.

There were also additional UA secrets you wouldn’t be privy to until your trial period had ended, Nedzu had added. There was an entire room of UA records about the past and present staff and students that you weren’t allowed to enter just yet.

At UA, you were teaching the heroes of tomorrow. There were techniques, quirks and classified school information that could not be leaked.

“Though that’s not to say you’re not trustworthy,” he said with another smile.
Although your brain told you to be wary of Nedzu and his too-good-to-be-true demeanor, you couldn’t help but return his smiles and be comforted by his disarming nature. He was just so likable.

As you traveled through the main building, a light conversation about the day and jitters evolved into a college-level lecture on the importance of instruction in the life of a young hero. At first, you listened intently as he went on, as the subject did have something to do with you. But your mind began to wander as you walked, eyes traveling over the school’s landscape.

In the distance you heard explosions and watched a small tornado rise from behind an adjacent building, eventually disappearing as it rose higher into the sky.

“Are you excited?”

It took a beat before you realized Nedzu had stopped speaking and had asked you a question. He was still walking but was looking up at you in a besumed sort-of-way. You grimaced -- he knew you hadn’t been listening to him.

“Don’t worry,” he said, patting you lightly on the hip -- as close to your shoulder as he could get. “It’s your first day and it’s something different. I don’t blame you for trying to take it in. I get a little too excited when it comes to topics involving education.”

“It’s strange and familiar at the same time,” you responded as another far-off explosion echoed. “I feel like I’m back in my high school.”

“I toured an American hero high school once,” Nedzu said. “Other than basic differences between our two schooling systems, the curriculum was generally the same. This one floated in the sky. So just think back to your high school days and you’ll be fine! Though, this time you’re a teacher, not a student.”

“Instead of taking tests and doing homework, I’m grading them.”

“Precisely! The students are all good eggs anyway. No one will give you any problems, so long as you handle yourself correctly. Now, let’s get you to the first classroom.”

You cracked your knuckles to ease the twitchiness of your fingers. It was something you’d always had to deal with -- the vibrations, a side effect of your quirk. The severity of the movements from antsy fingers to full limb tremors. At that moment, you were just shaky and worked up enough to get your blood pumping, but not too consuming to warrant some kind of physical response like jogging to expend some of the energy you were storing.

“Principal Nedzu, are the students aware that they’re getting a new teacher?”

“Well, I’ve been told the big rumor going around school is that one of the other teachers died, so you were brought in to replace them!” You shot him a disapproving glance but Nedzu continued. “Don’t worry though, most of the teachers aren’t feeding into the rumor, but I haven’t made any announcement to the first years. I thought I’d let you do it!”

“You know, for a very strict school, you’re surprisingly nonchalant about how the teachers… well, teach,” you noted as the pair began ascending several sets of stairs.

“I find it best to give staff some creative freedom. I choose them for a reason and it seems to work considering we’re still ranked the best school around! Now…” Nedzu stopped. “This is the room!”

It was an outrageously large door, as if it had been built with the intent on being accessible to those with even the biggest giant-sized quirks. It was also easily identifiable -- a red-lettered ‘Class 1-A’
was written horizontally down the length of it. At least finding room numbers wouldn’t be an issue.

You turned back to Nedzu.

“You’re waiting like I said before, the teachers move between classes. So after Class 1-A, you should head over to Class 1-B. I’ve got business to attend to this afternoon, but I’ll send another staff member up to get lunch with you, how does that sound?”

“Perfect.”

“Excellent! Now, I will let you be… Miss Lionheart?”

Your hand hovered on the handle of the door, turned back to the principal. He had walked several steps down the hallway and stopped as if struck by a sudden thought. “Please do me a favor and contact Jacksonville. I think it’s about time you called him back.”

He was gone before you could respond, though your only response would have been a groan.

You thought of the phone number tucked away in the computer desk back at your apartment. Imagining his voice answering the phone...

Force positivity, you inwardly intoned. Fake it until you make it.

A pink girl was standing on the other side of the classroom door, surprising you when you slid it open. The girl’s face mirrored what you felt.

“Oh, uh, hello,” you offered lamely.

A smile split the girl’s face.

“An American!” she exclaimed.

“Stop your shouting,” the tired man in the front of the class reprimanded, but the girl paid no mind. She happily moved back to her desk.

“Good morning! I’m Ashido Mina!” she said with a little wave from her desk, ignoring the looks of her classmates as she continued your conversation.

“It’s nice to meet you,” you responded, returning her smile, as you joined Eraserhead in the front of the room.

You had briefly met the homeroom teacher during your introductory staff meeting. Present Mic had pulled him over to say hello. But other than that simple greeting, you had yet to actually speak with him. Had Present Mic not mentioned his name several times, you probably would have already forgotten it.

Aizawa was disrobing from a yellow sleeping bag, carefully removing two empty protein pouches from its folds. As odd as it was to watch, you didn’t pay it much mind. Heroes, in general, were an eclectic bunch with strange habits. All things considered, an affinity for sleeping bags was relatively tame.

With a low, controlled voice, he gave a private, personal introduction to Class 1-A and his role as their homeroom teacher. They were the leading class for heroics at UA and all were well-behaved, though if any gave you any disrespect to let him know.

“Have them run laps outside or something,” he suggested, pulling a bottle of eyedrops from his coat.
While they spoke, the students’ eyes were on their new teacher.

Collectively they were looking to determine if they could recognize you as a pro. Much like with Eraserhead initially, they were coming up blank. You didn’t seem familiar and, instead of wearing a costume like the other teachers, you had arrived in casual wear. Leggings, an oversized sweater and boots.

*Fashionable.*

Midoriya would be the one to ask, a majority of the students concluded. But he had disappeared midway through homeroom for a start-of-the-week checkup with Recovery Girl and had not yet returned. He had some remaining injuries that required additional treatment, all that remained from the previous week’s Battle Simulator with All Might.

Aizawa took his leave without fanfare or a goodbye, leaving you alone with your new students.

The transition was a little jarring.

*This was it.*

“Alright…,” you said, looking at the young minds you had been hired to mold. “This is… class.”

A hand shot up.

Before you could respond, the student quickly stood and gave a rigid bow. “Welcome to Class 1-A, ma’am. My name is Iida Tenya. I have taken detailed notes of our past classes with Mister Present Mic that I’d be happy to share if you would like to see our English abilities and the material we’ve covered so far. Also, if you need any additional help on adapting to Japanese culture, please let either me or my classmates know and we will provide assistance.”

“Oh,” was all you could think of to say. The boy was still standing, his head still lowered. “Thank you, Iida. I appreciate your… introduction.”

“It is not a problem!” Iida declared, thumping back into his seat. Surprisingly, none of his other classmates made any kind of acknowledgment of his strangely passionate but oddly robotic behavior.

Was this normal for him?

“I should probably do attendance,” you muttered to yourself, opening up your backpack to bring out your grade book for Class A. Twenty students were listed and as you looked around the room, everyone seemed to be there. Your eyes settled on an empty desk.

Iida had stood again, his chair screeching against the floor.

“Apologies for the interruption, but Midoriya Izuku is here. He was injured during our earlier hero class and is with Recovery Girl.”

“He broke all the fingers on his hand again and I think his arm,” a bored teenager offered, twirling one of her long earrings around her finger. Iida nodded in agreement.

Oh, those were part of her earlobes, not earrings.

*Don’t stare.*

“Right, okay, thank you for the heads up…,” you trailed off, making a quick note in your grade book. “Well…,” you clapped your hands together and looked around the room.
Oh, there was also a student with the head of a bird.

And an invisible girl.

Focus.

“Right, I believe an introduction is in order.”

You gave a curt wave.

“Hello class. My name is… Lionheart and I’ll be your English teacher for the year.”

It was odd going exclusively by your ‘hero’ name, your actual named danced on the tip of your tongue. But monikers in the hero field were just as used as actual names -- in fact, more so. Even if UA was a high school, it was still a hero high school.

Another career difference you’d just have to get used to.

The class fixed you with blank looks and you could almost see them intoning your name in their heads, attempting to comb through mental hero archives for information about you.

“I know Lionheart might be hard to pronounce,” you explained, trying to reign in their attention. You were saying your name in English instead of translating it into Japanese. “So feel free to call me Miss L, if that’s easier.”

“So Lionheart is your hero name…” Kaminari asked, lazily raising his hand in the air, fishing for information.

“To satisfy some of your curiosity, I am a registered hero. But I’m several years retired and I guarantee you haven’t heard of me before…” you paused, unsure how much more to say.

“Did you come from America to teach at UA?” Ashido asked excitedly, waving her hand in the air.

“I’ve lived in Japan for a few years now actually--”

“Oh, whereabouts?”

“How long have you been retired?”

“Were you a hero before this?”

“Alright, you guys are a little too excited so let’s tone it down,” you said, raising and lowering your hands with a grin. “I’ve got a lot I want to get through today, we can play 20 questions another time. Now then…”

You looked down at your seating chart, making a note to check the names of the students who had already spoken up.

“It’s going to take me a couple classes to get your names down, so please excuse that. But let’s not waste more time. Present Mic did share with me his lesson notes for the previous week, so I do have an idea of where you’re at. Good thing it’s only a week in! But I’m going to do things a bit differently.”

It was oddly comfortable slipping into the role of a teacher. You felt almost matronly as you explained the structure of your class to the group of barely-teens whose eyes were already starting to glaze over. Not that you would think yourself that old. Though the inability to stay up past
10 p.m. on weekdays was becoming a little bit of a buzzkill.

“It looks like we’ll be meeting twice a week,” you said, looking down at your notes. “And it will be for the entire school year.”

After the basics were pushed aside you, the new teacher, crossed your arms and looked around, nearly two dozen eyes looking back at you.

“My job isn’t just to get you to read and write English -- I’m sure many of you have been doing that for years. There’s going to be just as much importance placed on speaking it as well. Who here wants to be a professional hero?”

Save for one pissed off looking boy, everyone in their class had risen a hand with varying levels of enthusiasm.

“English is one of the most widely recognized languages in the world. No matter where you go, I’m going to make sure you have a voice. I don’t want you to go through life living through translators and broken sentences -- I want you to puff your chest out and tell everyone exactly what you want them to know. Now stand up and move your desks into a circle. I want to get to know you guys.”

You watched as the students rearranged the desks of their classroom into a half-assed circle, bemused you were turning into the type of teacher you had hated in high school -- one that demanded class participation.

“From now until the end of class we’re going to be speaking in English, all right? I want someone to tell me something about their day so far. It can be how their commute to school was, what they ate for breakfast, any plans or clubs they joined. Hell--” you stopped. “Heck,” you corrected. “it can also be how your one classmate broke his hand. And if no one volunteers, I’m just gonna pick someone. Be warned -- I’m gonna make it a point to pick the most miserable looking people.”

Bakugou growled and sunk lower into his chair, arms crossed. He could feel the eyes of the teacher flicker over to him.

With some hesitance, Yaoyorozu rose her hand.

“Excellent!” you grinned, glancing at your roster. “Pronounce your name for me, hun?”

“Yaoyorozu Momo,” she said and you repeated it slowly, working to familiarize yourself with it. “Alright, tell me about your day Miss Yaoyorozu?”

“I had eggs and toast for breakfast this morning,” Yaoyorozu said steadily, though judging from the ease in which she spoke you had a feeling she was forcing herself to slow down. “After school today I plan on stopping by the store and purchasing a new book.”

“Oh,” you said with what she hoped was a friendly smile. “Any idea what book?”

“Not yet,” Yaoyorozu responded in the same deliberate speed. “I was going to look around and see if anything looked good.”

“I do the same thing, Yaoyorozu,” you said. “I like to find something that grabs my attention. What types of books do you like to read?”

“I like biographies.”

“Nice choice! I think the last biography I read was on Captain Celebrity. Talk about an… interesting
hero.”

“I love him,” Mineta said quietly.

“Thank you for sharing, Yaoyorozu! Now, anyone else want to chime in?”

The next to speak was a dark-haired girl with large, friendly features. Asui Tsuyu. She spoke of caring for her siblings and plans to take them to see the blossoms over the weekend. Tokoyami Fumikage followed, his contribution centering around a new horror TV series he had started watching.

You continued to listen while more students volunteered to speak, internally surprised at how involved there were from the get-go. There weren’t just one or two overachievers in class like you expected. Everyone in Class A wanted a chance to speak.

Was this how it was going to be at UA? It made sense -- it was the best hero school around. These kids had to work their asses off to get in and it seemed unlikely they wanted to squander their opportunity for greatness.

As class wore on, it became less about making a statement and more about having a group conversation. Someone would share something and other students would cut in and asked questions. Bakugou Katsuki even spoke up, though it was to mutter something mildly insulting when Todoroki Shoto mentioned doing some morning tai chi.

They were a bright bunch who already had a solid grasp on English, save for the occasional minor slip-up involving possession and verb tense.

A knot of dread settled in your stomach.

Oh god, you would really need to work on your lesson plans.

With five minutes left in class, you let out a breath of relief and directed Class A to return their desks to their original spots, ignoring Iida who was making sure his seating area had been put back with pinpoint accuracy.

“Our first class went better than I imagined,” you said. “What’d you guys think?”

“I liked it,” Ashido offered. “It’s way better than just a lecture.”

“We’ll have our lecture days for sure, but I want to do something different to get to see where you are. But before I end class and go, I do want to assign some homework.” Groans. You chuffed. “Even though it’s my first day, you’ve been having classes regularly, so nice try. It’s an easy homework anyway so it won’t kill you. Anyone know what a haiku is?”

Several hands shot up, you pointed to the floating uniform. Hagakure Tooru.

“It’s a poem!”

“Right, a style of poetry that I’m sure you’re all well aware of. Homework is simple -- I want you to write me a haiku. I’m talking a real simple one and I want you to follow the English way…” you walked to the board, neatly writing:

*My cat is so fat*
The fishes are scared of him

Flee from his fat paw

“This is just something fun and creative for you to play around with. Can be about you, a dream, your pet fish -- as long as it’s in English and the English words follow the 5-7-5 syllable format.”

With no questions about the assignment and your time at an end, you thanked everyone for a pleasant first day. As you started to pack up your belongings, you could hear the whispers as the students waited for the start of their next class, perking up when you heard a couple of English words in the mix.

The lesson was a success and had worked as you had hoped -- a way to determine the start-of-year benchmark for the kids. Hopefully, the success of your first classes would be replicated in the rest of your classes for the week.

BAM.

The door slid open in a crashing burst.

A rush of air shot through the room, scattering loose papers.

You whipped her bag by your side, the sudden intrusion putting you on edge.

“Hello, I am at the door!”

It was impossible not to know who he was. Tall and muscular, eyes hidden beneath bushy golden eyebrows. Not that people were looking at his eyes -- his enormous smile drew much of the attention on his face.

The greatest hero in the world.

But it was the loud yellow pinstripe suit that made the biggest impression on you as you worked to process what had just happened. You relaxed, slinging your bag over your shoulder while the students clamored to get his attention. His presence still made them giddy.

“All Might!” Kirishima shouted. The hero gave a curt wave, his focus zeroing in on you.

“All the new teacher,” All Might said, stepping into the room. “Principal said there would be a staffing addition. I’m sorry I missed the meeting this morning, got caught up doing some heroics! Pleased to meet you, I’m All Might!”

Like you wouldn’t know who he was. Nedzu had admitted during your final interview that All Might had been brought on as another new addition, you just didn’t expect to see him so soon. Or that he would seek you out for an introduction. But he was being polite and you returned the sentiment.

“Nice to meet you too,” you said, offering a friendly smile.

Before you two could move past your introductions, Cementoss entered the room, surprised at the collection of heroes in Class A. Disappointed, the class watched as All Might left, unable and unwilling to save them from the torture that was Modern Literature.

In the hallway, a few steps away from the classroom door, All Might revealed what his presence was about.
“I’m here on behalf of Young Midoriya,” he explained.

“Oh, right. One of the students mentioned he was with Recovery Girl. They said he broke all the fingers in his hand,” you paused before adding, “again.”

All Might inwardly sighed, exasperated Midoriya’s injuries were apparently becoming normalized by his peers.

“Just a side effect of his quirk that needs a little adjusting! But I heard he had missed class and I wanted to help him out. Is there any classwork I should pass along to him?”

“It was mostly practicing English today so I can get a sense of skill levels. The only homework he has to worry about is writing a haiku about whatever subject he wants.”

You held up three fingers.

“Three lines, in English, following the 5-7-5 format.”

“Excellent!” he paused and you swore his smile was hiding a grimace as the gears turned in his head. “Could you, ah… could you write that down?”

You let out a barking laugh. Could the greatest hero in the world truly be scatterbrained? You had seen him interviewed on countless newscasts and he always had to the same can-do attitude that bordered on oafishness. But seeing that that was just how he was… it was humoring.

He looked at you, curious about the cause of your laughter, and you found yourself apologizing.

“I’m sorry,” you said, afraid to have offended him. You retrieved a notebook from your bag and carefully wrote out a quick note to Midoriya. “It’s my first day and I’ve never taught anything before. Not only that, I didn’t know I’d be meeting All Might this morning. I’m a little starstruck I suppose.”

You folded the paper and handed it over to the hero. “It was good to meet you.”

“Likewise!” All Might said. “Now, I have to run. Thanks for your support and I’ll be sure to say hello again!”

He turned and disappeared down the hall, the energy of his departure tousling your hair and making it appear even more unkempt.

The greatest hero to ever live.

But you had to go find Class 1-B – you didn’t have time to dwell on your celebrity meeting.

As for All Might, he had just managed to round a corner out of your sight before coming to an abrupt stop and releasing a hacking cough as he deflated, ribbons of blood decorating the corners of his mouth.

He reached for the napkin he had shoved into his pocket, cleaning up his face.

That was close, he groaned to himself, double checking that he was alone in the hallway. The fact he didn’t have the energy to make it to the privacy of a lounge was discerning. He would have to really rest for the remainder of the morning if he hoped to have the stamina required to teach a class in its entirety as All Might.

Though all the other teachers knew of his… condition, the Principal had said they were going to reveal the truth to the new hire later in the week. A simple precaution in case she decided to quit after
her first couple of classes, as it had happened in the past with previous new hires.

Some people aren’t cut out for teaching a class full of budding heroes eager to show off their quirks.

She seemed pleasant enough, he thought as he opened Midoriya's assignment. At least she was quick to laugh, he liked that about Americans.

Dear Midoriya,

Sorry to hear of your injury! I hope you feel better soon. You didn’t miss much in class, we just practiced speaking English.

The assignment is as follows: write a haiku in English following the 5-7-5 syllable format.

You injured your hand

All Might stopped by my classroom

His suit is yellow

All Might looked down at his suit. Was that what she had been laughing at?

He frowned.

He liked his suit.

After your third and final morning class of the day, English with Class 1-C, a female teacher boasting an uncontrolled level of cleavage spilled into the room, her confidence level intoxicating.

“Midnight,” she introduced. “Mic has been making it a point to get the teachers to go by their hero names.”

“Nice to meet you,” you said with a bow. “I’m Lionheart.”

Her eyes flashed and she leaned in, observing your face. “How have your classes been? I hope there’s been no trouble.”

“No, the students are all great,” you said with your hands out, an uncomfortable laugh spilling out of your mouth at her aura and proximity. “I just have to get used to the Japanese school system. I'm used to dealing with government officials and salarymen.”

“You picked a good school to work at,” Midnight said, relieved. Stepping back she hesitated in the doorway, waiting for you to follow. Once you did, she led you down to the cafeteria. “You won’t have a problem with any of the teachers here. We’re a very accepting group. You were in the business world before this?”

“Translation services, mostly contract work with the US government out of Tokyo.”

“Oh, interesting. Have you had any problems with the Japanese since moving here? At the morning meeting, you said you’ve been here for a few years, right?”

“Yeah, around four years and no, everything has been fine with me save for the occasional grump! I heard some horror stories from people I used to work with, though. But they were working in the
corporate world.”

“Tch, a salaryman’s life is all work, drinking, fucking and sleeping until they die, that’s why they’re so miserable. Heroics is a lot more open-minded and westernized, I think. Though if you do have a problem let me know. I can be very… persuasive.”

You smiled.

There were two other teachers in the small room off the cafeteria designated for staff eating. They stood and bowed when Midnight entered with her lunch buddy.

Snipe and Ectoplasm they reintroduced themselves while you did the same.

“The brains of the school,” Midnight said with a wink. Ectoplasm shook his head bashfully while Snipe gave a shrugging nod of agreement.

Your lunch was meager compared to the spread that Snipe, Ectoplasm and Midnight unpacked. They were functioning heroes, you told yourself, eyeing your plain glob of rice and cut-up sausage that you sheepishly called a bento. They needed decent caloric and protein-heavy meals.

“So what’s your favorite thing about Japan?” Ectoplasm asked.

You held your hand up to cover your mouth as you chewed, tilting your head side-to-side as you thought.

“Probably the food,” you said. “And the vending machines.”

Your answer received a couple of chuckles and you relaxed a bit. There had been a ball of anxiety floating around your gut, nerves that had been created as you visualized making a fool of yourself on the first day and having all your coworkers dislike you.

It was UA -- was it so wrong that you thought the staff and students would be pretentious? You had imagined the atmosphere of an Ivy League school combined with the exclusivity of a New England boarding school.

Instead, it felt more like a technical high school.

Snipe moved his mask upward slightly to take a bite of his rice ball, chewing a bit before hidden eyes settled on Adelaide.

They asked a couple more questions that you had been bombarded with already -- where were you from, what did you do before UA, what brought you to Japan.

“All of you been to the USA?” you asked, trying to turn the conversation away from just you. The last thing you wanted was to be the center of attention.

All three nodded. Oddly, you found yourself humorously relieved that Snipe, with his cowboy swagger, had at least visited the country he was drawing inspiration from.

“I was younger though,” Midnight said. “I haven’t been back recently.”

“When I graduated high school I traveled around the Southwest and east Texas,” Snipe said. “We don’t have a firearm culture like you do in America, so it was eye-opening and I picked up some new skills.”

“I was in California for a bit,” Ectoplasm offered.
“Any plans to go back?” Snipe asked and you shook your head.

“No, I’ve been enjoying Japan too much.”

The lunch fell into silence and you focused most of your attention on your lunch. No one seemed uncomfortable by the quietness, which put you at ease.

“Make sure you see the blossoms this weekend,” Ectoplasm said to the group. “There’s supposed to be frost next week.”

Oh weather talk, you thought lovingly as the table plunged into discussions about how last year’s spring compared to the current one.

It was always the ideal work-talk subject.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you like tropes and cliches! Because I fucking do hahaha. I'll also have to work to make sure this doesn't get too boring. But I want the 'reader' to experience the world. As crazy as this sounds, there's more to life than just being in a relationship!
I hope everyone is having a good week!
Wanted to give you a slight heads up -- I may tweak the official timeline during this story to better expand on certain situations or build on things. It's nothing too crazy: for example, class rep elections take place a week later than written. That's the only major thing I can think of that I pushed back :D

You had six classes to teach each week, all first years from the heroics, general studies, management and support tracts. They were also all morning classes -- the afternoon was reserved for specialty classes.

Each class met twice a week, with three classes on Monday and Friday and another three on Tuesday and Thursday. Wednesday was a free day, a mid-week breather in which you could get a bulk of your work done.

Outside of classes, you were also attempting to build a repertoire with the other teachers. You learned most mornings they had a quick staff meeting where Principal Nedzu would list an educational or heroic topic he’d like his staff to look into and consider. Then he’d give some words of encouragement or point out areas he found needed improvement.

Present Mic, the other half of ‘Team English,’ was by far the most approachable of the staff. Sure he was loud, flashy, and had a tendency to refer to those around him as ‘listeners,’ but he was friendly. He would plop himself down next to you and start talking about anything and everything under the sun.

It was from him that you learned All Might was a rare sight at morning meetings -- he had only made it to one since the start of the school year. His hero job also ate into his school time. The days he wasn’t scheduled to teach, the number one hero would be absent from the school altogether.

Mic also informed you that Midnight and Cementoss had previously dated and, although they swore their relationship was over, his love sense indicated otherwise.

Also, Snipe was possibly involved in some super secret police work involving the villain underground.

And that Thirteen may have gone on a date with a fan.

You thanked him for giving you the lowdown of such important office details.

Then there was Aizawa.

Halfway through your first week, before school, you had visited each of the first-year homerooms you taught to post your class schedule. Apparently, it was a thing Japanese teachers did -- give a rundown on where they would be at certain times of the day. You had stopped by Class A’s room to replace Mic’s original schedule, which he had designed to be more of an eye-catching flyer rather than a boring white page.
Wrapped in his sleeping bag, Aizawa silently rose from his darken corner when you entered the classroom -- unfortunately, you were completely unaware of the other presence lurking behind you.

Upon turning around and seeing him, you yelped and nearly launched your backpack at him in surprise.

When you recounted the incident to Midnight over lunch that afternoon, the hero erupted into laughter, slapping her hand lightly on the table as you tried to keep a straight face, explaining how scared you had been.

“I thought it was a ghost,” you hissed, dropping your voice low, egged on by Midnight’s behavior. “I was reading these ghost stories last night and thought I summoned something.”

“Aizawa is something ,” Midnight cooed, her laughter stopping but the remnants of it still echoed on her face.

The senior teacher had you taken under her wing, so to speak. All in an attempt to make your open up and become more sociable. The past few lunches you had shared with your co-workers had been near-silent affairs as you retreated into yourself.

You were surrounded by people who obviously knew each other well and had already formed friendships, was it so strange that you were shy?

But she had caught you laughing at a joke Snipe had made in passing -- it was just a glimmer of the true personality hiding beneath. So, she had made it a passive goal to get the new hire to open up more.

That included prodding you about how your classes were going.

With a sigh, you mentioned how you had already redo several lesson plans since your first day.

“I had nightmares for weeks when I first started that my students would know more math than me,” Ectoplasm, your other lunch companion, volunteered. “Or that I would teach them something wrong. But time passed and I realized that I wasn’t as unsuited for teaching as I thought.”

“We all handle subjects we’re good at,” Midnight said. “Believe me when I say that if Nedzu didn’t have confidence in what you could do, you wouldn’t be here. Besides, never forget you’re the one in charge. Don’t be afraid to step and let everyone know who has the power in the room, who’s the boss.”

“We’re always here to help,” Ectoplasm added, pointedly ignoring the way Midnight licked her lips imagining the power imbalance.

You sat back in your chair, glad your colleagues were happy to give a near-stranger a pep talk. Not only were you a member of Team English, it appeared you were also a member of the larger ‘Team Teacher.’

The talk of cohesiveness and unity was corny and utterly needed.

“Hellooooo fellow teaching idols,” Present Mic sang, using his foot to slid open the door to the teacher’s cafeteria. He plopped himself beside Ectoplasm as general pleasantry were exchanged.

“Done with classes for the afternoon, Mic?”

“English is done for the day, heroics with general studies is next!”
A few beats of silence enveloped the group as attention was turned back to their meals.

“Nooodle bowl,” Mic sighed, inhaling the delicious meal that steamed before him. There was always one thing that could make any day a great day -- a proper noodle bowl from Lunch Rush.

“So Lionheart, what classes are you teaching?” Ectoplasm asked, electing himself to break the silence. You frowned, picturing your grade book in your head.

“Class A, B, C, D, F and Class H,” you said, marking off your fingers as you went.

“So all the hero first-years and one class from each of the other departments,” Ectoplasm said. “Impressive.”

“It’s surprising that there are so many classes yet only a few teachers. I don’t know how you all do it,” you muttered.

“Well, we do bring in some outside help,” he said. “Other teachers for the upper grades. Contract teachers, I suppose you could call them, to help with the classes outside of heroics for the other focuses.”

“Not part of the inner circle,” Midnight said with a wink.

“But still, you’re talking about a sizable amount of kids here at UA and only a handful of teachers. Different grade levels. Surely--”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Present Mic said after inhaling a sizable clump of noodles. “Don’t sweat the small stuff, yeah? Just go with the flow.”

To punctuate his point, he swerved his hand up and down.

“Well, okay…”

“That’s the spirit!” Mic said with a thumbs up. “Now, let’s talk about important matters, yeah? We gotta take Lionheart here out on the town! Give her a UA welcome the good ol’ Japanese way!”

“We’ve gone out only once so far,” Midnight acknowledged, responding to Mic’s enthusiasm. “We can go get some drinks,” her eyes flashed over to Ectoplasm. “Maybe do some karaoke?”

The fiend-like man suddenly looked very interested in what Midnight had to say.

“All riiiight ,” Mic said, slamming a fist on the table and doing a disc scratching motion with his hands. “The heroes out, painting the town red.”

“I’m sure you will remember to act with dignity as representatives of the esteemed UA!”

Nedzu had opened the door, his usual smile in place. Although his statement made you pause, the rest of the teachers were unbothered by it. Midnight flashed him a smile.

“We’ll be on our best behavior,” she cooed.

“That’s what I like to hear.” Two black eyes landed on you. “Lionheart, do you have a free moment? There’s something of importance I need to discuss with you.”

*Shit, were you going to be fired?*

*Had you done anything worth firing?*
Unexplained fear bubbled up in your gut.

Before you could properly wallow in it, someone else spoke up.

“Is it the big one?” Mic whispered to the principal who looked momentarily annoyed, catching you off guard. He gave a curt nod and the voice hero looked over to you, fixing you with a too-large smile. “Awww yeah, guess you’re really part of the team now!”

His look was unnerving.

“Er… okay,” you said, eyeing the other two teachers who all had similar, eerie looks.

It was a Stepford Wives kind of moment.

“It’s nothing to worry about, come along,” Nedzu said, waving you to follow as he began to plod away. You fell in line, glancing behind one last time to see a wave of encouragement from Mic before sliding the door closed and leaving you alone to walk the hallways with your boss.

“Now,” Nedzu started as he continued walking. You caught up in a few quick strides. “As a member of UA’s staff, there are certain secrets you’re sworn to uphold. During your time here, you will learn and assist in the development of our students and their quirks. Along with that, you will undoubtedly learn of any weaknesses they may have. We want a full picture of each student so we can properly teach them and help them improve. Obviously, when they graduate and move to working as professional heroes, this knowledge could be used to cause them harm. So it’s our duty to never reveal those secrets. Is that understood?”

You rubbed your hands together, unsettled by Nedzu’s terse and serious tone. He was looking ahead as he spoke, his voice low due to the collection of students wandering the halls. You had to really concentrate on listening in order to hear what he was saying.

“Yes, absolutely,” you said -- you weren’t going to snitch.

“That same consideration carries over to our teachers. We are a team and, much like working with a professional heroic team, you come to learn about your colleagues. Their likes, their dislikes, their quirks and even their weaknesses. It’s our vow to one another that will never reveal the secrets to anyone -- students, friends, family, the press, etcetera -- is that understood?”

“Of course...” you affirmed yet again, voice trailing off.

*What was he preparing you for?*

“This is a serious matter and I need you to fully understand that what you learn here at UA can’t be shared with anyone, not even to people you trust.”

He had led you to a teacher’s lounge and stepped aside, allowing you to enter first.

Oddly, your heart was thumping in your chest.

You weren’t sure what you expected to be waiting for you inside. Something horrifying maybe, a science experiment gone wrong that was kept secret, hidden away in the school basement. What if UA… what if it actually trained *villains*? Or was the front to some secret society?

But there were no test tubes with floating bodies or crazed, chained monsters waiting for you in the lounge.
All the room contained was All Might, who stood gazing out a window, his hands on his hips. At hearing the door open and visitors entered, he glanced over his shoulder -- a pose you had seen him strike hundreds of times on television.

A way to show off his back muscles, you had always thought.

“Hello!” his voice boomed as he turned and face you both fully, eyes obscured by shadows but his smile frozen in place. You stepped deeper into the room as Nedzu closed and locked the door behind you, quickly returning to his place at your side.

“All Might…” Nedzu said, holding his breath slightly as if prolonging the big reveal. “... is a teacher here.”

You blinked, looking between the principal and All Might.

That… that was the secret?

“Well I...er, I’ve already met him,” you said lamely, worried you had taken the brevity out of the introduction. “He stopped by my classroom one afternoon and--”

There was a hiss, like air escaping from a valve. Smoke or some kind of condensation filled the room and you stood straighter, holding out a protective arm in front of Nedzu, instinctively raising your left.

“No need for shields, Lionheart!” Nedzu chirped, patting your arm. “This is what we wanted to show you!”

The smoke had dissipated in milliseconds and you found yourself looking upon the figure of a lank man standing where All Might had been flexing only seconds prior.

He was quickly wiping his mouth, but not quick enough to prevent you from recognizing a crimson vividness of fresh blood that trailed from his lips.

Gears began to click in your head.

All Might had just been standing there, but he had been replaced by this stranger. You had heard the phrase ‘skin and bones’ plenty of times before, but the newcomer truly embodied the sentiment. Your thoughts whirled around you as you took in the sight -- the mop of blond hair, oversized clothing. The same clothing All Might had just been wearing. His hands were big, you noted as he moved them away from his mouth. He was tall too, though he stood with a bit of a hunch.

All Might. Stranger.

All Might… then stranger.

All Might turned into the stranger.

Oh.

“Oh…”

You continued to stare at the man quietly, more struck by the suddenness of the change than anything else. There was no gradual shift -- one moment he was All Might and in an instant, he wasn’t.

He seemed… unsure of himself. Adjusting his clothing and checking his hands before eventually
looking up and locking eyes with you.

Though they were still mostly obscured by shadow, two blue irises were somehow visible, as if they were able to produce their own light.

Was this part of All Might’s quirk? Was he able to transform? He had always evaded discussing the extensiveness of his quirk. It would explain how he could keep so much of his life a secret to the public.

“A few years ago All Might was badly injured in a non-televised fight,” Nedzu’s soft voice cut into the silence. Though you felt minutes had passed, it had only been seconds.

“I lost my stomach,” All Might said, the usual bravado and exclamation missing from his voice. “And part of my respiratory system. Though I’m able to flex into All Might’s form for short periods each day… this is what I actually look like.”

He fell quiet.

“The students don’t know this is All Might’s true form. The world doesn’t know All Might’s true form. It has been kept a secret for plenty of good reasons. We’d hate for people to find out the number one hero was injured so horrendously. Being a hero isn’t just about saving the day,” Nedzu said earnestly. “It’s also about representing an ideal.”

“As a teacher, it would have been near impossible to keep it from the staff members,” Nedzu continued. “Mutually we agreed that the teachers would need to learn of All Might’s injury -- it was unavoidable.”

“For now I can make it through my classes and some out-of-class appearances. But otherwise, the walking skeleton you’ll see around campus… that’s me.”

His suit was blue today, you noted absentmindedly. You looked up and met his eyes again before looking over to Nedzu, who was watching intently.

Silence.

They’re waiting on an answer!

“Of course I’ll keep this secret!” you said with a sudden loud, nervous laugh that thundered across the tension. The humor quickly turned to horror as a gush of blood erupted from All Might’s mouth. “Oh my -- are you okay? I didn’t mean to laugh--”

“Don’t worry, it’s mostly harmless,” he muttered, using his hand to wipe away the bodily fluid. Well, that wasn’t hygienic.

“I don’t know about that…” you muttered in mild disbelief but Nedzu waved away your concerns.

“Our own Recovery Girl is All Might’s personal physician and there’s no one better suited to treat him. Aside from the blood, oh and the missing organs, he’s in fair shape!”

You grimaced as the still-bloody-mouthed bony man frowned at you.

Fair seemed like an overstatement.

“Meet Yagi Toshinori!” Nedzu exclaimed, jumping up and causing you to flinch away from him in surprise. “Just another teacher at UA working to mold the next generation of heroes!”
You paused.

They were watching you.

*Do something!*

Gingerly you approached a clearly-confused Yagi, holding out your hand, inwardly screeching in horror at the lameness of what you were doing.

“Nice to meet you, Yagi.”

Tentatively he took your hand, brows still knotted together in uncertainty. Were you attempting to make… some kind of statement?

“This was a strange meeting but I can’t help but feel relieved,” you said, passing a hand through your hair, trying to retain the appearance of nonchalance about the whole exchange, even though you felt the urge to jump from a window.

Why did you shake his hand?

Yagi looked to Nedzu.

“Honestly, I thought I was going to see some deep, dark, seedy secret of UA,” you continued. “Like we were experimenting on kids or breeding super soldiers or something. *This*… this I can handle.”

Nedzu clapped his hands in delight and approached his two employees.

“Well, this turned out better than I expected! It was on par with how Aizawa reacted! Though he was a little more… stone-faced,” the principal said, recalling the erasing heroes quick… *introduction.*

“Why don’t I get us some tea!?”

“Principal Nedzu, let me--” Yagi offered but was silenced with a swipe of his paw.

“No, no, I will do it.”

And then it was over.

Yagi had revealed his secret to the newest member of UA and, like most of the other teachers, you had quickly accepted it.

Though he should have been overjoyed that the staff had been so willing to welcome him flaws and all, a part of Yagi was ashamed that they were able to do it so *easily*.

A cloud formed over his thoughts, a sudden bout of despondency that Yagi that he couldn’t shake. For what little remained of the lunch period, he could only partially pay attention to the chit-chat between Nedzu and the new hire.

Somewhere a bell rung.

Relieved, he settled his teacup down on the table, standing and bowing quickly to his company.

“Thank you for your time today,” he said. “But I must go prepare for my class.”

“Work is important,” Nedzu nodded, placing his cup on the table as well. He hopped off the couch and you followed suit, sensing your meeting had come to an end. “Thank you for joining us today!” he said, guiding you toward the door. “And I applaud your understanding of this delicate situation.
But please keep in mind what I said earlier -- what you saw today cannot be shared with anyone else or talked about openly."

“Of course,” you reaffirmed from the doorway.

And with a curt wave of goodbye, you were gone.

“That was painless!” Nedzu chirped and Yagi nodded. “Americans are so open and understanding! She was a good hire, wasn’t she?”

The number one hero didn’t vocalize his agreement. Judging from the deeper-than-usual scowl on Yagi’s face, the principal theorized he had probably gotten into his own head again. What Yagi needed was a distraction.

“Now, before you go,” Nedzu said purposefully, unwilling to dismiss Yagi just yet. “There was just one other thing I wanted to talk about. You see, I recently read a study on the importance of student leadership in the classroom! If you would give me just ten more minutes of your time…”

UA’s class schedule was odd. Your Monday classes, which were your heroic and general studies kids, were held again on Friday whereas your Tuesday classes, the other focuses, were held on Thursday.

Effectively the Monday classes were given an extra day to do work compared to their other classmates.

Which… didn’t seem fair.

You considered bringing it up as a complaint to Nedzu -- it felt like a form of obvious favoritism -- but Present Mic’s words echoed in her head.

*Just go with the flow.*

You glanced over to where he sat, his head nodding as he drummed to a beat with one hand and typed one key at a time with the other.

“There you are!”

You jumped, the declaration cutting through the silence of the room. Midnight had entered (you hadn’t even heard the door slide open!) and took a seat at the empty chair beside you where Snipe usually sat. “It’s a done deal for tomorrow! We’re all going out for some after work drinks.”

Part of you was enthusiastic to bond with your co-workers!

But a majority of your soul was just plain *exhausted* -- the week had been mentally taxing. You had daydreamed during your commute of getting an enormous takeout order, heading to bed early and spending the weekend eating and sleeping.

“I’m excited,” you forced yourself to say with what you hoped was a genuine smile.

“Attagirl,” Midnight said, but her eyes betrayed some suspicion over the authenticity of your words. “Will you go to karaoke with us after?”

“*That* I’m on the fence about. I’m no singer.”
“Well, we’ll have to see what drunk you thinks.”

She winked.

And, for some strange reason, anxiety started to sprout within you.

During the Friday morning meeting, Nedzu offered you congratulations on finishing out your first week. You gave a half-hearted wave as the room echoed with polite claps (and enthusiastic whooping from Mic.)

Homeroom teachers were asked to submit their list of class representatives if they had not already been selected. Starting the following week, teachers were asked to remain on campus after school on Thursdays for a new set of meetings related to the annual UA Sports Festival.

“It’ll be here before you know it!” Nedzu exclaimed.

After dropping additional wisdom on the need to capture and hold the attention of students during lectures, the teachers were dismissed,

You shivered as Midnight came up from behind you, her soft hands reaching to play with your hair.

“Someone is looking to impress,” Midnight said, squeezing your shoulders before disengaging, walking with you out of the conference room. Since the two didn’t have homerooms, you spent your mornings in the staff room, waiting for the start of your first period.

You rolled your eyes but couldn’t keep a self-satisfied smile from sneaking through.

“Please, all I did was wash my hair.”

“We work in a building brimming with blossoming puberty and young men with lecherous thoughts, you should put more effort into looking your best every day. Toy with some minds, it’s a pleasure to do.”

“Creepy,” you said fixing Midnight with an affronted look.

The hero cackled, holding open the door of the staff room so you could enter. She didn’t linger after that -- she took a seat at her computer.

You were left wondering if Midnight was actually the best person to pursue as potential gal pal. Those thoughts, however, disappeared by the time you made it to Class A, glad to see a full house.

You assumed the freckled boy behind Bakugou was Midoriya, the boy prone to hand injuries.

“Are we doing another discussion today?” Hagakure squealed.

“Actually, today is just straight lecture!”

You exhaled a laugh at the chorus of resigned sighs, turning to write on the board.

“You all surprised me with your English skills Monday, but today I want to talk to you about homophones and homographs, the enemy of anyone learning the English language.”

The class ran just over an hour and, as you ranted, wrote sentences on the board and listed out
vocabulary words you’d like the students to study, you watched the life slowly drain out of their faces. It was a Friday, their thoughts already faced the weekend, but the material was important and they needed to get through it.

Besides, you had taken a peek at the schedule -- they had a class with All Might later, so that would undoubtedly be a great end to the week.

With 10 minutes remaining, you took pity on the ‘dying’ students and ended the lesson early. Your gift to the class who managed to power through the lecture. After collecting the haiku homework, you clapped her hands, ready to waste some time.

“So anyone have any plans for the weekend?”

Aoyama slowly raised his hand, his fingers wiggling with a slight flourish. You nodded to him, interested in what he had to say.

“I have big plans this weekend,” he said cryptically, raising a finger in a shushing motion and winking. “Some would call them super --”

“A new VR arcade opened by my house!” Ashido squealed, unable to hold back her excitement. You frowned, ready to scold her for interrupting a classmate but Kaminari jumped in inquiring the location.

“I’ve got a date with the new Smash Brothers game,” Kirishima said, interjecting his plans and looking over to Bakugou, flashing a toothy grin. “You’re still coming over right?”

Bakugou scoffed and looked away, but growled a low, “yes.”

“And you guys are going to study these vocab words, right?” you inquired innocently.

Three people nodded their heads.

Good enough.

Your two other classes behaved similarly -- they politely took the notes but their thoughts were not circling vocabulary words. Much like with Class A, you ended classes early for B and C too, holding a quick discussion on weekend plans. Soccer games, blossom watching, arcade visits -- oh to be a teenager again, you thought nostalgically, your thoughts on fast food trips and sleepovers.

Leaving your general studies students while they prepared to head to lunch, you slinked away with the hopes of finding an unused lounge. You had picked up a bento box from a corner store on your way into work and had plans on sequestering yourself away from distraction to get grading done and form her lesson plan for the next week.

If you accomplish those goals, your weekend would be open and work-free.

You were also excited to check out the results of your haiku homework, excited see what the students had written. It was a chance for you to get a peek at their personalities, though they were all a pretty forward crowd.

To your relief, you found an empty lounge in the first year’s building wing. Stretching your back, you took a seat on the couch and did a quick check of your phone. With no important emails or messages waiting, you opened the folder containing Class 1-A’s work.
Bird songs fill the air
The rabbit scurry away
Bees collect nectar

‘Koda Koji,’ you hummed to yourself, trying to picture the student in your mind. You were sure he was one of the quiet ones, one whose quirk impacted his facial structure. Aside from the slight verbiage error, it was a sweet poem. A pretty ode to spring.

You wrote as much on the sheet, opting to give him a ‘B.’ Deciding grades would probably be the most difficult part of teaching, you mused. You couldn’t help it, you were a bit of softee at heart and wanted all your growing students to succeed.

I can hear the beat,
The tempo of life surrounds.
I dance to the sound.

Jiro Kyoka, one of the students whose quirk you knew. So Jiro had decided to write a haiku about her quirk. You wrote a note praising the subject matter. It was good, Jiro was talented.

Silent is the night,
Swirling darkness consumes all,
Somewhere the crow cries.

Tokoyami Fumikage. So he was the dark brooding type. It made sense really, you thought as you visualized the reserved teenager. Very Edgar Allan Poe. He had the raven look and every--

The door the lounge blew open, an explosion of force at its entrance.

Startled, you watched as your papers, caught in a hurricane of energy, blew around the room. Having already experienced his entrance already, you turned expecting to see All Might posing in the doorway, ready to announce himself.

Technically you were right -- though it was his lank form that greeted you.

Blood was oozing from his mouth and he seemed in pain, he was lightly gripping at his chest. Your heart sank and you stood. Was he having a medical episode?

“Oh my god, are you okay?”

Your voice made him jump, his dark eyes flying open.

With it being lunch, he had assumed the lounges would be empty. He hadn’t bothered to check before dashing into the room -- a massive mistake on his part. But he had been eager to drop his muscular form since he had a class to teach later. Unfortunately, eager students had kept stopping All Might in the hallway, excited about a possible chat.
“I’m fine,” he tried to play off lightness but it came out more like a groan. Fortunately, the aches and strains were already starting to fade away.

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and winced when he met your eyes. His words hadn’t put you at ease.

“You just smeared blood all over your chin,” you pointed out and Yagi sighed, patting his pockets for a tissue or something. “Here.”

He looked up -- you were standing in front of him, having grabbed a small packet of personal tissues out of your backpack, offering them to him.

“I have a multipack at home, why don’t you take these?”

Graciously, Yagi accepted them, nodding his head slowly and repeatedly in thanks. However an embarrassed spurt of blood lurchled forth when he watched you start to pick up the papers he had obviously sent into disarray around the room.

“It’s fine!” you said lightly, ignoring his multiple apologies. He had quickly cleaned up his face and moved on to helping you collect your things. “I was just doing some grading. No harm, no foul.”

‘No harm, no foul, ’ he repeated to himself as he added to his pile.

He glanced down, a familiar name catching his eye. Ojiro Mashirao he read on the paper in his hand. He looked at another. Koda Koji.

“Work from Class A?”

“Yep! Their first English assignment for me, the haiku one. Remember? You came by for Midoriya’s classwork the day I assigned it?”

A switch went off in his mind, the memory flooding back.

“Oh right, of course.” He slyly glanced at you, attempting to appear nonchalant when he followed up with a question on how Midoriya had done on the homework.

“I hadn’t gotten to him yet,” you replied. “I had only gotten to Koda and Jiro before you, well…” she trailed off and Yagi launched into another series of apologies, forcing down the blood that coated his mouth.

Don’t spit all over her papers!

“For the thousandth time it’s not a big deal!” you exclaimed. “Please don’t tell me you’re going to apologize every time I see you like this?”

“Maybe not every time,” Yagi said, handing over his stack. “Only when I disturb your work.”

You thanked him for his help, settling back onto the couch. As you straightened your pile and pulled out the already grades papers, Yagi glanced down, noticing the unopened bento box on the table.

‘Ah, so she was going to eat in here … ’ he noted plainly. He thought of his own lunch tucked away in his bag -- he had a similar plan. If you were planning on stationing yourself in the room he would have to find another--

“You want some tea? I was about to pop the kettle on.”
"Pop the kettle on. Was it an English phrase? That would explain why some of your sayings were a little… odd."

"Oh I don’t want to interrupt--"

"I’d appreciate the company,” you lied, standing and making your way to where the kettle and coffee pot had been stashed. “I was just about to eat lunch if you haven’t already. I wanted to get some work done before we go out tonight.”

When Yagi didn’t respond you glanced at him.

"Are you coming out tonight?"

He thought of the email Midnight had sent earlier in the morning detailing the after-work get-together that was planned.

“I hope you’ll come,” you added, setting up two cups of tea. “Otherwise you’ll disappoint Midnight, she’s been twisting everyone’s arms about it.”

“I’ll… see how I’m feeling,” Yagi deflected and the look he received signaled you had heard the hollowness of his words.

“I’ll let Midnight know you’re a tentative yes.”

He should have been annoyed by the pushiness of your actions, but your tone was warm with a twinge of humor. You recognized you were being ridiculous. As he waited for his drink, he absentmindedly looked at the topmost assignment on the table.

"I bring death and pain.

I stand above the wreckage.

I have no equals.

Yagi groaned, having already gathered the poem’s author by the first line.

“Oh, a good one?” you asked, approaching and passing off a cup to him. He handed you Bakugou's work, watching as your eyes scanned it.

When you finished, you screwed up your face in exaggerated contemplation. “Are… are you sure some of these kids want to be heroes…?”

Yagi chuckled -- off all the students, Bakugou was a curious case. His drive and rage reminded him a lot of Endeavor.

“He's prickly,” Yagi agreed, pausing to take a light sip of his tea. Too hot. “He just needs work.”

You looked down at the paper again.

“There aren’t any errors and I said it could be about any subject…” you leaned over, scribbling a quick note on the page. He attempted to quietly adjust himself in order to see what you were writing.

“There.”

His intrigue was sated when you placed it on the table before him, on your graded pile.
You had given Bakugou an ‘A’.

*Excellent use of English! Please try not to kill anyone, heroes aren’t killers.*

“A gentle reminder,” you said without looking up from the new assignment you were reading. Yagi sat back, slightly embarrassed he had been caught being nosey. “Don’t worry,” you muttered, scribbling a message. “So far, they’re my favorite class too.”

You had graded Ashido, Kirishima and Mineta’s poems before you took a break and reached for your bag.

“I hope you don’t mind, I’m starving. Have you eaten yet?”

You were pulling out a water bottle and cutlery, eyeing the lunch that had been teasing you for as long as you had been grading. Yagi hesitated -- did he want to stay?

“I hope you have something exciting planned for Class A later and not a lecture, I made that mistake today and the kids barely got through it.”

“Well…” Yagi bashfully scratched the back of his head. “I was planning on doing a tower test but Principal Nedzu did say I have to hold a couple lectures during the school year.”

“Tell me they at least pay attention in a lecture held by All Might,” you said. “I’m pretty sure some of the kids were sleeping with their eyes open during my class today.”

Yagi paused, reflecting on his first lecture class.

*All Might slammed the book he held in his hand on Uraraka’s desk, the sudden action making the teenage girl gasp.*

“Do you know what it means to be a hero!?” His question thundered across the room.

*He leaned forward, waiting in anticipation as she worked to form her words.*

She was afraid. All Might’s eyes were mostly obstructed and he was towering over her, his smile unintentionally taking a more ghoulish form. She swallowed and attempted to squeak out a response before he suddenly swirled and pointed directly at Sero, who also froze.

“Do you have what it takes to be a hero!?” he demanded.

*Sero also found himself tongue-tied.*

*In an effort to motivate his class into action, to compel them to stand and shout their ideals, All Might walked back to the front of the room and slammed his fist on the podium.*

*Speak up! Declare who you are and what you represent! He wanted them to embrace the fire that burned within them.*

*To his students, however, the act didn’t seem like one of education-fueled passion.*

*Especially when the podium cracked and crumbled to the ground.*

*He looked out the pile.*

*“Whoopsie!”*
Yagi released a weak chuckle.

“I found that by motivating them to engage, you can capture their attention,” he offered slowly. You nodded, chewing slowly, considering his words. He was a big-named hero, obviously he would have some educational wisdom.

“I agree,” you said and Yagi let out a quiet breath of relief. He reached into his own bag, pulling out his own lunch.

“Oh my god!”

Yagi froze at the tone.

He looked at you, but your attention was on his lap.

He looked down at his lunch.

“It’s wrapped it up so cute!”

He turned his head just in time to erupt into coughs at the nasally way you had drawn out cute. Small dancing bunnies decorated the cloth that covered his bento box and you were half-tempted to pull out your phone and snap a picture.

*Calm yourself! You’re an adult woman!*

Embarrassed, you heeded the scolding of your mind, wincing and calming as you returned to grading, careful to avoid spilling food on your student’s work.

You did your best to involve Yagi as he was not-so-subtly reading everything. You began to freely pass poems over to him when you were done, though you did rope him into promising not to tell the students that he saw their work.

“I don’t want them to get embarrassed or anything! They are teenagers after all.”

So far Aoyama’s had been a favorite:

*The world is your stage*

*Twinkle and shine, mon amour*

*The stars sparkle for you ~ ~ ♥*

“I wish I had the confidence of this kid,” you said with a shake of your head after jotting down your praise but reprimanding that he had deviated from the 5-7-5 format and used French.

Yagi rubbed his chin, the blond boy had yet to excel in his class. His quirk was a bit… odd too.

“He seems like a good kid,” he offered, absentmindedly digging into his rice. His eyes flickered to you, but you seemed preoccupied, brows furrowed as you read what was in your hands.

He looked back to his meal.

“Seems like you have a fan,” you finally said, passing over another paper.
A hero’s smile

The reigning symbol of peace

Bettering the world.

Of course it was Young Midoriya. Yagi cleared his throat to hide his chuckle over the boy’s fanboy enthusiasm for him. Though he didn’t outright mention All Might, the context clues were blatant enough that you could piece them together with a single readthrough.

“How is Midoriya doing in your class?” he ventured to ask, watching you write a quick line of praise before giving him an ‘A’.

“Considering today was the first class I had with him... all right so far,” you said, sharing a grin. A moment passed. “You’ve already pegged him as your favorite, huh?”

“Well--!” Yagi said a little too loudly and quickly, his attempt at acting impartial backfiring spectacularly.

“If his work slips you’ll be the first to know,” you said, slapping your thighs in victory, the entirety of Class A’s work graded. You flipped open your grade book to record the markings. “I’m sure if any of the kids got a stern talking to from All Might about their grades, they’d all be model students. And if you need me to yell at anyone about their work ethic in your class, I’ll be sure to bring the English hammer down on them.”

You smiled widely and flashed a thumbs up, an obvious call-out to All Might’s signature pose. He found himself returning a small smile, though his internal All Might had responded with much more enthusiasm.

“Now onto Class B, who has already formed a rivalry with their sister class.”

“That’s how it’s always been at UA,” Yagi offered, a piece of sage wisdom on the inner workings on the school. “Naturally forming rivalries that make the students play off one another. They’ll form between classes and between students.”

“All in a race to be the best,” you said with a small shake of your head.

That interested Yagi.

“You don’t like it?” he inquired.

“I’m an idealist when it comes to heroics,” you offered as you continued reading and grading. “I think this push to be the top hero taints what the whole profession is about. Shouldn’t it be about helping people? Isn’t that what the focus should be on?” Yagi opened his mouth to answer but you spoke up first. “And believe me, I’m well aware I’m talking to the number one hero right now.”

Yagi winced.

The reality of his situation was casting his ranking into doubt.

“Ranking is just part of the job,” he offered, certain his momentary emotional response had gone unnoticed. “Why pretend it doesn’t happen? The drive to be number one forces kids beyond their limits. So do the rivalries. They grow and adapt. It’s not just the saving heroes are responsible for, they’re also symbols. The higher the rank, the more media attention. That means your message can spread further and maybe shine through some of the dark.”
You opened your mouth but closed it, chewing on your bottom lip as you continued to record grades.

“I liked the way you put it,” you finally offered.

“Were you… are you… a professional hero?”

For just a second, he saw your pen hesitate. He probably would have missed the slight twitch had he not been looking directly at you. In fact, he wasn’t entirely sure you even realized you had a physical reaction to the question for you responded with a curt, “Kind of, retired now.”

“I’m ashamed to admit I don’t know your background,” Yagi said. You shrugged but didn’t appear bothered by the admission.

“There’s a lot of heroes in the world and I worked in the states,” you said. “I would have never crossed your radar.”

It was apparent you weren’t comfortable with the subject. But it was odd -- you were working at a hero school, obviously there must have been some draw to heroics.

“I’m not that cool,” you said, eager to take control of the conversation. “It just so happened UA had an open position and a former colleague recommended me for it. It probably helped that I was a native English speaker, already in Japan and could start immediately.”

Yagi wanted to try and pull some more information from you, curious about your background, but of all people who was he to poke and prod? Did he not have secrets of his own?

“I’m sorry,” he said, making it a point to take out his phone and look at the time. “You want to do work and I’ve been hindering it.”

“Oh, it was no problem!” you said, though your tone was slightly colder. The topic had made a negative impact on you and he inwardly shook his head, though the burning curiosity remained.

To his surprise you actually shook your head, placing your work back down on the table. He continued to pack, pretending that he didn’t notice you taking a minute to gather yourself.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to be a bummer,” you said, injecting friendliness back into your voice. “It was drilled into us that our work was considered classified, so it’s still a bit odd to talk about it so openly.”

Yagi had seen enough movies to know how the United States classified its intelligence.

Still, hearing you say it out loud did kind of make you sound like a secret agent.

A spy movie!

“It was truly, honestly, fun today,” you said, continuing to build on the friendliness. “Don’t be a stranger! Come eat lunch with me again -- I’m with Midnight most days down in the cafeteria.”

You seemed so genuine that Yagi felt himself believing you.

It was… nice.

Before he closed the door of the lounge behind him, he heard you shout one last thing.

“I hope to see you tonight!”
All Might’s class was no lecture, that was certain. Cementoss had been kind enough to create a large cement tower the night before in one of UA’s open instruction fields, a new obstacle the class would need to triumph over.

It was a marvel, nearly as tall as a skyscraper, rising high above the school. The goal seemed ordinary enough -- All Might had declared that the lesson was simply to reach the top of the tower, where he would be stationed.

There was no time limit and it was strictly pass/fail; if you didn’t climb the tower before the end of class, you would fail.

The only rule -- don’t damage the tower structurally.

“Otherwise it will fall and crush you all!” All Might said, brandishing a thumbs-up, his smile never faltering.

Mineta, who had been eyeing the tower in terror, felt his bottom lip tremble. He imagined an errant blast from Bakugou smashing into the tower, making it crumble and allowing the tons of concrete to rain down on his small body.

“Now, wait for my signal!”

All Might crouched low to the ground and sprung upward, the force creating a wind that swirled around the students. Many grinned, the displays of All Might’s power during class still made them giddy. It took only a single jump for him to effortlessly make it to the top, his large form barely visible as he looked down over the edge.

“Can you hear me alright? Wave your arms around if you can!”

All Might’s voice boomed around the students and several of the nervous ones jumped, startled at the sound. He was obviously using speakers, but where they were hidden, no one was sure.

“Good! Now, remember what I said about knocking the tower down. Otherwise, I believe in all of you! Now, let’s go!”

At his go, several of the eager students jumped forward and began their ascent. All Might stepped back out of view and relaxed, allowing his muscular form to dissolve away. He turned to the
television set he and Cementoss had set up, giving him different perspectives off the tower.

Bakugou was in the lead, the explosions from his hands propelling him upward. Following behind him was Todoroki, who was using ice to create hand and feet grips. He applauded their instant tenacity, but it was a high tower. It would be a good stamina baseline for the students to see how long their quirks could last.

He cycled through the different perspectives, looking for the familiar green mop of hair.

Midoriya was still ground-level, joined with several other students whose quirks would not be much of assistance when trying to scale a vertical surface, let alone a skyscraper. For these students, this would be a problem-solving lesson on top of a stamina test.

Young Midoriya was talking intensely with a slim brunette girl -- Uraraka. Iida was also standing beside them. The three appeared to be talking, strategizing. Yagi rubbed his chin, curious. If he remembered correctly, Uraraka had a zero gravity quirk, the lesson should have been simple for her.

Though he hadn’t structured it like a race, undoubtedly the more forward-thinking students were treating it as one.

Yagi couldn’t hear what the students were saying, and he was terrible at reading lips, but he watched the three of them nod their heads. Uraraka reached out, touching Midoriya, Iida and herself before the trio linked arms.

Together all three jumped up, rising lazily. So Uraraka would share her power to let her friends--

Midoriya twisted in the air so that he was facing the ground. He held his hand out, poised to flick a finger. He turned to Iida and nodded. At relatively the same time, Iida released a blast from the engines on his calves while Midoriya released a finger.

Though there was a mild difference in power, the intended result was achieved. Acting as boosters, the three lurched forward, quickly rising and surpassing the other late starters.

Pride swelled in his chest and he had to consciously beat-down the urge to release his muscular form that threatened to spill forth at the display of such marvelous teamwork. No, his time was limited. He had to wait.

Quickly, he looked through the other views. Their plan hadn’t been silent and their rocket ascension caused many students to cry out in frustration -- even Yagi could hear it from where he was.

Bakugou and Todoroki were still ahead, though the frog-like student Asui had joined their ranks. Their efforts doubled when they looked down and realized they weren’t as far in front as they believed.

Midoriya, Uraraka and Iida were not the only team that had formed. Kaminari, Jiro and Shoji had come together, as had Sero and Koda. Sato was also helping the invisible one, Hagakure.

Yagi decided he would make it a point to applaud them on their teamwork. He never told them they had to work individually and it appeared the students took note of that.

The only student he was truly concerned for was Aoyama. Though he could propel himself upward with blasts from his belly, they were short-lived. He had taken to clinging to a leftover chunk of ice from Todoroki, queasiness on his face mixed with fear.

He wondered how long the ice would hold up as it looked like Aoyama would have about a six-story fall if his grip broke off the tower. All Might may have to do some saving to prevent a broken
spine.

Recovery Girl would not forgive him for that.

Taking a seat on the cement, he flickered through the television perspectives. It was now a waiting game. Thankfully, no one appeared to be on the brink of disaster.

He patted around his baggy suit, looking to where his cell phone had been buried in fabric. Normally he wouldn’t carry his phone around while acting as All Might -- it was a liability in case he accidentally dropped it, which wasn’t out of the realm of possibility considering he had dropped and lost a villain several months earlier.

He looked at the clock. He would give them another 15 minutes before he would end the lesson. He also quickly skimmed his emails--

Oh no, he had an email from Nedzu. It wasn’t a mailing list email either, it was personally addressed to him. He checked the TV to make sure everyone was still in one piece before quickly reading it.

Missed staff meeting. Disappointed at lateness.

Glancing up again, he quickly typed out an apologetic response, vowing to do better time management in the morning.

“Fucking Deku!” came an angry cry and Yagi nearly dropped his phone at how close it sounded. He flicked through the views -- so it seemed Bakugou had altered his strategy, enraged that Midoriya had made it to his altitude.

He was hurling firebombs at the trio and, in order to evade them, they were forced to maneuver out of the way and had lost their upward trajectory as a result. Yagi sighed, he also didn’t tell his kids they couldn’t attack each other or hamper one another. It was unsavory, sure, but he opted to allow their spat to continue.

Besides, it would be good for Young Midoriya. It was the conclusion he had reached as he watched the two classmates confront one another during his Battle Simulator -- Bakugou and Midoriya had an undeniable bond that needed to be sorted out.

The two fed on each other.

A ball of fire shot up beside the tower forcing All Might to instinctively expand into his muscular form. He returned his phone to his suit and strolled over to the side, looking down.

They were like ants swarming a tree branch, all racing up his way.

“Anyone need saving?” his voice boomed. He waited for any screams or flailing arms, but no one responded. “That’s the spirit, you’re all doing wonderfully! You have a little over ten minutes, so put all your energy into some final pushes!”

The announcement of the remaining time caused a scramble. There was a clinking sound to his left and All Might turned in time to watch a barrage of jutting ice appear, followed by the distinctive red-and-white hair of Todoroki. He pulled himself over the ledge and shakily stood.

“It appears Young Todoroki is the first to complete the lesson!” All Might boomed, walking over to congratulate and check on the softly panting student.

A soft ‘oof’ also caught his attention - looking over his shoulder he saw Asui pull herself up.
“Followed by Miss Asui!” he exclaimed.

Somewhere below, Bakugou released a cry of fury upon hearing he had already lost.

“Excellent job you two,” he said, clapping Todoroki on the back. The student winced, fully beginning to realize how sore his arms were. “You blew my expectations clean out of the water!”

“Speaking of water,” Asui muttered, forcing herself to sit up. “You wouldn’t happen to have any, would you?”

“Nope!” All Might said, flicking a thumbs-up. “But we’ll be sure to get everyone hydrated before their next class!”

Asui sighed, attempting to wetten her dry tongue.

In an explosion of rage, Bakugou shot above them all, landing on the top of the tower with a loud thump. His teeth were clenched, breathing ragged in anger and fatigue.

“And not to be outdone, Young Bakugou has literally rocketed his way to a finish!”

All Might turned to offer his congratulations to the blond, but the teenager was in an obvious mood and turned his back to him.

“You’ve done very well Bakugou!” All Might offered, hopeful that the boy would take the praise to heart.

In response he bristled, sitting down in a huff, facing away from the rest of his classmates.

All Might expected Midoriya and his friends to float up next. However, it was Sero and Tokoyami who arrived neck-in-neck.

Finally, after Yaoyorozu and Kirishima managed to make their way up, Midoriya and his team appeared.

All Might inwardly groaned realizing that many of the fingers on Midoriya’s right hand were in shambles. Once Uraraka removed their weightlessness, All Might realized Iida was also sporting a limp.

“It’s just a cramp,” Iida said with a grimace, sitting and flexing his toes. Uraraka also sat, the effort of the test leaving her feeling queasy. She was dry heaving, hands clasped over her mouth.

She had to vomit something fierce and desperately worked to keep it in.

“Excellent teamwork you three!” All Might bellowed, his zeal cutting into the exhausted students.

*Time is up! Time is up! Time is up!*

Heads turned to All Might, whose voice they heard shouting on repeat. He laughed nervously, retrieving his cell phone and silencing the alarm.

“And with that,” he said, “Time is up!”

“Whaaa!” came a cry as a small student flung himself over the side. He turned to look at All Might, tears welling in his eyes, blood oozing from his head.

“Don’t worry Young Mineta!” All Might said in a consolatory tone. “Let’s say you finished just at
the clock struck zero. Good job!”

Mineta deflated in relief, walking over and collapsing next to Yaoyorozu.

All Might peered over the side. The remaining students were clinging to the tower at varying heights. Some had followed in Aoyama’s footsteps and were using Todoroki’s ice remnants to pull themselves up. Koda had been immobilized, Sero’s errant tape wrapping around him and accidentally binding him to the side of the tower.

The few students who were relatively close to the top had decided to finish their climb, despite losing.

“Hang on, I’ll get you all down soon enough!” All Might called to the stragglers while also searching the ground for his block-shaped colleague.

He had said he was going to arrive in time for the end of class - he was their ticket down off the tower. All Might’s smile clenched. If he needed to personally bring the students down…

That was going to be an energy drain.

“Looking for me?” A soft voice asked and the center of their cement tower gave way, revealing Cementoss. Mineta screeched in shock, clamping onto Yaoyorozu, thankful for the excuse to touch the boxum classmate.

She rolled her eyes and patted his back, not yet aware of his true lecherous tendencies.

“Oh! Cementoss my good man, what a sight for sore eyes!” All Might declared, stepping forward. Cementoss smiled bashfully, nodding his head at All Might’s excitement to see him.

But speaking of sore…

Cementoss looked at the piles of aching and exhausted students that surrounded All Might. They appeared disinterested in his appearance, all in their own worlds of discomfort and ache. Though the troops surrounding him were obviously in distress, All Might’s smile only widened.

“They’ll be fine!” he said and Cementoss shrugged.

It wasn’t his class to teach.

After issuing a warning to hold on, Cementoss began to deconstruct the cement tower. Slowly it fed back into a nearby hose, disappearing into the cement reservoir the hero had established underneath the school.

“You all really impressed me today with your stamina and ingenuity!” All Might declared after all his students were returned to earthen ground. “I was expecting maybe three or four of you to excel at this lesson but you all astounded me! And the displays of teamwork!” All Might’s flashed a victory sign. “For this test, let’s just say you all pass!”

There were relieved sighs as those who technically failed were given a freebie.

“Don’t expect this for every lesson, but the drive and problem solving I saw today are indicators that some excellent heroes are brewing in this class! Now, why don’t we head back and change!?” Besides Young Midoriya, are there any others who need medical attention!?” When no one raised their hands, All Might nodded.
Good, it would give him a second to catch up with his protege.

“Again, good job everyone! Class dismissed! Now come along Midoriya, let’s get you to Recovery Girl.”
It’s nerve-wracking going to a place with a group of people you barely know.

What if you bumbled your words? Made a fool of yourself?

Worse yet, what if your co-workers grouped together and you ended up alone?

What if most of your night was spent drinking quietly and trying to look interested by something you found on your phone?

Trying desperately to smother the feeling of desperate loneliness that tends to rear its head when one is surrounded and ignored by people they actually want to interact with?

Those fears that clouded your thoughts faded when you sat down at the table Friday night, surrounded by your coworkers. All relieved to have another week of the term stuffed under the belts.

Midnight, though she was brimming with perverse innuendos and mannerisms, was actually a very hospitable person. Immediately she pulled you into every conversation she was part of and, by the third drink, you were chatting pleasantly with Present Mic, who had taken to singing the last word of all his sentences, a red tinge starting to dance across his face.

Apparently the man could not hold his booze.

You all still had time to kill before your karaoke room reservation, so the heroes had gathered by a bar in fairly close proximity to UA. It was a frequent watering hole for some of the teachers -- the barman was eager to clear a large table to allow you all to sit together and the service was impeccable to the point it almost felt like your beers were neverending.

“Aizawa and I were in the same class together,” Present Mic declared, jutting his thumb at the morose man staring at his beer. “I was the one who named him Eraserhead.”

“Have you guys have been best friends since?” you asked. Present Mic nodded solemnly, as if their relationship was no joke. Aizawa seemed less enthused.

“He followed me to my internship my first year. He hasn’t left me alone since.”

“Brothers from other mothers,” you said, the translation a little rough. Still, the gist of it translated well enough that Present Mic immediately endeared himself to it, repeating it enthusiastically while gesturing between himself and his friend.

Aizawa took a sip of his drink.

Across from you was a teacher you had yet to interact with personally, but you were sure his hero alias was Vlad King. Just as you had pulled away from your conversation with Mic for a breather, Vlad had taken a break from speaking with Snipe.

“I don’t think we’ve met officially yet. I’m Lionheart,” you said. You relaxed when his eyes met yours, a sign that he had heard you over the chatter of the bar.

“Kan,” he said simply, though not in an unfriendly way.
“You’re the homeroom teacher for Class B, right?” you asked. The teacher nodded in affirmation. “They are an impressive bunch... You know I teach English right?” you began, an indication you were about to launch into a story. “Well, I may have let it slip that their curriculum was the same as A’s and they were so offended. They told me to change the work -- they wanted it to be harder!” You sighed, looking down at your beer in awe. “A bunch of teenagers want more work? You should be really proud, that class is amazing.”

Vlad was pleased by the praise you were dropping, his exterior instantly warming. He knew the potential of his class, of his kids.

“They tried to convince me to hold morning training exercises instead of homeroom,” he said, his face acknowledging it was a ludicrous idea but his eyes reveling in the tenacity behind it. “They’re not gonna rest until they topple Class A.”

The nearby teachers who were eavesdropping turned toward Aizawa to see his response. As Class A’s homeroom teacher, how would he react to such a statement uttered by a rival teacher?

He seemed unperturbed by Kan’s declaration.

“I hope they try,” Aizawa replied with his usual flatness. “The kick will be good for my class.”

“You think that now but wait until the sports festival,” Kan said, grabbing for his beer while holding out a finger. “They’ll really impress you then.”

“I haven’t told my class about it yet. The festival,” Aizawa admitted. Present Mic choked on his drink, crazed eyes glancing from behind his glasses.

“Wha--“ he was flabbergasted. “You haven’t been training them?”

“I had them do some physical stuff at the start of the semester,” Aizawa intoned, taking another sip of his beer and tugging the topmost layer of his scarf, loosening it a smidgen. “Most should know about the festival already. It happens every year -- every UA hopeful watches it.”

“No warning or practicing though? That seems like a foolish plan and a good way to lose your top seat,” Vlad said with a grin. “But if it’s benefiting us, I’m not gonna stop you.”

“Yagi!” Midnight cooed, jumping up from her seat at the head of the table and waving her arm. Collectively the teachers watched as their slender colleague maneuvered his way through the still-sparse bar toward their table.

Greetings were called out from all those seated and Yagi paused, his eyes falling on the empty stool beside of you. Immediately you caught his eye and patted it, gesturing him to join you.

Of course, the only empty seat would be next to you.

“I’m glad you came!” you said as he took a seat, gently placing his bag out of the way on the floor. Large hands rested quietly on the table before him as he nervously glanced at all the pairs of eyes peering at him.

“Yes... well...” he trailed off and Present Mic leaned over the table to get an unobstructed line of sight.

“Hey All Mi-”

In one slow, controlled motion Aizawa dug his elbow into his friend’s side.
Present Mic released a gasping breath, clutching his bruised torso as his glasses traveled down his nose. He turned to his colleague, breathless and confused as to why he would attack him in such a painful way.

Yagi panicked, waving his arms wildly, wide eyes darting around the bar.

*Don’t say that name!*

Fortunately, Mic caught onto his near-gaffe and after taking a few shaky breaths to compose himself, he bounced back to his usual bravado and attempted to ask his question again. “Can you drink?” he asked, curious if alcohol could be ingested by someone missing their stomach.

The timing was perfect -- the long tentacled arm of the waitress plopped a beverage down as she breezed by to assist another newly-seated group.

“I don’t drink… *this* is non-alcoholic beer,” Yagi said, sating curiosity. He also showed the label of the bottle for good measure before pouring it into his glass, lest anyone thought All Might was a liar.

You knew he was missing some pretty important internal organs, but you weren’t entirely sure of the extent of his medical maladies. Still, he didn’t look like a particularly healthy individual. You idly wondered if he took off his shirt, you would be able to see his heart beating -- you had watched a video of something like it once. But your memory was failing you; it might have involved a baby and not a full-grown man.

To think, such a scrawny person was actually All Might. You sipped your beer.

“Look at us all together,” Midnight clapped her hands together and excitedly looked around the table as if she was holding court. “Like a little family.”

“I’m not sure if I’d want to be a member of your family,” you heard Mic mutter in his drink. Aizawa heard it as well, the corner of his mouth twitched upward.

You had another hour or so to pass before it was time for karaoke. Stifling a yawn, you pulled out your phone, the weight of the week finally hitting you and dragging you toward exhaustion. You weren’t drinking quickly enough to propel you into a happy party mood. Instead, the heavy beers were tipping your toward slow blinks and yawns. You could feel the buzz from the alcohol in your bones. If you went to bed soon, you would probably sleep well.

Although it had been fun so far, you weren’t sure if you could hold out another two or three hours for karaoke.

“I can’t wait to go to bed,” you said, looking at Yagi who had been quietly sipping his drink. “Fridays are rough.”

Yagi politely nodded in agreement, casually looking over. You waited a few seconds and, when you received nothing more, you returned her attention back to your phone.

*Oh!* Common sense struck Yagi. You had been trying to start a conversation.

“Do you live in Musutafu?”

You perked up, quickly turning your phone front-side down so you wouldn’t be tempted to steal a glance at the screen. Another rude habit you were attempting to break.

“Yep!” You chirped, internally wincing at how eager you sounded. *Calm. Be calm and nonchalant.*
“I moved here when was offered a job. Before that I was in Tokyo. It’s a lot quieter and *a lot* smaller. What about you?”

“Oh, I’ve only been here a couple months. I’m still trying to get used to everything,” he said.

He was friendly but not as… companionable as he had been previously. When you were grading papers in the teacher’s lounge. It was disappointing, the feeling of having possibly taken a step back in your blossoming friendship.

Although it was completely childish, your main focus, besides doing your new job well, was getting your co-workers to like you.

“You’re in the same boat as me!” you pointed out, hoping that could further tie you together.

Yagi nodded and a silence fell. You took a swig from your glass and surveyed the table, trying to think of another conversation starter that didn’t have to do with work or the weather.

Thankfully Yagi stepped up.

“How have you lived in Japan long?”

You mentally performed a tally in your head, relieved he had taken to helping guide your conversation along.

“I’ve been here for a little more than four years.”

“What brought you to Japan?”

“A change of scenery,” you said before taking another deep, slow drink. With a sigh, you shot a quick glance around you before tilting a little closer to the blond man, as if you were about to reveal a secret. “Truth is, I got hooked on Korean dramas a couple years back. I thought about moving to South Korea but ended up in Tokyo and, well, stuck around.”

“Korean dramas…” Yagi said in bewilderment, eyes wide. In those sneaky moments, he thought you were going to truly say you were a spy.

Soap operas!

You were still leaning close to him when he turned back from hiding a wet cough, which surprised him. It wasn’t a hygienic habit he had developed -- most had the common sense to avoid a stranger’s blood and cringe away. Sensing your closeness was making him uncomfortable, you shared a friendly grin to put him at ease, pushing back to sit deeper in your chair.

Something in him thrummed.

It was… a nice sensation.

“Your Japanese is pretty good for a foreigner,” Vlad said, interjecting himself into your conversation. You blinked up at him. “How did you learn it?”

“Self-motivation and personal strength,” you declared before faltering sheepishly as a joke, miming that wasn’t the *real* answer. “Plus a tutor and some online programs.”

Vlad thought for a moment before giving a slight shrug -- the answer appeared to satisfy him. But he had opened the door and suddenly you were in the crosshairs of world-class interviewer Present Mic.
“Nedzu never told us your background, you know,” he said, pushing his sunglasses down slightly and looking you over. “You weren’t some kind of American spy were you?”

Ah, Yagi thought proudly. Someone else was aligned with his thinking.

You laughed at Mic’s question, shaking your head as you sipped your beer. But you didn’t vocalize an answer and he wasn’t about to accept that. What kind of host would he be if he didn’t press for the facts? Didn’t ask the hard questions? His listeners would be so disappointed in his work!

“If you weren’t a spy, what did you do?”

*They were prying because they were curious.*

“I worked for the US government,” you said with a shrug, most of your focus dedicated to your beer.

“Oh that’s exciting!” Midnight called out. She had been eavesdropping on the conversations you had been involved in, making sure you were being involved and were comfortable. “You have to tell us about it!”

A hidden flush spread across your chest when you realized the other coinciding conversations had paused in favor of hearing your answer. You had been put on the spot.

“I worked with the military,” you said after a pause, pretending to pull lint and hair off the sleeves of your sweater. Catching yourself retreating into nervous habits, you forced yourself to look up and smile.

“Oh, you were a soldier?”

“Not exactly. I worked as support for the military.”

“What do you mean, support? Like a doctor or something?” Vlad asked, brows furrowing.

“On-field support. Our team was like… *back-up*. I signed on to help out during some… covert activities.”

*Covert activities.*

Spy, thought several teachers (and Present Mic) concurrently.

Secret Agent, Yagi thought triumphantly.

“But not covert like James Bond or something,” you interjected with a quick laugh, catching immediately how that phrasing would sound. You weren’t aware your words immediately dashed the hopes of several of your audience members. “But my team would…” you looked down and concentrated, as if you were selecting your words carefully. “We would act when the US didn’t want to make a scene. But only in areas where we had a military presence already on the ground.”

You fell quiet, no longer fidgeting with the sleeves of your sweater but lightly tapping one of your fingers on the table.

“Did you go pro after your military stint?” Vlad asked.

“No…” you said, drawing out the word. “I signed up for another tour and ended up leaving three years in.”

“Why’d you leave?”
“A bunch of reasons, really,” you finally said, the drinks have loosened your tongue. But the conversation still made your skin itch and you wanted it to end. “I realized I kind of lost my way, you know? I never considered myself a hero but I felt like I definitely wasn’t acting like one.”

“Then why did you sign up again?”

“I was an idiot.” Your words, although you said it with a goofy smile and a light tone, were harsh and jagged.

Enough was enough, this was getting beyond polite conversation. It was time to end it.

“Well, that’s pretty much my origin story. Went back to America. Went to Europe. Ended up here.”

Silence.

_Goddammit._

You were obviously uncomfortable about the questioning, the heroes at the table noted. Although most wanted to press for more answers -- meddling, it’s what they did -- they opted to let the topic drop. Though you were new, you appeared nice enough. Genuine. You laughed freely, spoke politely and already had begun breaking through your initial new-girl reservedness.

It was still rare for you to go out of your way to start a conversation, though you would happily participate if someone else began speaking to you first.

Baby steps.

For the teachers, this had been the most animated they’d seen you by far -- probably because you were sporting a heavy buzz.

“Sweetie--”

Midnight stood up and sauntered over, standing behind you. Her arms wrapped around your neck.

“I am so glad you told us!” she cooed as she squeezed you tighter, gently rocking you from side to side. You froze, allowing the shaking to continue, a dazed confusion contorting your features.

“I’m glad you came out and that you shared your story with us!” Midnight continued to sing. You laughed, teetering between relieved and uncomfortable, but settled with being at ease. The R-rated hero didn’t linger behind you for long -- Mic let loose a joke referencing her age and immediately incurred her wrath.

You were glad the spotlight had been shifted off of you. Your colleagues were full of smiles and chuckling, entertained by Present Mic’s misfortune. All but Aizawa, whose heading was slowly nodding forward as if he was on the brink of falling asleep.

There was no judgment, just acceptance.

Looking back, you don’t know why you turned your head to peek over at Yagi. Perhaps it was because he was one of the greatest heroes to ever live and there was still a large part of you that admired him for it. Validation, maybe.

Sure, you never became a professional hero but that didn’t mean you never _wanted_ to. Many a night had been spent chatting with friends about futures that never materialized.

All Might was regarding you, his mouth slightly agape as it usually was, but it was unmistakably
curved downward in a deep frown. He was scowling at you. Your face snapped away and you forced yourself to stare at the nervous huddled form of Present Mic.

The positivity and optimism you had forcefully been storing eroded away.

He knew what you were.

“Well with that,” you said, voice airy but strangled. “I should head out. It’s late and I really do have a lot of work to catch up on--”

“But karaoke!” Ectoplasm said, shocked that you would excuse yourself before the main event -- the major reason they were out to begin with.

“Don’t go!” Midnight added, ignoring her victim to place a pleading hand on your shoulder. “This is about team building!”

“A rain check I promise!” you said, deftly maneuvering away from the clawed hand. You dropped a handful of yen on the table (way too much) grabbed your bag. “I definitely want to hear all about it on Monday! Someone sing a nice American song for me! ‘Sweet Caroline!’ Bon Jovi!”

“I’ll sing it with you!” Mic announced, standing up and holding an invisible microphone to his mouth, one hand reaching toward you. “Duuuuuet!”

You had broken away from the table, full of smiles and apologies as you quickly left, sidestepping just in time to avoid running into the waitress, who had nearly a dozen beer bottles wrapped in her appendages.

For Yagi, it wasn’t until you stood to leave that a switch flipped in his mind and he got a clue what was happening. The look you had shared -- he didn’t know what to think of it at first. But the way you jerked your head away and jumped up after your eyes met, he realized he may have unintentionally been drooling blood or making a face.

He tried to speak up, to apologize for any offense he may have caused, but you had waved away the shouted protests.

*Go home. Go to bed.*

“Poor thing,” Midnight tsked, watching your fleeing form. “We probably made her nervous with the interrogation.”

“I thought we handled it well,” Ectoplasm offered.

Yagi kept quiet, hands folded on his lap.

“It was probably just hard for her to talk about it,” Midnight said before she sighed and slid back into her seat. “I wished she would have stayed. I wanted her to feel welcome.”

“We can go out again,” Aizawa said, his voice a low hum and his eyes lazily scanning over those who sat around him. Midnight considered his words.

“I’ll talk to her on Monday,” she said. “Work some of my… magic.”

Snipe furrowed his brows. Midnight’s ‘magic’ seemed like it would involve a plethora of whips, cuffs and restraints--

A tinkling alarm jolted him out of the images that were forming in his head. He was glad he wore a
mask. Midnight gasped, reaching for her phone and checking the time with a grimace.

“Dammit, we’re late!”

Ectoplasm stood quickly, his chair loudly skidding behind him.

“Let’s go!” he roared as he and the rest of the group dug into their wallets for money. As they grabbed their belongings, Yagi happened to glance back at the table, eyes falling on an unclaimed cell phone sitting forgotten in the chaos. He was going to point it out when he realized where it sat -- in front of the empty chair you had fled from moments before.

_You flipped your phone over and turned to him, your full attention on him._

His hand hovered over it and he grasped it, adding it to his bag.

So consumed was he in his thoughts that he mindlessly followed the teachers out of the bar and down the street. It wasn’t until they were ushered into the private karaoke room that he remembered he had wanted to take his leave _before_ they got to karaoke.

The door snapped shut, bathing the room in privacy. Although Ectoplasm stood with a flourish, determined to get to the machine first to start the night off right, he was enraged to find Present Mic had beat him to the microphone. In fact, in the energy of everyone settling, the DJ had already entered his song selection.

The sound of snapping fingers filled the room and the hero held out a second microphone to a preoccupied Yagi.

_Maybe he could just shout his goodbyes and slip out the door--_

“All Might!” Present Mic’s voice boomed from the room’s speaker system and Yagi jumped, poised to start flailing for him to quiet down. But they were away from public eye and Present Mic was unconcerned. “I want to sing a duet with All Might!”

_Jitterbug._

Yagi groaned and he felt the hands of Midnight shoving him to the extra microphone Present Mic was swinging out to him.

_Jitterbug._

“Come on! Just a few songs!”

Yagi sheepishly rubbed the back of his head and tried to duck away.

Midnight wouldn’t allow that.

Oh no.

Yagi was no singer.

_But All Might was._

With a powerful inhale Yagi stepped forward and All Might took the microphone from an ecstatic Present Mic. The DJ hero bounced and bopped to the beat, singing the song and adding flourishes of spinning discs and arm waving.
All Might was mostly bent over, his ‘singing’ dissolving into trying to read out the words on the screen fast enough before they were replaced by the next line.

"Wake me up, before you go-go! Don’t leave me hanging on like a yo-yo!"

All Might grit his teeth, though his smile remained.

The disc jockey couldn’t have picked a better song?

On the train, you realized your phone was missing. Frantically you dug for it in your bag, hoping it had nestled into some recess and avoiding your hand. But when you got home and dumped your bag out on your table, your fears were confirmed.

It wasn’t there.

Of course it wasn’t there.

You didn’t have the patience to handle such an annoyance that night; you were already cringing at you abrupt exit from the bar.

All he did was look at you.

Everyone must think you’re so… weird.

With a groan you rubbed at your face, trying to physically remove the embarrassment you felt from your body. You’d deal with your phone situation when you weren’t feeling so… loathsome.

When you logged onto your laptop the next afternoon to check your school email (and to price a new phone from your carrier) there was a message waiting for you.

Hello Miss Lionheart,

You left your phone at the bar last night. Don’t worry, I have it with me. Please let me know if you’d like me to drop it off.

Warmest wishes,

Yagi Toshinori, you read with a nod of your head.

He would be the one to pick it up.

You responded to his email thanking him but brushing off his offer to drop it off. There was no need or rush -- you would grab it off of him Monday at school.

With a snap, you closed your laptop and flung yourself onto her couch.

By Sunday cooler heads were prevailing. You woke up and took a shower. You made some tea. And you mentally sat yourself down and derided yourself about the way you were acting. You needed to get your shit together, not sit and mope around the house like a fool. Having filled an entire day with self-loathing and pity, it was time to mash those negative feelings aside and clean house.
Optimism, you repeated, bouncing on one foot then the other, releasing a few fake jabs as you did so. If All Might sees you as trash, well it’s up to you to work and change his mind. Be a good person, release those good vibes and good things will follow. They were empty words but, in the past, you discovered that if you repeated them enough, a small part of you would latch onto them.

And that was all you needed.

By the time Monday rolled around you were all smiles. Your heart did flutter when you opened the door to the conference room and saw several familiar faces turn to see who the newcomer was -- teachers all sitting and waiting for the morning meeting.

“I--” you started before throwing your hands to your sides and sharply flinging your upper body down into a rigid bow “-- am sorry I ran out on you guys Friday!”

Midnight clapped her hands together, squealing at the unneeded humility you were demonstrating. Snipe rubbed the back of his head. You just needed to leave it alone, they had all already moved on.

“Shut up and come sit next to me,” Midnight said, pushing Present Mic (“Hey!”) down a seat and freeing the one beside her. She tapped it expectantly and you fell into place, quickly scanning the room for a mop of golden hair.

Damn, it looked like you would be missing your phone for a few more hours.

“Happy Monday!” came the chipper call from Nedzu as he opened the door to start the morning meeting. A chorus of greetings and nods answered him. A teacup in hand, he gingerly took a seat at the head of the table and looked around the room. “Well, looks like we’re missing one of our esteemed colleagues. I wonder what he could have gotten up to this morning…”

Due to a quirk misfire that occurred on Friday after school, a class of third-years was being temporarily relocated to another classroom. The kendo club needed a new staff member to sign on as an advisor if anyone was interested. Lunch Rush would be out of the office--

“I am entering late!”

You heard the cry before the door opened and, as a knee-jerk reaction, slammed your forearms on the table, protecting the open folder you had sprawled before you. Ever the showman, All Might entered with a powerful flourish and a smile that did not reach the faces of his colleagues.

Present Mic looked forlornly at his cup of coffee that had been knocked over in the accompanying gust of wind. It had been made with the last of the flavored creamer he had hidden away in one of the lounges.

He stood to get a rag.

“Please excuse my tardiness,” All Might said. “There was a car accident with injuries and--”

“It’s fine,” Nedzu said, though he appeared rather tired. “Please take a seat All Might, there’s just one more thing I wanted to address. The news of All Might’s hiring has leaked, so reporters have started gathering at the gates. Please remind students of proper media etiquette. And if you haven’t already,” the mouse-bear-animal smiled and looked squarely at Aizawa, pointedly saying without words the next part was directed at him, “Have your students elect class officials. Now, dismissed everyone -- except for you, All Might,” Nedzu said lightly above the commotion of people standing.

All Might stopped himself from standing fully -- squatting above the seat of his chair. You glanced at his face on your way out the door. The smile was there but he looked to be… sweating?
Wow, if a possible scolding from Nedzu garnered a fear response from All Might…

You shivered, ignoring the chills and the suddenly sinister light you saw the principal in.

“Well, did you grade the homework?”

You jumped, shocked by the face that awaited you behind the door to Class B’s room. Monoma Neito.

“Er, what?” you said, sidestepping around the hovering boy to the front of the room. He followed and you noted several of his classmates were rolling their eyes at his behavior.

“Did you grade the homework? The poem homework?” he repeated.

“Well, yes I did Monoma--”

“Did you grade Class A’s homework as well?” he pushed, a smile forming.

*Oh. So that’s why he wanted to know.*

“Yes Monoma,” you said with a sigh. “Why don’t you take your se--”

“And what were the results, hm? Has Class B proven its mastery of English? I’m sure Class A’s grades were lacking compared to ours--”

“Take a seat, Monoma,” you groaned and the blond boy slinked back to his desk, the crazed look remaining. “Both classes’ grades were similar. The lowest grade was one ‘C.’”

Monoma cackled, turning to Kaibara.

“See? Even in English, we are poised to overtake Class A!”

Kaibara’s frown deepened and you inwardly shook your head.

Monoma had been the one to get the lowest grade on the assignment.

What a strange boy.

“Miss L! I just wanted to let you know that Fukidashi and I have been elected class presidents,” Kendo said, raising her hand. A smiley face appeared on Fukidashi’s bubble.

“Congratulations guys! You two will make great presidents!”

Two red circles appeared on the cheeks of Fukidashi’s smile as you pulled out your Class B folder, gently waving the haikus in the air before you began passing them back.

“The haikus were great, everyone,” you said as you walked around the room. “You’ll see I added some comments and made any corrections that were needed. We might want to spend some time looking at verb tense, so I built in some practice in the next lesson. But otherwise, I was blown away how articulate and creative you all are! Now, before we get into lecture does anyone want to practice their English by telling the class what they did this weekend?”

Class B, you had come to realize, was not as talkative as your other classes. Kendo and Tsunotori
were the only two to volunteer to speak -- which was not surprising considering Tsunotori was American. Awase also volunteered some information when you pressed about the amusement park visit he had mentioned during your previous class. But rather than pull teeth, you allowed the discussions to remain short in favor of moving on to the lecture.

“Now, I’m going to write a couple sentences on the board…” you said as you started to write, purposefully keeping your handwriting neat. “Tell me what’s wrong in each of them…”

Even for you, the classes dragged the closer the clock ticked toward lunchtime. When the bell finally rung, you filed out of the classroom with your last class of students, all heading to the cafeteria.

Midnight had made it a point to email you to let you know she and Ectoplasm would be absent at lunch -- they were working on a hero assignment for older students that would take up the rest of the afternoon. You considered going to the teacher’s cafeteria alone, but the absence of your usual eating buddies was… well, it was a little daunting, especially without a phone or book to occupy you.

Unable to ignore the rumblings of an angry stomach that had gone without breakfast, you beelined to a first-year teacher’s lounge. It was not empty, you realized as you slid the door open -- it was already occupied by a man wearing a familiar yellow pinstripe suit.

*Her phone!*

“Hello stranger,” you greeted carefully. Yagi, who had glanced over to see who had entered, stood and gave his own greetings before immediately grabbing his bag and rummaging around in it.

“I have your phone…”

“Thank you!” you said in relief, slightly swaying in wait as he moved from digging through his bag to removing piles of papers in an effort to find out where the phone had gone to.

He froze as a sudden memory smacked him in the back of the head.

He had been plotting possible lesson and simulator ideas Sunday morning.

He had dug out his small lesson plan notebook.

His hand had brushed the phone.

*Oh no, why had he been compelled to take it out?*

Maybe he just wanted to look at it. It wasn’t anything interesting -- a smartphone in a purple case. The background was a slice of pizza.

*Yagi placed the phone on top of his table, grabbing his notebook to jot down his ideas before they fled.*

“How,” you heard as Yagi dropped his bag on the couch -- you knew something was up, blood had trickled out of the corner of his mouth. “I-I forgot it,” he admitted in a strangled voice, looking at you with a sheepish, horrified face.

You blinked.

“Oh, no worries then!” you replied brightly with a shrug. Surprisingly you weren’t that upset -- it was almost freeing not having that tether of a cell phone. “No big deal! At least it’s safe with you and
I didn’t lose it in some gutter. Just bring it around whenever you remember!”

You hesitated.

“Well,” you said. “I’ll leave you be. See you around!”

“Do you need to use the lounge?” Yagi asked as you opened the door to the hallway. You looked over your shoulder and he was gesturing to the table. “I’m almost done my work, I’ll be leaving soon.”

“Oh I don’t need to grading or anything,” you said, waving away his offer. “I was just going to eat lunch. Midnight isn’t around and I didn’t feel like eating alone in the cafeteria. I can go find somewhere else.”

“I haven’t eaten yet…” Yagi said, vocalizing his thoughts. “I mean--” he gushed with a start.

He had just said he was leaving soon.

“Let’s eat lunch together then!” you said, closing the door to join him on the couch, making the decision for him. “This time I don’t have any student poetry to share with you, sorry. Just a bunch of regular homework that I honestly don’t feel like grading right now.”

Yagi systematically began adding his papers back to his bag.

“I heard All Might had a good time at karaoke Friday night.”

He groaned, shoulders slumping. Three songs he had been roped into singing before he finally freed himself from the clutches of his fellow teachers.

“Really, that’s how you feel? I’ve seen All Might on TV countless of times and he’s quite the showman. I thought you would be all about performing!”

“Showman maybe,” Yagi said, though there was amusement and pride in his voice. “Singer? Well, there’s a reason All Might never released an album.”

“Shame, I’m sure they would sell like hotcakes. A Christmas album? I can picture you in the green and red suit and everything.”

He graced you with a laugh and you grinned at yourself, pulling out your lunch. Cold teriyaki chicken with rice. Yagi had also taken out his lunch. You glanced at it.

“Bunnies,” you noted, looking at the cloth wrapped around his bento. “Nice choice. Whoever makes your lunches is really good at it.”

“Erm, well, it’s me,” he admitted as he scratched at his nose. But he wore a pleased smile.

Unable to help yourself, you shoved a large piece of teriyaki into your mouth as soon as you popped off the plastic lid. Your body hummed with joy -- chicken had been a good choice.

“How are you liking UA so far?” you asked, taking a breather between mouthfuls of food. Technically you both were junior teachers. Yagi picked through his rice thoughtfully.

“I really enjoy it,” he said. “UA was my hero academia, so it’s good to be back. And the students are great.”

“I know,” you said, placing your utensils down and leaning forward. “They’re going to make some
great heroes, I can’t wait to see what they become. I do have a question though. Midnight and Mic said Aizawa had expelled an entire hero class last year. Is that true?”

“Have you not looked at the records?” Yagi asked, receiving a head shake in response. “Yes, he did. He felt that last year’s class was… lacking. You really should check the records.”

“I’m actually not allowed to look at the records yet,” you admitted sheepishly. “Nedzu hasn’t given me permission to access the room yet, so I’ve been either guessing or asking about the quirks of the kids. If they’re not already obvious, of course.”

“Oh, well…I hope you get access soon. The records are an interesting read.”

You sighed.

“Way to make me feel inadequate,” you said dryly.

He pushed away from you in horrified embarrassment, a lurch in his chest bringing forth a cough. You let out a hearty laugh, reaching into your backpack and handing him a few brown napkins, your laughter dissolving into giggles at his reaction.

“I was kidding!” you said, shaking your head and but the echo of humor remained on your face. Yagi took the offered napkins, cleaning up his mouth. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know you were going to react like that! Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” he said, waving away the concern.

“I’m sorry, I hope I didn’t offend you, I was just trying to be funny.”

“Offend?” Yagi said with a surprised look. “I wasn’t offended.”

“Oof, now I feel bad,” you said, sitting deeper in the couch. “I try to make a joke and nearly give you an aneurysm instead.”

Your voice was playful and Yagi wondered if you were trying to egg him on, engage in some banter.

“Yes, well… You didn’t!”

He flinched at his own lame words, scolding himself on how unexpectedly tongue-tied he felt. You grabbed for your lunch, allowing the moment to fade away.

“Have you… prepared English lesson plan ready for the week?” Yagi asked, returning the topic to something comfortable.

“Yes,” you said. “Though I was thinking about playing a game next class. Like Jeopardy with some of our vocabulary words. The kids are great at written English, I want them to really build on speaking it. How’d you learn English, by the way? I’ve heard you speak it before on TV -- you’re very good at it.”

He chuckled, rubbing his chin.

“Well, I watched a lot of American movies,” he said. “That’s how I started learning it. And I liked America and American superheroes. Course, I spent a few years there too when I was younger.”

“Oh,” you said. “So is that why you’ve named your moves after American places?”
He didn’t act self-conscience as you expected at the question. Instead he puffed out his chest, confidence flickering onto his face. You blinked.

“You could say that,” was the only explanation he was willing to give. With a grin, you decided to accept it.

What a funny guy.

“Well, next time you come flying into my class like a hurricane, can you speak English for the kids? It’ll go a long way.”

“Deal,” he said with a thumbs up that you returned.

Suddenly you felt very foolish. Not over your current exchange, but on how you had acted during the happy hour after work. You were so sure he had been judging you but you sensed no ill-will from him or hesitancy. You realized the look he shared with you Friday night may have just just been his face at rest, or you had simply read his expression wrong.

*He didn’t know you. You were a stranger to him.*

“How is Class A doing…?”

“Are you fishing for information again, Yagi?” you said with a cackle. “Wait, you had your eye on a student. It was Midoriya, right?” Yagi went rigid. “He’s doing well. All the kids are. You gotta stop playing favorites though, you’re no good at hiding it!”

The chide was a playful one and Yagi relaxed.

“Good, I’m glad they’re doing well.”

You talked for a little while longer about the weather and both of your appreciations for spring. But Yagi had to excuse himself to prepare for class. He gave his goodbyes, warmly thanking you for keeping him company, which you echoed. After he left, there wasn’t much else for you to do, so you ducked into the staff room to do some web surfing and ‘grading.’

You didn’t see Yagi for a few days after -- there were days he wasn’t scheduled to work, so he didn’t come to the campus. Although you missed your phone, you weren’t surprised that he didn’t stop by the school just to drop it off. Chaos in the form of the media had set upon the UA Barrier in force. Anyone who walked through the front gates -- guests, students, teachers, it didn’t matter -- were all interrogated about the teaching ability of the great All Might. Even you had a microphone thrust in your face, a reporter demanding that you retrieve All Might from inside the building so they could get some soundbites.

Thankfully, Present Mic and Aizawa had been put on press duty, cutting short your stammered apology to wave you inside.

“Like we told you yesterday,” you heard Aizawa explain as you sped walked away. “All Might is not on campus today. Please leave. The students will be arriving soon.”

“Mass media say, ‘hey, hey, go away,’” Mic chanted, gesturing them to move away from the front gates.

Their requests fell on deaf ears. The media simply packed tighter together, determined to get the scoop.
“As you can see,” Nedzu said during the smaller-than-normal morning meeting. “The press has truly descended. Please warn students to remain mindful of what they say to members of the media, though we prefer if they didn't speak to them at all. We’d hate for something unsavory to be used in the evening news.”

Although they were not allowed on campus, the media’s presence hung over UA. It was hard not to look out the window and imagine the press circling, sharks sniffing out and waiting for freshly spilled blood. It did give you a great idea for another creative lesson, especially one your business management kids would get a kick out of. They could draft press releases on a hero of their choice. Or maybe, you thought as your fingers flew across the keyboard, they could pick a student from the heroics or general studies class to write on...

Your hands froze over the keys as you thought it out. Actually, that might be a bad idea. You’d hate for the management kids to all pile on the flashier students and ignore the others. You could assign students but that seemed likely to backfire as well.

Maybe newly graduated students? Heroes less than a year out in public? Heroes outside the top 100 list?

You glanced around the staff room, looking to see if there was someone around you could bounce ideas off of. Thirteen had been there only moments before but had apparently snuck out while you had been swept up in your bout of inspiration. Maybe Midnight or Ectoplasm would stop by and you’d get their opinion.

“Howdy,” Snipe drawled as he entered the room, seeing someone inside. You gave a curt wave.

“Hey Sn--”

A screeching alarm erupted, shattering the peace of the room and nearly making your heart stop. You jumped up as Snakey whirled around back into the hallway. A fire alarm?

You instinctively following the senior teacher outside the room.

“There’s been a barrier breach,” Snakey said as you ran, aware of the sound of the alarm. He was leading you out of the building an onto the green.

Wow, talk about a security alarm.

“The press?” you asked.

“That barrier locks up pretty tight, dunno how they would have gotten through it.”

Though it only took you seconds to reach the ground floor, UA staff had already descended upon and corralled the trespassers before they were able to attempt to enter any of the buildings. Cameras, notepads and voice recorders signaled to you and Snakey that it was, in fact, the media that breached security.

“I didn’t get a chance to eat lunch,” Present Mic complained as the duo walked up. “Damn scavengers. My noodles will be cold!”

After Vlad arrived with Thirteen and Cementoss, staff members were sent out to double check the grounds, making sure there were no hidden stragglers while Nedzu went with Aizawa to check the front gate.

You and Cementoss did find a cameraman hiding in a grouping of thick bushes, but otherwise your
search came up empty.

“Has this happened before?” you asked Cementoss on the way back to the main building after finishing your sweeps of Grounds Alpha and Beta. The cement hero shook his head.

“Not in recent memory. No one breaks into UA. It’s near impossible.”

With no immediate threat detected, classes resumed. Teachers like you, who had free time in the afternoon, were asked to continue their sweeps of the grounds as a precaution. Although most of the campus believed the threat to have been a false alarm, the giant hole that punctured the barrier and allowed the press to enter told the staff otherwise.

Nedzu confirmed fears during an impromptu end of the day meeting. A reporter with a quirk wouldn’t have done that to the barrier -- as annoying as they were, the press did have professional standards and morals they had to adhere to.

Something darker, he said solemnly, had made its way on campus.

“There were no injuries, right? I know a bulk of students were in the cafeteria. Aside from confused panic, no one was reported missing.”

Nedzu looked to Thirteen and nodded.

“No injuries. The staff was unharmed too. That’s what concerns me. Was this a message? Was something taken?”

“The buildings weren’t breached,” Power Loader said. “The same security for the barrier carries over to the buildings -- you don’t have ID, you’re not getting in any of the buildings. The alarm would have gone off again.”

“So maybe it was a message…” Midnight muttered and you frowned.

“But to go after a school? I mean, were they trying to threaten a bunch of kids?” you pointed out.

“Or someone connected with the school,” Aizawa said.

There’s was no point in saying the name -- immediately one possible teaching target popped into their heads.

Snipe adjusted in his chair, his thoughts moving away from All Might to himself. He had a laundry list of villains from his time working on various task forces who would take a shot at him if given the opportunity.

“This breach is cause for concern. There will be a police presence outside the gate during the school day. Cementoss and Power Loader have already fixed the opening in the barrier and are in the process of reinforcing it. Going forward, we’ll have to be more mindful of security.”

“I don’t like this,” Mic said. He was serious, his eyes scanning his colleagues with visible concern. “I don’t like this at all.”

“We’re heroes,” Aizawa droned, spurred to speak by Mic’s discomfort. “We can handle something like this.”

But underlying concern still tainted Aizawa’s stoic words.

An hour later, Midnight created a group text for the teachers. A way for everyone to stay in the loop
going forward, in case something else happened.

The levity of the day was broken, however, when Present Mic began spamming links to his online radio show to the new chat. After Aizawa removed himself in annoyance of the constant onslaught, Midnight intervened and Mic’s barrage of texts ceased.

Unfortunately, you had not been able to see the drama in the chat unfold.

Your phone was still in the possession of a certain number one hero.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you're liking it so far! Like I said, a bit of a slow-burn haahaha. But it's fun! I get to write more as the teachers/students.

And I'm doing some minor reimagining -- I don't think the male president of Class B was ever revealed (unless they do it in the manga chapters happening now). So I went with Fukidashi Manga!
“Oh, a rescue simulator!” you said with a grin. “That sounds like so much fun.”

“It will be. Aizawa is bringing over his homeroom class today and tomorrow I'll be hosting Vlad's,” Thirteen explained.

“I haven’t seen the USJ but I’ve heard about it. Is it as big as everyone says?”

“Yes!” Thirteen was buzzing with delight. “Any kind of disaster you can think of, we’ve planned for it! I’ll talk to Vlad and maybe see if you can come with Class B tomorrow to assist and observe. It shouldn't be an issue. And watching the students in action is amazing! Though it can get a little tedious walking between landscapes. But the kids always seem to love it...”

It was a quick hallway conversation, just some words shared in passing as Thirteen headed to their next class and you went off to take a walk to waste time and clear your head. It wasn’t often you caught the hero outside of the staff room; since they were a disaster scenario prodigy, they were usually pulled into various classes to observe and instruct on rescue techniques. The USJ was Thirteen’s pride and joy -- a distant building on UA’s campus that you had heard all about but had yet to actually visit. From what you were told, because of its massive size, it was situated quite a distance from the main school buildings.

By bus was the best and fastest way to reach out.

Otherwise, a person was in for a bit of a hike.

‘English is important work,’ you reminded yourself as you continued on with your walking break. But it was hard not to feel jealous whenever the other teachers started talking about their heroics courses around you.

You looked down at your hand, flexing, watching the muscles contract in your forearm. How long had it been since you used your quirk?

You missed the feeling of it; the constant echo of a memory embedded in your bones. You imagined it was the same kind of longing a surfer would have during the winter months, when they were unable to be in the ocean. Perhaps you would start pestering you colleagues to let you assist in their classes -- they constantly asked one another for help but had yet to approach you.

Maybe they just didn’t know what you could do.

You thought of the thin arm adapter you had stashed away in your apartment, a goodbye gift from a good friend, created with everyday use in mind. You had assumed you wouldn't need it but maybe you should start wearing it? Would that be too much?

Probably not.

You were the odd one out when it came to daily workwear compared to the other teachers. Midnight, in particular, came to mind.

You headed down the main walkway of the school, turning to walk adjacent to the school’s Great
Wall. Despite the breach previous day, the repaired UA barrier stood as imposing as ever, though the main entrance bore a jagged scar from Power Loader's welding work.

The press had finally given the school a break from their barrage, only a few stragglers remained outside the wall’s perimeter. Most of the lurking reporters had moved on after facing the public backlash at having trespassed on school grounds during a security emergency. To further nudge them along Nedzu, in a show of goodwill, promised to host an almost monthly 'school update’ with All Might, so long as the students and staff were left to enter the school unperturbed.

So far, so good.

You continued your walkabout, thoughts moving from barrier to the beautifully clear weather. You even gave some thought to the first test you were scheduled to give the following week.

A test you hadn’t created yet.

A brightly colored bird darted across the treeline rising in front of you. Before you could get a good look, it was gone.

You'd have to look up test questions online. Or ask Mic...

“Hey Miss L,” a soft voice called out. You slowed your pace, looking over your shoulder to see Shinso, one of your general studies students. Walking beside was one of his classmates -- a bat-eared boy named Koumori.

“Hey!” you exclaimed, perking up considerably at having caught two of your kids outside the classroom. Both were carrying stacks of what looked to be math textbooks -- you furrowed your brows. “What... are you two up to?”

“Collecting books for Snipe from Hound Dog,” Koumori explained, lifting his stack a little higher.

Math textbooks... for Snipe?

“Oh?” you asked, confused, eyes flickering between the two students and their bounties. You were fishing for a more detailed explanation and, thankfully, they were perceptive enough and willing to indulge you.

“Shu bet that Snipe couldn’t shoot through seven textbooks. Snipe said he was wrong. Well, first he laughed for like, ten minutes. Then said he was wrong. Now they’re going to test it.”

You sighed and rubbed your forehead. Shu was another general studies student.

Student.

Snipe was arguably one of the most intelligent teachers UA had on staff and even he could be roped into a pissing contest by a student?

“It was actually Snipe’s idea to have the contest,” Koumori added after seeing the exasperation painted on your face. You dropped your shoulders even more, shaking your head at the situation. “Snipe said technique was more important than firing power and that he'd show Shu 'how it's done.'”

“Do me a favor,” you said to Shinso and Koumori. "Take a video of this. I want to see this next class.”

Shu had a projectile quirk -- you'd seen him holding his hand like a gun, firing off during outdoor
fighting classes. Even you knew Snipe had developed a soft spot for the first year, particularly because he had excellent aim and a… rambunctious personality. Still, if Shu was able to outshoot Snipe… although unlikely, the possibility was hilarious.

Koumori snickered and Shinso let out a small smile.

“Will do, Miss L” the purple-haired boy said before the two continued on their way, leaving you standing alone on the pavement to finish wasting--

*Wait a second…*

*What were you doing?*

*You had no plans for the rest of the afternoon.*

“Actually!” you called out, jogging after your students. “This… this I want to see firsthand.”

There was something special about UA’s general studies students. Though they had made the cut to get to UA, and had the outside awe that went along with attending such a prestigious school, within UA’s community they were essentially labeled speciality-tract rejects. Not good enough for heroics, support or management. And they knew that -- it was no hidden secret. But that underlying dream and drive to be special, to do good ...

It the reason they aimed for UA to begin with. And that motivating fire remained within all of them, pushing them beyond just settling and to reach for something more.

So, the fact that a general studies student had gone so far as to challenge a professional hero to a shoot off… well, it made everyone giddy.

Everyone knew Shu was going to lose, but it almost felt like a sign of respect that Snipe was even entertaining the boy's quirk.

Snipe’s class had been moved from it's usual room to the empty Upsilon field by the cafeteria. You held up your hand to shield your eyes from the sun as you approached the group of about 20 students that had taken to loitering in whatever shade they could find. If the time in your head was correct, lunch would be starting shortly. The contest between Shu and Snipe was obviously going to cut into it -- there might be a little bit of a show for anyone observant enough to look out a window.

“Shinso and Koumori are back… oh, is that Lionheart?”

“Hi everyone!” you said brightly, fixing them all with a beaming smile. “I ran into these two on the grounds and heard about what was about to go down. I couldn’t miss all the hullabaloo!”

Your smile remained as you shot a look over to Snipe, clearly poking fun at the situation. Unfortunately, you couldn’t get a read on his hidden face -- an upside to masks, you mused.

The fourteen textbooks were being divided and stacked -- the only real preparation the contest of shooting skills required. A majority of the class had taken their seats on the grass, clearly pleased to be wasting lecture time by being outside in such nice weather.

“So how are you planning on doing this?” you ventured to ask, turning to the wolf-like student, Mai, who was sitting cross-legged near you.

“Amaya is going to levitate the books in a row,” she explained, pulling out clumps of grass to keep her hands busy. “Shu is going to shoot first and then Mister Snipe is going to shoot the other set of
books. Then we’re going to compare.”

“Who picked seven?” you asked.

“Shu said he’s been working on his quirk and that five was what he tried last when he was in middle school. So he bumped it up to seven for this class.”

‘Much thicker than armor,’ you thought as you eyed the thickness of the stack. You were impressed.

When everything was in order, and both Snipe and Shu declared they were ready to start, Amaya stood. She hung back behind the shooters and exhaled, closing her eyes and reaching out with her quirk to raise the first row of books into the air. They were wobbly for only a few seconds before settling tightly together.

With hushed whispering and laughter, the class watched their classmate step forward and take aim with his right index finger. From what you knew, his quirk allowed him to shoot projectiles from his body of varying degrees of hardness. Why did you know that? Because he had shot some kind of… spitball at Koumori during English class while your back was turned. Unfortunately for Shu, you had finished writing on the board in time to witness him firing and missing -- his small... ball ricocheting off the board and nailing a front-row student in the head.

That was the first time a student irritated you enough to drop you honeyed personality. You snapped. Though your ‘snapping’ was him cleaning the chalkboards of all the general studies homerooms.

It was a cardinal rule of the school -- quirks, unless directly okayed by an instructor, weren’t to be used in class.

Shu quickly bent his thumb and a crack was heard as an object shot from the tip of his finger, striking the row of books head-on. As he lowered his hand, Kuro ran forward to check the damage. He tossed away the first book, as it had been cleared, before finally coming to rest on the last one. With ample flourish, he raised the math book above his head -- a small object was embedded in the center.

“He hit the last one!” he exclaimed and Shu pumped his fist in victory, releasing an anxious breath. He had not wanted to fail in front of such an important audience.

Several of his classmates whooped in celebration as Amaya cut off her connection with the target practice fodder, allowing them to crash back to the field. A quick break was called when she erupted into a fit of loud, body-shaking sneezes -- a side effect of her quirk.

When she had settled down to just sniffling, she turned to the undamaged row of books and levitated them in the air while Snipe took his turn. You cheered half-heartedly for him as you were part of Team Teacher, earning a nod of acknowledgment from your colleague.

Snipe did not take long.

As soon as he stepped up, it appeared as if he pulled his gun from his holster and fired at the same time, the loud and sudden crack of a gunshot ringing out across the field. Had it been a contest of speed, the hero completely destroyed Shu.

But it wasn’t.

“Mister Snipe hit the last book too!” Kuro said, having anointed himself contest referee officially. He was blinking though, staring at the last book before rising it in the air with finesse, as he had done with Shu. “Actually... it looks like he fired… five bullets? Uh.”
You let out a low whistle as you approached the cowboy. He was fast -- you had only heard three shots fired off, not five. He was reloading his gun as the students debated on what constituted a victory. Technically it was a tie, the additional bullets fired by Snipe were just to show off.

“Show off…?” he hissed as he listened in on the students. He shook his head at you, clicking his revolver back in his holster. "I wasn't showing off."

“Oh come on,” you said in the same low tone, out of earshot of the class. “That’s exactly what you were doing, wasn't it?”

“I coulda cleared at least… twelve books, I reckon,” he said, tipping his hat back and mentally increasing the stack, visualizing his shots. “Using more than one bullet, I could push through maybe twenty.”

“Shu’s a good shot though,” you said. “How many shots can he let off?”

“Dunno,” Snipe said. He looked over to the white-haired boy, a sharp whistle cutting through the growing-louder discussions. “Shu, come over here,” he barked, waving the gloating student over. “How many of those shots can you do?”

“Maybe four or five, but then things start to jam up,” he admitted, wiggling his thumb. “I have to keep cracking my finger to loosen the knuckle back to normal before I can use it again.”

“We'll have to work on that,” Snipe drawled, placing a good-natured hand on the boy's shoulder. “You gotta work on that speed, though. If you’re caught in a shoot-out with a villian, you can’t be taking your sweet ol’ time lining up your shot.”

“Yes sir,” Shu said dutifully.

“All right, y'all can run along to lunch now. Lionheart and I will clean up these books.”

“Oh, okay,” you said with a playful snort as the mob of kids headed toward the cafeteria, glad to be dismissed. You eyed the discarded math books, wondering if Hound Dog had been told they were going to be used for target practice. A realization dawned. “Say Snipe... what class do you teach?”

“Sensei!”

It was a gut-wrenching call that made the hair on the back of your neck stand on end. You were immediately on edge.

Something was wrong.

With a sudden horror, you both looked to see where the voice had come from.

Someone was running to you at a breathtaking pace.

“Is that… Iida-- !?”

“Villains!” the bespeckled boy gasped out, sliding to a stop, doubling over. He could feel his calves locking up, the engines were too hot, the smell of burnt fuel hanging in the air around him. That didn't matter. What mattered was his classmates. What mattered was getting help. “Villains at USJ! They attacked us. Aizawa and Thirteen--”
Snipe had already whipped out his phone and had started dialing at the first mention of villains, growling into the receiver. In an instant, the shrill shriek of the alarm was already ringing out, the alert sent out without any sort of delay.

“How many?” you asked and Iida’s darkened-and-panicked face made your heart clench.

“They broke us all up, the students. It was hard to get a good estimate. But it’s happening right now, we have to--”

Dozens of thoughts were running through your head, the worst of which was fear. Fear that there were children in danger of being hurt or killed. On what should have been a normal school day. But what was needed was a reaction. You were swearing at your breath, looking to Snipe.

“I’ll meet the teachers at the front of the building,” the cowboy said. “We’re heading there now.”

So the teachers were responding in a united front. That was good, you’d go--

Your eyes flickered to the cafeteria. Lunch Rush was usually the only hero on duty there.

Where were you actually needed most?

“I’ll be in the cafeteria,” you said, mind already made up.

Nothing else was spoken, Snipe nodded and dashed away, going to join the ranks of the counterassault. With a strangled cry, Iida went to follow, upset he had been left behind to suddenly, but was prevented from following after by your surprisingly ironclad grip. He was attempting to rip his arm free, his sense of urgency surpassing his usual need to show respect.

You didn’t hold it against him.

“No, you’re done. Come on.”

“But my class--”

“Let the heroes do their work, come on Iida.” He was a heavy, eyes wide with anxiety, but he allowed you to hang his arm over your shoulder, a way to take some off his weight off his overworked legs. It was an awkward half-hug -- Iida was a tall boy. Far taller than you were, so you were handling a lot more body weight than you expected as he leaned down onto you. “Sorry bud, I know it hurts but we’re gonna have to make a run for it.”

The class president nodded and put on a brave face, working through the radiating burn in his legs to match your jogging speed.

The cafeteria was in an uproar over the alarm, though it had not dissolved into a panicked mob like the day of the breach. Near the front entrance, you released your grip on Iida’s arm, bringing two fingers to your mouth. A loud, shrill whistle cut through the nervous chatter -- it had been an attention-grabbing skill you had developed over the years.

“All right, we’ve got villains sighted on campus,” you bellowed in an even tone, jitters melting away as a resoluteness took over and a certain kind of steel began pumping through your veins.

Time to play hero.

Some students had cried out at your announcement, horrified that it wasn’t just a drill or mistake and that their peaceful existence had been so raggedly attacked. Again.
“Hey, hey!” you shouted, slamming a fist on your open palm. “This is UA! We’re a school for heroes, yeah? So let’s act like it!”

Flee or stay? Flee or stay?

There had to be a couple hundred kids of varying skill levels in the room, you strategized as your gaze swept over the eyes staring back. Would leading them out of the building simply be taking the lambs to slaughter? Or should you hold tight? Wait for mass rescue?

Flee or stay? Flee or stay? Flee or--

Stay.

“Listen up, we’re doing some elephant-style protection here. I want non-fighters in the center of the cafeteria, heroes and combat quirks circling. This is not the time to overestimate your abilities. Chances are we're all fine here, but we've got to be prepared for the worst, okay? You got the kitchen locked down, Lunch Rush?” you called when you saw the metal frame of the lunch hero pop into view.

In response, Lunch Rush nodded, swirling some very large butcher knives around their head.

Just let them try getting by me.

“I need a few of you stationed by the windows -- keep your heads down and stay out of sight. You see anyone coming, you give a holler.”

You cracked your knuckles, fingers dancing with a popping, waving energy. Your orders were being heeded, you saw with relief. The mass of students had started to shift and morph around the room. These were heroes, you reminded yourself. Heroes who were more than willing to engage with an enemy if it came down to it. It wasn’t going to be just you against a swarm of baddies. No, you had a capable squad.

You had to beat down a rush that bubbled up at the visualization of a battle. The thought of a fight already fanning the flames of your passion.

An actual fight!

You were disgusted with yourself at how excited you were.

No, focus on the kids.

Eyes were staring at you for guidance.

“The other teachers are working to take care of the threat, the villains were sighted at USJ. But I need everyone to stay clear-headed, alright? If they somehow do make it up here, no attacks unless I say.”

“How many?” an older student asked, stepping forward. He didn't look familiar to you.

“A lot,” Iida said as he rubbed his calf, answering on your behalf. His mouth twitched. “A lot.”

There was a loud whimper in the crowd but the sound was answered by a collection of positive tough-guy talk from surrounding students.

Villains? At UA? What idiots, they picked the wrong school to attack.
“What if they get in, what should we do? Run?”

It was a solid question shouted out at you. Obviously, your internal debate hadn’t been as obvious as you thought. You chewed on your lip, the scenario playing out in your head. You were doing a lockdown now only because so many of the kids had hero experience and you didn’t know what was waiting outside. What if a squad of villains had set themselves up for an ambush? What if they were at the gates waiting?

“If they get into the cafeteria, the goal is to get off a campus,” you said. “I don’t want anyone trying to take on a villain if they don’t have to, the priority is safety. To escape.”

“Come on,” another student said, his voice a caress that blanketed the cafeteria with calm. You wondered if he was using some sort of quirk -- even you felt a little less on edge. He ran his hand through his hair, half-lidded eyes combing over almost everyone in the room. “You know our teachers probably have the situation all wrapped up already.”

“Are you a teacher?” someone asked you, the suspicious tone in their voice undeniable. You faltered, not expecting the distrust. But you had your advocates in the crowd.

“She’s Miss Lionheart and she teaches English!” Tetsutetsu hollered, jumping on a table with fist raised, fully prepared to fight for you. “She’s no villain!”

“Thank you Tetsutetsu,” you said, gently raising and lowering your hands to calm the fired-up wannabe-hero. But you were glad to see a familiar face burst forth from the crowd -- it wasn’t until his appearance that you started to pick out other recognizable faces staring back at you.

Sirens screeched in the distance, their sound growing closer. You moved to a window, sidestepping the student crouched below it keeping watch. A convoy of police vehicles sped by. You assumed they were heading in the direction of the USJ.

“Looks like the police are here,” you said, your fighting aura dissipating as the situation skewed more toward under control.

None of you were going to be going head-to-head with any attack villains.

Disappointment.

“Were there students at USJ?”

“Well, the glasses kid up front who saw the villains -- I think he’s in Class 1-A.”

“Wasn’t he the kid that flew into the wall during the last alarm?”

“He is!”

But a tenseness settled over the cafeteria as time continued to trudge by. News of the USJ attack had reached the outside world -- several kids shouted out breaking alerts their phones received and stayed on top of Twitter updates. But there was no official word given to you that the coast was clear.

You had busied yourself with talking softly to two support students who appeared really shaken by the suddenness of the 'attack.' A second-year boy was pale, rocking quietly back and forth while a third-year girl, just as rattled, sobbed false encouragement.

It was a horrendous sight to see and their breakdowns were wearing on the nerves of those nearby. You murmured positive sentiments, going so far as to downplay the situation while looking at the
clock on the wall.

It’s fine! Everything’s under control! They hadn’t seen any villains, right? They were at a hero school surrounded by peers who were all biting at the bit to protect. Plus you were there. Nothing bad was going to happen, you promised.

“Someone’s coming!”

You stood with a jolt, turning to see several kids pointing in the direction of the single cafeteria door leading outside. Immediately you cut through the crowd, your giant litter of pups crowding behind you, waiting to see what would happen.

You lifted your left arm, conjuring up a bright wine-colored barrier that exploded up and out -- though it wasn't long enough to protect the entire width of the cafeteria, there was no way an enemy was just going to side-step around your protection.

But you had none of your support items. Undoubtedly there were weak points in a barrier this large without your shield device. And that didn't bode well for long-term soundness.

The panting figure of Hound Dog burst through the doors with an echoing crash, drool spilling between his bared teeth. Your eyes narrowed as you took in his unmuzzled, heavily panting, form.

“The situation is under control,” he slurred out in a growl, bending over with his hands on his knees as he worked to catch his breath.

*He should have stayed in that soccer league -- the run from USJ shouldn’t have winded him so easily.*

His words did nothing to ease your suspicion so your barrier remained up. Out of all the teachers to bring the good news... Hound Dog was one of the teachers you were least familiar with.

Even if you did share a computer.

“Sorry bud, but I’m going to need a little more proof that everything is good before I let this shield drop,” you said. Despite the apology, your hard words indicated you had no remorse for your distrust. He looked baffled at first, floored by your response. But, after seeing the eyes of the students grouped behind you, he relaxed.

It was overkill, sure, but your hesitation was understandable.

Although two police officers arrived to give the all clear, it wasn’t until Present Mic strolled in to give his loud recap that you felt comfortable enough to let your shield drop. With the police handling the captured villains, the students were ordered to return to their homerooms and wait for dismissal -- they were being sent home early and would be escorted to the main gates by their teachers.

“What happened?” you hissed, pulling Mic aside. Hound Dog also appeared in your huddle, hungry for any news or details he may have missed.

With the students filling out, Mic dropped his usual bravado to share the story. Using some kind of warp quirk and a quirk that dampened security and communications, a gaggle of villains had attacked Class A while they were at USJ. Collectively, the students were able to hold the intruders off, protecting themselves and each other until All Might arrived.
He had been first on scene -- the hero subdued the biggest of the villains but the ringleader escaped with ‘Warpy Man’ when the rest of the staff showed up.

None of the students suffered serious injuries, Mic said, but his voice was low as his eyes darted around, making sure no one was close enough to eavesdrop. All Might was pretty beat up but appeared fine; it was the other teachers they should be concerned about.

“Eraserhead…” Mic trailed off, clearing his throat, unwilling to continue. “Thirteen too. Their injuries were the worst.”

They had already been carted to Recovery Girl’s infirmary on campus for treatment -- her healing abilities were superior to most of those found at nearby hospitals and she was already on campus, prepared to take the injured. You knocked into Mic as a soft, comforting gesture. His frown twitched.

It was a quick catch-up. After Mic relayed the details, the three of you were broken up to assist with the dismissals. Although some of the students were shaky about the relatively close-call, you were surprised to find most were in good spirits. Especially as rumors began to bud and spread about what had gone down in USJ, what Class A had accomplished on their own. How a handful of freshman students could hold off so many villains for so long.

But was it really surprising?

UA was a hero school after all.

How could the students let a bunch of villains kill their mood?

After playing the escort, you were stopped in the hallway by grim-faced Nedzu who was on his way to back to his office, a few officers trailing behind him. He stopped for a very quick word, thanking you for assisting the students in the cafeteria.

“With so many of the staff going to help at USJ, I’m glad there were some who stayed back,” he said with relief, patting your hip.

An hour later, he sent out an email informing the teachers that school would be closed the following day and would reopen normally on Monday. Though staff would work as normal as a meeting with the police department was scheduled to dissect the situation that had occurred.

“There’s no point in you sticking around,” Midnight said when she came across your huddled form in the staff room. After doing so many laps of the campus and the classrooms, you had run out of ways to be useful and instead decided to do work. You couldn’t leave after something of this magnitude. You needed to stick around. You needed to be *present*.

“Team Teacher,” you said simply, raising a fist. Midnight rolled her eyes at your corniness but her expression was kind. She walked and placed a hand on your shoulder.

“Want to go grab a drink? I’m heading out with Yamada. He’s… he’s pretty worried.”

You thought of Mic’s face in the cafeteria, how crestfallen he appeared at sharing the news of his good friend’s injury. Couple with the fact Midnight had used Present Mic’s actual name…

You agreed, grabbing your purse to follow in tow.

Being at the teacher's usual after-work bar did nothing to alleviate the worry, however. It was obvious Mic was concerned about Aizawa. Over a large beer, the voice hero explained how he had
stopped by the infirmary to check in on his friend.

“Recovery Girl said he was awake when she bandaged him up,” he said. “But he wasn’t when I stopped by. He broke his face or something, he’s swaddled from head to toe.”

“You know she goes overboard with the bandages,” Midnight pointed out. “Remember when you broke your thumb and she had your entire left arm wrapped up?”

The corners of Mic’s mouth twitched.

“Yeah. She also gave me candy.”

“What’s the villain count at now? Thirty?” you asked. Instead of ordering your usual ale, you had switched something a bit... stronger. You would need it to help put you to sleep; adrenaline still buzzed in your body, at having been awakened your quirk was making your muscles twitch and spasm.

“Oh, we’re much higher than fifty at this point,” Midnight said. “You should have seen how many villains there were. Dozens at each simulation, not to mention all the ones Aizawa brought down.”

"So was the barrier destruction, related? A test of our defenses? A warning?” you partially theorized. Midnight shrugged.

“Maybe. Or they used it to get intel. Somehow they knew All Might was going to be at USJ.”

“The kids say the villain's goal was to kill All Might,” Mic interjected as a clarification. You frowned.

You were out of the loop, weren't you?

“I hope the kids bounce back,” you said, pushing your thoughts aside. “To be attacked like this as a first year… Hell, I know heroes that would have panicked with the odds so stacked against them.”

“Class A is an impressive bunch,” Midnight offered. “They’ve got moxie. They were all very willing to talk about the attack with the police and were excited to share their stories with each other.”

“Aizawa lucked out this year,” Mic said, staring at the contents of his glass. You and Midnight shared a look.

Poor guy.

You parted ways after a few short hours decompressing, ending the night with a plan on buying Thirteen, Aizawa and All Might all ‘Get Well’ gifts. You were going to handle Thirteen, who was slowly being ‘pieced back together.’ You weren't sure the exact details of what that could entail, but it didn't sound... pleasant.

You found yourself on edge during your commute home, sitting off to the side on the train and glancing over your shoulder while walking. You were acting as if simply being associated with UA was enough to make you a target.

In all actuality, it probably did.

The sense of peace and safety that the school offered had been shattered, even a wall couldn't protect the souls inside. Chances are if you were feeling that way, the sentiment would also be felt amongst the students. Amongst other teachers.
Your old costume wasn’t packed away, rather it was stacked neatly in the corner of your bedroom, piled on top of a small trunk. A makeshift shrine and a testament to another life. But you were toned in that other life -- there was no way the pieces would fit anymore.

But you weren’t completely out of luck.

Digging around in the trunk, you found your small shield generator and the metal pole that expanded to become your weapon.

These pieces, you decided, would be incorporated into your daily attire going forward.

At that decision, the yearning inside of you had disappeared, replaced will a thrill of anticipation.

Your shield was coming out of retirement.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading! I hope you're enjoying the fic so far :D
Happy Wednesday, I hope your weeks are going well! Here’s a chapter for you. It’s on the short side but it’s leading to that good stuff.

Before the staff meeting, several of the teachers stopped by the infirmary to say hello to their injured co-workers. The first stop was Thirteen -- they were mostly pieced together, sitting on top of the blankets of their hospital bed. Their usual spacesuit was on -- you wondered if they wore anything else besides it.

In fact, you wondered what they looked like underneath it all. Their quirk was a black hole one, did that mean their body was one too? Was that possible?

You shoved these thoughts aside, forcing a smile when you watched Thirteen’s large eyes widen slightly as you handed over the ‘Get Well’ basket. It was a mishmash of whatever space-themed snacks and knick-knacks you had come across.

_Come on, Thirteen had to like space, right?

“I love it,” Thirteen said, plucking out the plush astronaut you had hanging off the side of the basket, placing it at their bedside. “Thank you!”

“How you holding up?” Snipe asked, taking a seat at the edge of the bed. The suited hero sighed.

“Sore but fine. I hope to be back in time for class on Monday.”

“Don’t rush it,” Midnight said, concern in her face. “Take enough time to heal up.”

Thirteen gave a half-hearted promise to keep their limits in mind. But not even a serious injury could keep a hero from returning to work. Ignoring boundaries -- it’s what heroes did.

“So…” Mic leaned forward, glancing around him. “Does the food still suck?”

You and the rest of the teachers were only able to chat with Thirteen for a few minutes. Although you all wanted to stick around longer, Recovery Girl and some of her assistants arrived in the room with a strange machine to continue patching Thirteen back together.

The group was kicked out.

So you moved to your next stop:

Aizawa.

The erasure hero was stoic as he sat up in his bed, face facing staunchly forward when your group piled into the room. An uncomfortable silence settled over you all -- his entire person was layered with a thick coating of bandages.

“I got you a present Eraserheaaaad,” Mic sang, shattering the hesitancy in the room. He was
brandishing the gift he had been assigned to pick up. “We may have to change your name now, though. You’re less eraser, more mummy! Mummyhead. Mummy Man!”

Mic had somehow curated, or purchased, an actual ‘Get Well’ basket, though it had a dinosaur themed and was obviously catered toward little boys. It was punctuated by a balloon of a bashful Tyrannosaurus Rex holding a ‘Feel Better’ sign.

Mic placed the basket on the ground, tying the balloon to Aizawa’s headboard and placed a stuffed pterodactyl in the bed next to him. He stepped back, clapping his hands together in delight at his work.

Though Aizawa’s face was just as bandaged as the rest of his body, two bloodshot eyes were visible enough through the creases between bandage layers. They flickered between the gifts and Present Mic’s beaming face.

You could feel his frown.

“This is only part one!” Mic exclaimed, the hand he threw in the air accidentally smacking the balloon bobbing beside him. He paid it no mind. “When you get out we’re getting beers on me!”

Aizawa didn’t answer. In fact, he remained quiet and motionless for the remainder of the visit. Questions were ignored, side-conversations weren’t acknowledged. He just sat there. Even Present Mic wasn’t able to goad him to engage in talk. You wondered if he had simply fallen asleep.

“Must be the meds,” Mic said with a shrug.

Only Snipe caught Aizawa’s movement on the way out -- turning slightly to make sure his visitors were truly leaving him alone.

Midnight was stunned to find Yagi dressed and standing when you arrived at his room, the final stop on your infirmary tour. He bore no visible bandages or bruises and jumped when everyone began to pile into his room.

“Visitors!” he exclaimed, eyes widening. “I wasn’t expecting visitors!”

“We had to come check on you, All Might!” Midnight cooed, handing over her large basket of snacks and chocolates. Yagi eagerly accepted the gift, examining each treat. A small melon had even been stuffed in the center. While you and Mic opted for humor, Midnight had been thoughtful with her selections.

Shit.

“Thank you!” he said, genuinely touched. “You really shouldn’t have--”

“Don’t be silly. This is the least we could do!”

“Well, I hope you will all help me eat this at least.”

“All Might,” Mic said, pushing his way to the front of the group and bowing his head. “Of course we will help you eat that.”

“I’ve been cleared to leave today, are you all going to the meeting?” Yagi asked. The crew nodded at one another -- yes, that had been the plan. A smile split the hero’s face. “Excellent, I’ll follow you up!”
A police representative already present and speaking with Nedzu when everyone arrived in the conference room. The detective introduced himself as Tsukauchi as means of a hello and immediately fell right into a brief on what the police knew of the attack on the school.

It made sense, the brisk pace -- what you were dealing with was a big deal. And as you sat in the conference room, the dread from the previous day began to resettle in your gut.

On a screen behind the detective played excerpts from UA’s security footage of the USJ.

The quality of the images and video were surprisingly crisp, you thought, mesmerized as flashes of fighting were shown. Although the villains had been able to prevent alarms from triggering, they did nothing to keep their faces from being captured by the cameras.

But it was… wow.

Watching the first-years in action was inspiring.

Truly, you were blown away by the battle sense the teenagers had. If you were their age and thrown in a similar situation, would Lionheart have been able to rise to the occasion?

As a first-year with no fighting experience?

Much of what Present Mic conveyed initially rang true, though Tsukauchi went into additional detail. It was chilling, watching an army of villains pile out a wormhole, the feeling made worse as you watched your students struggle to stay alive.

Aizawa’s fighting style was breathtaking. You found yourself leaning forward in your chair, watching the teacher deftly move and incapacitate an entire group of villains.

Until the big purple guy was unleashed, the one the police named Nomu.

Then, the screen was filled with All Might’s battle.

All of this headed by an individual the police theorized was nothing more than a man-child. A guy with the reactionary mindset of an adolescent boy.

Seventy-two villains were apprehended, Tsukauchi said. Your heart squeezed uncomfortably. The police were hoping for more arrests in the coming days, working their magic to try and unearth the possible colony the villains had crawled out from. An attack of such a magnitude implied extensive planning was involved. And, with so many low-leveled thugs clued in on the plan, someone had to have run their mouth at some point and divulged some secrets. The police were putting together a task force to look into the situation.

“Well,” Snipe said, moving his hat to rub his forehead -- the scope of the attack was finally sinking in. “This is a doozy.”

“The media is going to flip,” Mic added with a groan. The school had just gotten rid of the press blitz camped out at the front gates, undoubtedly they would be back. In force. “Students attacked by villains? Smells like a big story.”

“Don’t worry about the press, Tsukauchi and I will handle that,” Nedzu said. “Although this attack is a first for UA, it would be unwise to appear shaken over it. I think it’s best to put our faith in the police and carry on as usual.”

“What of Class A?” Midnight asked. “Do we need to do any type of crisis counseling?”
“They’re wannabe heroes at UA, if fighting villains was too much of an upset for them, then they
shouldn’t be here,” Vlad countered.

“But as first-years?” you compelled to speak up, gesturing to the screen. It had frozen on Jiro and
Kaminari in mid-fight. “Facing so many bad guys at once? Come on now, we shouldn’t just brush
the situation under the rug. Something should be done.”

“Maybe we should set aside time during our classes Monday to talk through what happened?”
Ectoplasm suggested. Vlad snorted but a consensus was reached that the topic would be broached if
deemed necessary.

“Keep an eye out for anyone who seems too affected,” Nedzu said after giving the suggestion his
approval. “Vlad isn’t wrong -- an essential duty for a hero is to protect the public from villains. If
fighting a villain, or threat of fighting a villain, causes too much of an emotional reaction…”

He trailed off but the insinuation was understood. As callous at it seemed, if villains were seen as too
frightening for a hero student than perhaps UA was not the school for them.

The flow of the meeting turned toward security. Power Loader was leading the charge in updating
the school’s system. The barrier was already being addressed, but it was clear the alarm system had
its shortcomings.

“I can’t plan for everything,” he stressed, as if the security issue had been some sort of personal
failure. Nedzu nodded sympathetically but his expression was stern.

“We can try,” he said simply and Power Loader’s shoulder slumped.

Sure, he could try.

And then there was you.

A slight blush rushed to your face when an image of your shielded form appeared -- a mess of
students crowded behind you. Nedzu was thanking your presence of mind to stay behind to defend
students in the cafeteria. Lunch Rush was also highlighted.

You gave a stiff smile, eyes darting over the eyes glancing over to you.

And that was that.

One-by-one the teachers filed out of the conference room while Nedzu stayed behind to continue his
original conversation with Tsukauchi.

With the meeting finished, the rest of the day was pretty open. No classes, no students. All that was
left was work -- something no one seemed really interested in doing.

So the day was mostly spent crowded in the staff room, chatting and watching video after video Mic
was adamant in showing. When the workday eventually did come to a close, Midnight suggested
another happy-hour. But it quickly became apparent no one was in the mood for drinks. It was an
exhausting couple of days and disappointed Midnight let the suggestion drop.

Despite the heaviness that had settled on campus, it was a beautiful spring day; you observed the
heavily cloudy sky as you left UA’s main building. A cold snap had been hovering over Japan for
several days, the news had been filled with stories about the trouble such a late-season frost could
have on the country’s farms.
That was, of course, until yesterday.

Before the big news stories centered around UA.

Well, at least the air had finally grown warmer. You considered stopping on the way home to stock up on any of the remaining sakura candies before they were officially gone for the season. Those spring blossom Kit-Kats…

“Erm, Lionheart!”

Your pace slowed when you heard your name on the wind. Curious, you glanced over your shoulder. It had been Yagi who had been out to you, trailing a couple feet behind. You stopped, waiting for him catch up.

“Hey stranger,” you said as he settled next to you, a slight rasp in his breathing. “How you feeling?”

“Oh I’m fine,” he said on a wheeze, waving away your concern. “Picture perfect. I’m just looking forward to sleeping on my own bed! Those infirmary beds are a bit lumpy.”

He tapped his lower back for good measure.

“Well they can’t be too comfortable,” you said, a flash of humor in your eyes. “Otherwise a trip to Recovery Girl would be considered too much of a treat. Soft beds plus all that candy she gives out? I’d be looking for ways to get hurt so I could pay her a visit.”

Your joke was rewarded with a chuckle from Yagi and you grinned, pleased with yourself.

Yagi was the one who resumed walking first, moving down the main path at your side. The pace was slow -- his gait a not-quite shuffle, yours meandering slightly to keep from going too fast.

You looked at him out of the corner of your eye, painfully aware of the silence that settled over you both.

Should you talk?

Who starts a conversation but doesn’t contribute to it?

But you kept quiet -- it was obvious he was thinking about something.

“Your quirk is impressive,” he said and you found yourself smiling at the compliment.

“Kind words coming from the man who punched a one-ton beast through a ceiling.”

Yagi smiled but didn’t respond to your comment.

“So is your quirk… barrier creation?”

“More like energy manifestation.”

“Oh? You can create something more than a barrier…?”

“Yeah, but only shields and simple weapons like swords and hammers.”

Your responses were simple and short, Yagi noted. Though he wasn’t sure if you were just being coy or if you weren’t comfortable discussing something so personal.
“What’s your quirk, Yagi?”

He lurched at the question, mind racing for one of the witty retorts he usually had stashed away for such a moment.

“My quirk gives me the ability to punch one-ton beasts through a ceiling,” he said with a too-loud laugh. “Oh! I also have something for you…”

Light danced in your eyes at his response and quick change of subject. ‘Classic All Might,’ your thought as you watched him reach into his bag.

“Could it be…?” you said with faux-wonder. The act fell apart with a chuckle when Yagi heroically pulled out the small device, holding it out toward you with hushed breath. “Finally, reunited at last!” you said as you plucked your phone out of his hands. “Thank you for keeping it safe.”

“I turned it off so the battery wouldn’t die,” he said when you tried unlocking it. You thanked him again for his thoughtfulness, clasping it by your side as waited for the device to boot up.

Immediately, it began vibrating madly as days worth of back texts started streaming through.

“Wha—” you said in genuine surprise, watching a litany of notifications fly across your home screen. Yagi peeked over.

“Oh, it seems Midnight added you to the teacher’s group text,” he said.

There were easily more than two hundred texts you had missed, you realized as you scrolled up in the chat. The bewilderment made worse when you realized you had only one number saved -- Midnight’s. The rest of the responses were a bit of a mystery.

“I’ll have to get everyone’s numbers,” you muttered more toward yourself. “Well almost everyone. Thousand yen says the one who sends all the exclamation points is Present Mic.”

Yagi laughed again and cast another glance at you as you continued to skim the chat. You had reached the edge of campus, both instinctively turning right, heading toward the nearby train stop. You glanced up at Yagi then the road before you.

“Hey… are you hungry?” you ventured to ask, causing a slight hitch in Yagi’s step that you didn’t catch.

“Er, well…” he said.

“There’s this karaage stand on the way to the train station that is always swarmed by kids. Hopefully, it won’t be as busy today since classes were canceled… You want to grab some? It smells amazing.”

An innocent dinner with a coworker, Yagi told himself as he weighed your offer. It would be smart to turn you down, saving himself from the pressure of having to have a prolonged one-on-one conversation with a near stranger. Plus he had vowed to maintain a comfortable distance from all his co-workers as it would just make things… easier down the line.

He turned, mouth open and ready to give his regrets.

It was like a slow-motion scene from a movie.

And Yagi knew movies.

Sensing that he was looking your way, you turned your head to meet his gaze. The sun was caught
in your hair, the light settling on the ends and stressing the varying shades of color. Your eyes…
there was life in your eyes. A spark that was drawing him in. But there was also a… fatigue in your
face?

But was that truly so odd? What hero wasn’t battling weariness on a near-constant basis?

You were starting to smile -- he watched your mouth growing wider, the corners of your mouth
breaking apart to reveal white teeth hidden beneath plush lips--

And that’s when it struck Yagi that had was clearly staring.

He whipped his head to the side, hand covering his mouth and hiding the blood that lurched up in an
embarrassed horror. He tried to play it off as a cough had suddenly sprung up.

It was cruel to be thinking like that.

He was far too old for you.

You were just being nice.

He was as a good as dead.

If you were interested, it would only be because of All Might.

Pathetic. Inadequate.

“I didn’t mean to put on you on the spot,” you said, self-conscious of his delayed reaction. It was an
obvious no -- he was just thinking of a polite way of turning you down.

Apparently, you had the innate ability to make yourself look like a fool around him.

Way to go.

You scratched your cheek to hide the embarrassed blush that was rising. “It was just… I wanted to…
Just trying to thank you for keeping my phone and the kids safe!” you managed to blurt out. “Maybe
another time, yeah? I should probably lay off the fried foods anyway. I’ve been inspired to lose the
flab and get back into hero shape.”

Yagi watched you pat your stomach, horrified.

“You don’t--” he offered but your hand shot up to silence him.

“I ate two ice cream sandwiches for breakfast, Yagi. Today, when I imagined running from the main
campus to USJ… and with this villain nonsense…” you trailed off. “Thank you, Yagi. Your dinner
rejection has further solidified my resolve to start working out again.”

He grimaced.

You parted ways just before arriving at the train station -- you claimed you had some light shopping
to do before heading home.

Put some distance between you two.

You couldn't imagine taking the train with him after such rejection.

Yagi gave his goodbyes and watched you disappear into the crowded Friday evening streets, an odd
sense of disappointment enveloping him again. After the disastrous dinner invitation, you had managed to keep the conversation light and friendly.

Yagi had been on the verge of giving in and admitting he did want to get fried chicken with you...

But he didn’t.

That night, after All Might made an appearance to break up a back alley brawl that erupted a few blocks from his place, Yagi ended up Googling your name. He was curious about your background and hoped that he could sate that interest without the need to actually ask about it. Unfortunately, other than your name, he didn’t have much to go on.

Nighteye was always so good at finding people online…

*Lionheart.*

Two articles of interest directly mentioned a Lionheart. The first, a woman who went by the moniker Lionheart, saved a young boy who had been caught in a rip current off the coast of Camber Sands in England. Another was several years old and was only a few sentences. A reporter stationed in Syria mentioned that US-backed troops had been protected from enemy artillery fire from thanks to the assistance of a hero named Lionheart.

A third article had been translated from a German newspaper and was several decades old. Lionheart defeats monster villain, the headline blared. Accompanying it was a photograph of a middle-aged hero with grey hair posing beside a handcuffed ogre of a man.

Yagi shut his laptop, tapping his fingers rhythmically on the top of it. His research hadn’t been as enlightening as he had hoped.

*Shield hero Lionheart.*

He sighed, rubbing his face and the thoughts out of his mind. He needed to stop with this nonsense, he told himself. He had bigger and far more important things to think about.

*Young Midoriya.*

Vividly he could see the boy leaping into harm's way at USJ, risking his life to try and save All Might. The memory both electrified and horrified him. So brave, so reckless -- the boy had been blazing with the desire to do the right thing and save the day.

He could have found no better successor. But the boy needed to develop some level of self-preservation, especially at his age.

With Nedzu already declaring the sports festival would go on as scheduled, Yagi knew that Midoriya had only a couple of weeks to prepare for it. Although he already saw the potential and fire within the boy, the *world* needed to see it.

Then there was the other matter he had been putting off. A promise he had made that he had not yet fulfilled.

There was one other person he needed to inform about the succession of One for All.

He shivered, the thought of Gran Torino still conjuring a sickening mixture of fear and dread that wriggled in the bottom of his very being. He couldn’t imagine calling him… *visiting* him? Goodness, that was completely out of the question. The older man didn’t own a cell phone so texting wasn’t
possible. He wasn’t aware of an email address either.

He tapped his fist on his hand in resolve, an idea coming to him.

*Ah, a letter it was!*
The wound that the UA attack had left on the student body quickly scabbed over as the campus was overtaken with Sports Festival fever.

It was the equivalent of a yearly Olympics in Japan, with worldwide live stream numbers that far surpassed it. Highlights were shared on social media and displayed on hero fan sites across the globe, watch parties were formed and betting was rampant.

For first years, it was their introduction to the public. For the older students, it was a chance to surpass previous performances and cement their names as THE heroes to watch out for.

“We don’t have sports festivals like this in the US,” you explained to Thirteen the week before the festival. “I mean, of course hero schools have competitions. But our big events are always the finals - it’s basically just a bunch of already winners competing against each other.”

“That’s a shame,” Thirteen said. “During our festival every student has an equal chance of getting camera time, no matter the class rank.”

Planning the sports festival was like watching a well-oiled machine in motion. Food and drink vendors had submitted applications months ago, aware their booths would also be competing against operations headed by UA’s more entrepreneurial management students. Press badges had been distributed, light and video contractors hired. The stadium was being cleaned and prepped, heavily scrutinized trucks rumbling across hidden campus roads filled with materials.

Everything looked so under control.

You were surprised, however, when Midnight sauntered over one day and gave you a job to do at the festival -- you would be assisting Cementoss as a ‘bouncer.’

“Bouncer,” you repeated, visions of beefy men standing in doorways dancing around your head.

“Sometimes the kids can get a little… fired up during fighting matches,” she explained. “And we’re going to have one this year after the calvary match. You just have to be ringside with Cementoss in case a barrier needs to pop up. Mostly crowd protection -- I’d hate for something to fly off and kill someone!”

Then, both of you opted to take a quick break, heading out of the main building to the field where a UA photographer had set up shop. He had been brought in to take pictures and video that were going to be used during instructional segments during the festival and for promotional purposes leading up to it.

“You want us to carry him ?” Present Mic exclaimed as the two of you approached the gathering of people on the field. The voice hero was gesturing wildly to a unintentionally posing All Might standing beside him. “I have noodle arms! I can’t carry him !”

“I… have to side with Mic on this one,” Thirteen agreed, eyeing the girth of All Might. “He seems a little heavy--”

“Nonsense!” All Might said. “I have faith you two can support me! Besides, I dropped some extra
weight. This will be easy for you two!”

It was not easy for those two.

You and Midnight were doubled over in laughter watching as Present Mic attempted to force a smile and hide his shaking legs while the photographer, with very impressive acrobatics, dropped and rolled around them for pictures.

“Go get Uraraka,” Mic wheezed to Midnight, catching himself just as his knees startled to buckle. What they needed to do was make All Might weightless. But his demand broke All Might out of his posing trance and he glanced down at his colleague.

“Nonsense, we’re almost done! Now, everyone smile real big!” All Might said on Midnight’s behalf, grinning for the camera while his co-workers began to sweat in earnest.

While one of the assistants was adding point headbands to All Might’s head for the video footage, Mic’s legs finally did give out and the trio collapsed in a groaning, moaning pile.

“He broke… all my bones,” Mic wheezed as pain shot across his limbs and back. In a surprisingly fluid motion, All Might jumped up from his seated position atop his partners, picking up the crumpled Mic by the jacket with one hand and dusting off him off with the other. Thirteen was already standing, albeit much more stiffly.

“You are doing so well!” All Might exclaimed, setting his coworker standing upright and thwacking him on the back. “Only a couple more shots. Come on now, you know you can handle something as easy as this!”

All Might’s show of camaraderie unintentionally knocked the air out of Mic’s lungs. He was left clutching his chest, eyes wide, certain he was in the throes of a heart attack. An assistant ran over the duo, whispering something to a leaning All Might. His brows furrowed though his smile was unchanged.

“Okay, maybe more than a couple more shots!” he corrected with laughter before holding his hand up to obscure his mouth. “How much longer did you say? There’s something I’m going to need to take care of in about 45 minutes and it won’t be able to wait…”

The morning of the sports festival, you awoke extra early. It was a world-wide televised event and the last thing you wanted was to be pegged as the frumpy teacher in the crowd. Your hair was freshly washed and styled, your eyeliner thick and black. Your outfit: so far you had tall boots and leggings, the top was proving a challenge.

After nearly an hour of just trying on shirts and posing in front of your mirror, you opted to go for a black tank top with a floral cardigan. It was something presentable, something hip and something with just the right amount of cleavage to bump up your game as an available thirty-something.

Of course, with a celebrated R-rated hero center stage, you had some pretty stiff competition.

You’d just have to do your best to look radiant in the background.

Arriving at school, you saw that you were not the only one to have stepped up their appearance. The teachers were gathering in the conference room for last minute preparations before heading down to the stadium to greet security and the vendors. Everyone looked polished and poised, their costumes flawless.

Mostly everyone.
Aizawa looked unwashed.

“I was hoping you’d come in hero costume,” Midnight said, a slight frown on her face, as she looked you over. You shrugged before thumbing at your nose.

“I don’t think I fit in my suit pieces anymore,” you admitted sheepishly.

“Then go visit the support department! Talk to Power Loader about it, they’ll take care of you.”

Your morning assignment was rather boring -- you were partnered with Ectoplasm to oversee the vendor entrance, essentially telling people where to set up and checking their identification. It hit a snag about an hour in, when a majority of the vendors had set up their booths and started preparing for the rush. Merchandise was being set up, lights were being hung.

And the food.

“Oh it already smells so good,” you murmured as the scent of cooking food started to fill the morning air as you walked through the stands. Ectoplasm agreed, eyeing a skewer stand he planned on visiting during a break. “Do we get any kind of perks as a teacher?” you asked abruptly, already noting how bad it sounded. “Can we, uh, skip the lines?”

You winced, mildly expecting a scolding for being so selfish. He placed a friendly hand on your shoulder.

“Stick with me. By the end of today you’ll have eaten your fill.”

You thought about the workout regime and diet you had been sticking faithfully to the past several weeks. You know, gotta get into hero shape again!

Ah, to hell with it.

One cheat day wouldn’t kill you.

Before you knew it, the time for vendor setup was over and you and Ectoplasm were removed from security detail, replaced by professional heroes the school had contracted. By then the hero spectators had begun arriving at UA, the crowds growing in numbers as the sun rose higher in the sky and the morning warmed.

Ectoplasm looked down at the time, nudging you gently.

“We better head up.”

Ah, it was time to grab your seats.

Unable to resist the siren’s call of good smells, you stopped for a morning yakisoba (smiling sheepishly as the stand owner laughed at you) before finding your way up to the box where the teachers sat.

You and Ectoplasm were apparently the last to arrive. You shuffled past a tense and distracted Yagi to sit in an empty seat between Thirteen and Snipe.

“Eating already?” Thirteen asked. Even though the hero’s face was obscured, you heard the playful tone and shrugged.

“Hey, it’s basically a festival day. That means there are no rules.”
The familiar voice of Present Mic boomed throughout the stadium, making several of you jump, signaling the event was moments from starting. You inhaled a steady stream of noodles as fireworks launched and danced overhead.

You could imagine how it must have looked on TV -- aerial shots of a packed stadium beneath bursts of flowering fireworks. Close-ups of cheering heroes.

Oh god, what if they showed the teacher’s box?

You cut your noodle eating short, slowly and demurely resting your food on your lap. You’d wait to stuff your face after the students arrive to take the attention.

Speaking of students...

The first years were already making their way to the field for the starting ceremony. The crowd was roaring with excitement as the students filed in like cattle to the center of the green. Present Mic, his face smeared on every giant television screen that decorated the perimeter of the stadium, launched into his opening monologue.

Referencing Class A’s triumph during the UA attack rallied the audience into a bigger frenzy.

You were anxious, experiencing the type of jitters a sports fan would get at the start of an important game. Clearly you were emphatic for what the students were feeling as they looked up to see a stadium filled with thousands of spectators.

From where you sat, you could see the faces of the kids. It was almost comical to see the range of emotions -- fear, excitement, adrenaline… sickness? You winced as a first-year beelined straight to the sidelines to empty their stomach.

“Poor kid,” you muttered and Snipe shrugged.

“They gotta get used to the attention,” he answered.

Midnight took her position at the main stage, favorite flogger in hand. She had been named the head referee of the event, acting as the overseer to all participating in the day’s challenges. But before the games could get underway, they needed to adhere to one of UA’s storied traditions. The students had to pledge to act honorably in the events ahead, as any proper hero would.

Reciting the player pledge would be Bakugou, the top seed from the acceptance exam.

A chill visibly passed over the students. It went unnoticed by most of the spectators, as they were not aware what high school archetype Bakugou had decided to fill, but the teachers looked on curiously, waiting to see how the hot-head would react with the attention of the world centered on him.

"Damn the pork in the yakisoba was divine. Whatever it had been marinated in--

“I pledge... that I’ll be number one.”

You snorted into your food, Bakugou's voice cutting through the respectful silence that had fallen over the stadium. You covered your mouth, shaking with laughter over the ballsiness of the first-year as his fellow classmates erupted in rage at what they viewed as disrespect.

“Gotta give the kid credit,” Snipe said, tipping his hat back. Bakugou’s attitude had coaxed out a
“Lionheart,” Power Loader said, sitting forward to look at you over Snipe. “Where did you get that, what is it, yakisoba?”

“It’s on the first row of vendors closest to the bathroom, like halfway down the row. There’s a crepe vendor next to them -- it looked so good.” You could see Snipe look toward you and you bristled. “Yes, I’m excited about the food. Sue me.”

“Shh, Midnight’s about to tell the kids about the obstacle course,” Ectoplasm said from behind.

After the rules of the first game were explained, the students lined up at the starting gate. Snipe leaned over.

“You a-bettin’ woman?” he asked under his breath.

Your eyes flashed suspiciously to the cowboy.

“Are you seriously betting on children?”

“Heroes in training,” he corrected, sitting up straight. “Got my eyes on Bakugou now to win this. Thought we could liven up our watching. It’s all in good fun.”

“Midnight says we’re going out tonight after this,” you said, watching as the lights above the gate light up to begin the countdown.

All in good fun?

There wasn’t any harm in it, right?

You didn’t think Snipe would be the one to blab to the students that he had been betting on them.

“If Bakugou wins, I’ll buy your drinks tonight but if…” your eyes scanned the crowd as you debated on your champion. “But if… Tetsutetsu wins, you’ll have to buy my drinks.”

“Tetsutetsu,” Snipe repeated, finding the boy in the crowd. Class B? The odds were not in your favor.

Two lights.

“He’s been all sorts of fired up because of Class A’s… run-in with villains at USJ. All of Class B has. I can see him winning this.”

“He’s got it in him,” Vlad said from behind them. “I expect my class to pull an upset today.”

One light.

“Fine, you’ve got yourself a deal.”

After the final light went dark, and at Midnight’s cry, the students lurched forward and the UA festival began in earnest. The large screens decorating the stadium switched views, alternating between shots of the race and Present Mic’s face.
It was also revealed that Aizawa had been pegged as Mic’s co-commentator. He looked as bandaged and miserable as ever, any words of wisdom he found worth sharing nothing more than mumbles.

Mic’s new hero moniker for him, Mummy Man, was very fitting.

The teachers watched as Todoroki broke away from the massive crowd of first-years, bursting through the bottleneck of stadium tunnel and painting the ground behind him in ice. Almost the entirety of Class A, well aware of his quirk, were able to keep from getting frozen leaving the rest of the students at a disadvantage.

The ice was an additional obstacle that Todoroki left for the other racers who hadn’t been frozen in the initial ice burst. Some were able to avoid the slick surface, the rest trying to quickly find their balance as they shuffled along.

Mineta, surprisingly, was hot on Todoroki’s trail, creating leaping stones using the balls on his head. He felt alive -- it was his time to shine in the spotlight.

*He* would become the number one guy in class.

But his dreams were immediately dashed when the *true* first hurdle of the obstacle race appeared -- the battle robots.

In one quick swipe, a bot sent Mineta careening off the track and off-screen altogether.

“Todoroki was a recommendation for UA, right?” Thirteen asked as the boy worked his magic on freezing the field. Yagi nodded his head, though he was focused on trying to locate any trace of Midoriya. “So he didn’t see the robot villains during the entrance exams?”

“Yes, but the low-point villains should hardly be a hurdle at this point in the school year,” Vlad said. “The playing field is still even.”

With a wave of his hand, spectators watched as Todoroki unleashed a torrent of ice that completely encased one of the bots, allowing the teen to maneuver under its legs and continue the race.

As Present Mic roared about the dazzling move, and Todoroki put distance between him and his opponents, your eyes were on a television screen showing Kirishima bursting through the chest of the fallen robot like a facehugger from *Alien*. Your fist raised when a second student -- Tetsutetsu -- cut through the same bot in a strikingly similar fashion.

Snipe elbowed you gently.

“Don’t cheer,” he said. “We’re supposed to be *outwardly* impartial. You don’t want to end up on TV.”

Several of the teachers remarked positively about Class A’s ability to forge ahead while the rest of the students paused to strategize. The same thought process extended to the commentator’s box where, acting as a stark contrast to Mic’s near squeals, Aizawa suggested his class’ inability to stand around came from experiencing a life-or-death battle firsthand.

Yagi was compelled to point out how close in ability Class B was, their presence and skills adding pressure to Class A. But he fell silent when Midoriya appeared briefly on one of the cameras. Villains were exploding around him, falling victim to various quirks, but Midoriya had kept himself mostly out of the fray.
It was smart, Yagi thought, but dismaying. The sports festival was a multi-event, the obstacle course just a small leg in an otherwise marathon. If he unleashed his power now and injured his body, he would effectively be shutting himself out of the rest of the event.

But the boy needed to stand out and finish strong otherwise he risked getting cut.

The cameras cut away just as Midoriya was rooting around in the scraps of a fallen villain. The race leaders had made it to the next leg of the race--

“The FAAAAALLLL,” Present Mic introduced, the loudness of his voice causing the speaker system to squeal in distress.

“My creation!” Power Loader said, raising his hands in triumphant victory with a slightly maniacal laugh.

It was mind-boggling that UA had gone so far as to create an entire canyon system on their campus.

Actually, you realized. It wasn’t. How many mini-cities did the school have hidden away that were destroyed and rebuilt daily?

It was at that moment you began to comprehend the massive scale of UA and how much money the school must have access to.

“I spent two weeks digging that baby out,” Power Loader cooed, breaking you from your existential thoughts. “Had to pray it wouldn’t rain and muddle everything up. Pretty sure I found some kind of dinosaur fossil when I was excavating.”

“Where’s the bone at?” Thirteen asked.

“Eh, just threw it in the support lab for now. The thing is basically a boulder. Maybe I’ll see if one of the support kids wants to try and whittle it down.”

“So if a student falls, they’re disqualified,” Ectoplasm said, eyes switching between screens. Power Loader may have dug deep into the crust of the Earth -- panning cameras over the course only revealed an inky blackness awaiting any students unlucky enough to fall. “What’s on the bottom of the course?”

“Oh nothing,” Power Loader said with a shrug. “It’s mostly just muck. Water collects when you dig as far down as I did.”

“Well… what if a student falls?”

“I built it with the assumption that the students weren’t gonna fall,” he said. “Aaaand, if someone did fall, I figured they’d be saved because, well, heroes.”

Thirteen grumbled in dismay and you furrowed your brows, the student acrobatics on the tightropes suddenly becoming a lot more daunting.

“Oh they’ll be fine,” Power Loader said, waving away their concerns. “I’m more upset that I’ll have to fill in my creation later on this week! Farewell, Power Canyon. May you go down in sports festival history.”

Todoroki was still the breakout star of the race, though Bakugou had gone completely airborne and was gunning to overtake and overpower him. Although most of the race shots were top-down views captured by drones, the on-course camera bots had found their favorite students and were providing
them ample screen time.

“Jeez,” Thirteen muttered when Iida, who had been propelling himself precariously over a tightrope using his calf engines, faltered. He dipped dangerously to the left and, for a second, the hero thought he was going to lose his balance entirely.

Hopefully he was able to right himself and not fall to his possible death -- the camera view suddenly switched to a close-up of Todoroki.

Mic’s giggles echoed across the stadium.

He had made it to the last challenge.

“A minefield!” you exclaimed as the cameras zoomed out to show wooden signs emblazoned with skulls. You looked to Snipe -- would the school seriously risk maiming the students?

As if he had heard your horror, Present Mic’s face filled the screens. He was wagging his finger at the crowd. At you. Like we would send our precious children through a minefield, he appeared to imply.

“These landmines are for games, they’re not that powerful,” he cried as he stood, kicking his chair back and grabbing his head. “But they’re loud and flashy enough that they’ll make you wet your pants!”

“Depends on the person,” Aizawa muttered offscreen.

Yagi gripped his pant legs.

Come on Midoriya…

“I helped with this one too!” Power Loader added, his excitement palpable. “It’s actually not as dangerous as it looks. If you look hard enough, there’s only the slightest amount of dirt covering the mines. So if the students watch where they step--”

An explosion of purple smoke flashed on-screen, a hovering drone catching the action. An indistinguishable student had been the first to step on a mine and was sent careening high into the air, stunned. As Mic had said, the explosion was loud enough that it startled other racers, prompting additional missteps.

What followed was an avalanche of explosions and flying teenagers.

“Oh my god, the government is going to come and investigate us for abuse,” you groaned as the camera followed one airborne student as she cartwheeled through the sky, only to land on another batch of mines that sent her spinning again.

“Eventually she’ll luck out and hit solid ground,” Vlad said unconvincingly. “Or at least she’ll come to and right herself.”

She didn’t.

Her limp body was flung further along the minefield at each explosion until she finally landed in safety of the bushes that dotted the perimeter of the course.

“We have someone new in the lead!” Mic called and the camera shifted just in time to broadcast Bakugou swiping at a surprised Todoroki. The two frontrunners had started to trade blows with one
another while running.

Behind them a collection of students had found their groove, catching on to the raised ground that signaled a buried mine was hidden beneath.

Chances were they were going to--

**BOOM.**

You and Thirteen gasped when the cameras shook and the sound of thunder roared loud enough that those seated in the stadium could hear it clearly.

There was as a massive explosion near the entrance to the minefield, several times bigger than any of the blasts earlier mines had been giving off. Your heart squeezed when, out of the corner of your eye, you saw Snipe react in a mildly defensive manner.

That was way too big. Something was wrong.

Villains--

No.

Something was in the sky on screen. A camerabot had caught onto it, zooming in and following the object’s trajectory.

There was a… boy flying through the sky, desperately clutching a large piece of scrap metal.

Green hair, red shoes...  

**Midoriya!**  

“Yes!”

Ignoring the proper teacher etiquette of remaining impartial, Yagi had shot forward to stand, his hands raised in elation as he watched his protege soar through the air.

*I am here!*

“He’s taken the lead!” Mic screamed, enveloped in a fit of passion as Midoriya nearly cleared the minefield in one impressive move, rocketing himself closer to the two leaders of the race.

Yagi retook his seat, hands clenched on his legs.

He leaned forward, the game reaching a fever pitch as Todoroki and Bakugou turned their attention away from battling with each other and, instead, to outrunning Midoriya.

But he was quickly losing speed and altitude.

At one point, Midoriya was perfectly in line with his competitors, though completely upside down. There was no way he could correct himself without losing any of his momentum--

In a dazzling display of ingenuity, Midoriya did manage to right himself, slamming his metal surfboard on the ground and activating a chain-reaction of mine blasts that propelled him forward even further and faster.

When his feet finally did touch the ground, he was locked in a sprint.
This was it.

You wrung your hands and bounced your legs, Snipe squeezed the brim of his hat, Thirteen scooted forward…

Bakugou was unleashing a series of thunderous explosions behind him.

Todoroki was at his side, face set in a concentrated stone.

The three racers had entered the final stadium tunnel where there were no cameras.

It was anyone’s race.

Eyes were trained on the tunnel exit, the crowd in a roar, Present Mic attempting to get Mummy Man to spill the secret on how his class became so spectacular...

You felt like you could vomit, anxious worms dancing in your belly. You had no idea why you were so… involved -- either of the three students could have won and it would have been great for you.

Confetti cannons exploded overhead and cheers erupted before the winner even crossed the threshold of the stadium’s green.

But it had been timed perfectly. When the anguished face of Midoriya finally appeared on-screen and in the open -- the winner of the first event -- the sight could not have been sweeter. It was jubilation. Celebration. An underdog moment, one of the pack breaking away at the last minute to become the winner using pure on-the-spot innovation.

He took only a second to take a breather before looking wildly in the crowds, obviously searching, the joy of the audience lost on him at that moment. You assumed he was looking for family--

Until he looked straight up into your box.

The teachers were all clapping at the turn of events but Midoriya had a fist raised, determination and pride as he locked eyes with someone.

I am here!

Who could--

You glanced at Yagi, intuition telling you that he was Midoriya's target. It appeared he had regained his educator composure, the enthusiasm of his clapping matching the rest of the teachers.

But his face told another story.

Even from where you sat, you could see the dazzle in his eyes, the way his jaw was clenched, the burning spirit radiating from him as he returned Midoriya's zeal.

I am here!

A bubble formed in your stomach and you looked away, fighting the odd flicker in your chest. That look… that was something else.

It was burned into your mind.

The look...
You desperately wanted to see it again. Something gluttonous had awakened inside of you. The strength, the power, the passion behind it...

But it was gone, lost to time. He had relaxed and Midoriya had looked away.
And you…

You shivered slightly, trying to work out the nerves in your chest.

That’s what it was. Nerves. From the games.

*Yagi Toshinori…*

Another quick look at him -- he was watching the race.

You jerked your head away, reaching down for your phone, fingers dancing wildly as energy pooled in your body. Your quirk was going wild.

… Yagi Toshinori.

Mic declared a slight intermission while the students continued to finish the course, or were carted off the track, and the rankings were recorded.

“Hmm,” Snipe said, leaning back and crossing his arms, his voice jolting you out of your daze.

“Looks like neither of us won that match. Though Bakugou *did* place higher than your pick—”

He was looking at you, stopping when he took in the color of your face.

“What’s wrong with you?” he asked, utterly confounded at how red you had become. Thirteen glanced your way and, to your horror, Yagi had also looked over upon hearing Snipe’s bewildered tone.

“I just get anxious when it comes to sports!” you blurted out too loudly.

Somewhere below, you heard one of the business students crying out about bento boxes for sale. You launched yourself forward enthusiastically, momentarily scaring Thirteen who believed you were about to fling yourself over the railing of the box.

“Hey!” you bellowed, waving wildly. The student missed a step, turning (as well as a sizable amount of spectators) to see a teacher gesturing wildly down to him. “Toss me up one of those bentos!”

“Tell him to send me up one too,” Ectoplasm said, all the excitement stirring up an appetite, the noodles you had given him earlier already finished. After Power Loader and Vlad jumped onboard, you ended up thundering to the student to just visit your box -- you all were looking to buy.

After completing your massive bento order, the teachers took to mulling around their seating area, unwilling to leave for fear of missing the race rankings.

“That Midoriya is a crafty one,” Power Loader said with a chuckle of admiration. You had moved from your chair to sit on the floor beside him, as those eating had gathered in a relaxed circle.

“Grabbing that robot part and digging up those mines without setting them off…” Power Loader whistled, shaking his head. “He’s something.”

Yagi had also purchased food but had not joined the staff circle, opting to remain comfortably in his seat. But he was eavesdropping, digging around in his food as praises were sung about Midoriya, internally beaming like a proud father.
“He’s going to be one to watch after this display,” Thirteen agreed. “But he’s got some tough competition with Bakugou and Todoroki.”

“Reckon it’s a bit unfair with Todoroki though -- he’s got famous blood in him already.”

“Famous blood?” you asked and Power Loader shot you a bewildered look.

“Don’t tell me you don’t know he’s Endeavor’s kid.”

Your brows shot up, genuinely surprised at the revelation.

“But… but he’s ice,” you said dumbly and Snipe shook his head.

“He’s got a two-part quirk. Half fire, half ice. Only seen him use ice though, but the fire is there.”

“I thought his hair made it pretty apparent,” Power Loader added, tapping the side of his hand on his forehead. “The half red, half white deal.”

“There’s actually a whole sad story surrounding his family,” Thirteen said quietly. “Some pieces are in his file--”

“I still don’t have access to the school files,” you groaned, jabbing at a piece of chicken. “I still get the denied buzzer whenever I try to swipe in.”

“You should really talk to Principal Nedzu about that one. ‘Spose it’s been long enough.”

“RESULTS ARE IN!”

You turned, scooting to your knees to look over the railing. Midnight, sauntering over from the sidelines, took center stage and gestured to the main stadium jumbotron where the results were being displayed. First, second and third places went to Midoriya, Todoroki and Bakugou respectively--

“Oh my goodness, look at his face,” Thirteen whispered in awe.

“So scary,” Yagi said in the same tone.

“Tenth place, darlin’,” Snipe said with a slight jeer as Tetsutetsu’s rank appeared on-screen. You bristled.

“He made it into the Top 10, didn’t he?” you snapped, oddly protective of your grey-haired student.

But there was no time for additional rest for the students within the top 42. The field was being cleared off and the students were retreating somewhere subterranean to mentally prepare for the next leg of the event.

You tossed away your two containers of half-eaten food, flicking your arms and bouncing from one foot to the other, your quirk still in overdrive. You'd needed to expend some energy otherwise you'd be a fidgeting mess.

So, you went to pace the hallway leading to your box.

Your thoughts wandered as you walked from one end of the hall to the other in an almost mindless pace. Of course, Yagi was at the forefront of your mind. Picturing the zeal he had demonstrated made you want to jerk your shoulders around to try and rid yourself of the anxiety within you.

No, focus on other things.
Like the sports festival.


*For the first event!*

You recalled the relay races and fighting tournaments of your youth, back when you were working to be a hero. The "sports festival" equivalent you had experienced and participated in were grade versus grade games of touch football, softball and soccer.

*This...*

This was something else entirely.

Talk about a hero high school.

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Chapter End Notes

My break is over, baby! I'm loosey goosey and ready to get back into the swing of things. I hope you're enjoying yourselves and aren't overworking yourselves, especially if you're in school.

Remember -- sleep is your friend!
I hope you all had a great Halloween! And I'm sorry about the delay -- I ended up losing some work Wednesday night when the chapter was supposed to drop. But everything is all good now.

Thank you for your continued support!

The cavalry battle was announced as the next event and you chuckled when the explanation images were displayed to the masses via the large television screens. The photographer the school had brought in had truly been an expert -- Thirteen and Present Mic appeared to be carrying All Might so effortlessly, smiling as the number one hero rode atop them, waving.

The point system for the battle was explained, the students already strategizing before Midnight could even finish her introduction. The disrespect obviously irritated the R-rated hero, who was cracking her flogger threateningly in an attempt to restore order, but the minds of the students had already been lost. The need to do well in the next round far outweighed any fear of reprimand they had.

Participants had fifteen minutes to select their team members. Most of the audience's eyes on Midoriya as his team would be the ones to watch during the round.

The green-haired teenager had been isolated -- with his ten million point value, he had been pegged as the number one target.

Which made him a liability.

Yagi winced, watching his protege struggle to draft a team. It was painfully obvious he was being rejected left and right by friends and outside classmates alike.

When it came to heroes, even among friends there was always an underlying rivalry. A drive to be the best.

“He’s a smart kid.”

Yagi looked up, watching as you stole Thirteen’s seat beside him. The desire and thrill to talk about Midoriya's strategy overpowered the butterflies that danced within your gut. You were already surveying the gathering teams, trying to guess the plans they were drumming up.

“Yes,” Yagi said, only realizing after he answered that you never specified who you had been talking about. He fidgeted, on the verge of backtracking when you folded your arms and let out a low ‘hmmm.’

“With such a big point difference, he must realize he should be focusing on defense. Better to evade and avoid and let the match play out. Of course, the problem will be getting a strong defense using only people who want to work with him.”

While Midoriya was being scorned, Bakugou was being swarmed. At third place, he was in a unique
position to play whatever kind of game he wanted. But the Class A students buzzing around him had additional insights into his mindset that the other competitors didn’t -- they were well aware of the daily drive he displayed when it came to defeating Midoriya whenever the opportunity presented itself. He was going to go after the ten million with all he had.

Teaming with him was one of the best chances at securing a victory.

“Quite a popular guy despite the attitude,” you mused, watching as he settled on his first partner for the event -- Kirishima.

“Even with his personality, he still came in third and has two hundred points,” Yagi pointed out. “Considering the all-purpose use of his quirk, it makes sense that he’s popular.”

“He can be offensive and defensive,” you said, impressed with Bakugou’s obvious versatility. “You’re right. But he needs to pick a team that won’t be phased by the explosions and wants to put up with the sass.”

“Oh, he’s crying again…” Yagi muttered in exasperation, a sign he had only been half paying attention to what you had to say. Your gaze returned to Midoriya, who was talking to Uraraka and openly weeping.

“He’s just in tune with his emotions!” you exclaimed with chuckle. “It’s fine!”

Yagi sighed and gave you a look that clearly said otherwise.

“Looks like Hatsume is with Midoriya,” Power Loader called as another was added to the team. “Good choice, she’s a support prodigy.”

Tetsutetsu had also formed his team, a collection of Class B students, a majority of which placed high in the rankings. You grinned, side-eyeing an oblivious Snipe. Bakugou was good choice but the odds were with you.

Those beers were going to taste so sweet…

Fifteen minutes came and went. Thirteen had returned, taking your seat and rebuffing your apologies and offers to switch back.

“It’s fine,” Thirteen said but two large eyes were looking at you curiously. Feeling their gaze, you kept yours focused on the field.

The back of your neck was burning.

At the cry of Mic’s start, the groups descended upon Midoriya, who froze when he saw more than a dozen teams heading directly at him. The first to make a valiant attempt at retrieving the ten million headband was Tetsutetsu’s team.

“Get him, Tetsu,” you hissed before laughing nervously and raising your hands apologetically at Yagi’s ogle.

But Midoriya was quick and evasive, activating an apparent jetpack--

“That a girl, Hatsume,” Power Loader said with pride.

-- and zooming out of reach.

Thousands of amused eyes watched as teams ducked, dived, flew and attacked; first targeting
Midoriya’s team then each other when Midoriya proved his collection of outsiders could quickly maneuver out of reach. He would not fall prey to an early-game defeat.

Still, they were not entirely untouchable. As the owner of the prized ten million headband, the cameras were consistently trained on him, leaving his team’s tribulations on display for all.

Bakugou gave Team Midoriya a scare, launching himself at them only to be reeled in by Sero before he touched the ground — an automatic disqualification. Then there was the surprise attack from Mineta, concealed in the running tank that was Shoji.

Shoji was doing well, Snipe realized as the multi-appendaged boy flashed on the screen. Despite his large stature, he was a quiet student in a class brimming with loud personalities. His unassuming nature gave him the strange ability to blend into the background, though at first glance his size and stature stated otherwise.

Surprised gasps and whispers echoed in the stands as the cameras cut away and the updated ranking were displayed on the screens.

Despite all the action that was occurring on the green, the points were extremely one-sided, all favoring Class B’s representation.

Vlad chuckled.

In real time, the audience watched as Bakugou’s team fell to zero points when their headband was snatched by a slippery Monoma, who paused with a sick smirk as he tied his new prize around his neck.

Although they couldn’t hear what was being said, Monoma had apparently opted to pause a bit longer, blatantly ignoring the other teams that were descending upon him. All so could speak with a clearly surprised Bakugou.

Vlad sighed, the chuckle disappearing as he rubbed his temple. It was near certain Monoma was gloating. Although he had always spoke of outshining Class A, those sentiments had gone into overdrive after the villain attack a few weeks back. Praise had been heaped upon the Class A students from the media, the public and even the teachers, enraging the rest of the student body. All those who wanted to prove themselves at UA suddenly found themselves trying to step out from an even bigger shadow.

It had been Monoma who fanned the flames of rivalry within Class B, his glibness inciting an already combustible bunch. Having just one-upped the boy who placed first in the hero placement tests…

After seeing what Bakugou was capable of, bragging was unwise, Vlad thought tiredly. He could already envision how the situation was going to play out. Sure Monoma could copy a quirk, but he lacked the training and mastery that the true owners held.

He would really have to drill the ego out of the boy. He did not have the ranking or skills yet to back up his words.

The camera zoomed on Bakugou, who had gone white with rage.

Then, in a twisted transformation, his face contorted into a glowering snarl, an unhinged look in his eye.

He had a new target in his sights.
Meanwhile, Todoroki and several other groups had launched another attack against Midoriya. They were not working in tandem however -- a massive electric wave brought forth by Kaminari had shocked the surrounding teams while Todoroki unleashed another ice assault, incapacitating Midoriya's.

But the boy was slippery and his team managed to unstick themselves, pulling out and away from Team Todoroki’s grasp. Though Midoriya was the overall target, Todoroki was not blindly chasing after him. Instead, he took the time to grab the headbands of the indisposed before returning to the chase.

“Ah,” Power Loader said as he watched Todoroki’s team create what appeared to be a giant spatula to deflect a defensive swipe from Dark Shadow when they caught up with Team Midoriya.

“Creation, what a rare and powerful quirk,” Ectoplasm said. “This year’s class is phenomenal.”

“He’s boxed him in,” Vlad interrupted, gesturing to the field.

Midoriya's team had been backtracking in order to avoid a direct confrontation. Pressed against the out-of-bounds line and Todoroki ice creations, it appeared Midoriya would be forced to go on the offensive in order to try and break away.

Yet, despite being enclosed, he was still able to keep a distance.

It was… amazing.

“One minute left!” Mic cried, sending a crowd, and the remaining teams, in a frenzy.

Midoriya had managed to retain the coveted headband for most of the match -- an amazing feat. A camera caught him muttering to his team, trying to piece together how they could escape from the mess they had found themselves in. All they needed was to hold on to the headband for one more minute...

In a flash of movement, Iida launched his team forward.

Instantly, the teen closed the gap between the two teams only to immediately pull away. Team Todoroki came to an abrupt stop in a manner of seconds.

Todoroki and his other teammates’ shocked expressions were shown on the screen.

It appeared even they were unaware of the speed Iida could achieve.

More importantly, somehow, during the burst of momentum, Todoroki had managed to retain his wits and snatched the headband from Midoriya's head.

Your heart dropped when the rankings flashed on the screen, Midoriya’s team falling. Yagi’s fists loosened, an odd sweat forming as he marveled at Iida’s perk while also witnessing Midoriya’s moment in the spotlight fade away.

“There’s still time!” you said beside him. The firmness in your voice struck Yagi, somehow enticing him to briefly tear his eyes away from Midoriya in order to look at you.

Your eyes were lit, face ablaze with vivacity. You had sensed the inkling of doubt that crept into his mind and would not allow it.

*Trust him!*
He didn’t say anything back but you had seen something flash in his eyes. A spark.

Both of them returned their attention to the field where Midoriya had mounted a last push to reclaim what was his.

A similar spark had erupted inside of Midoriya, the cameras catching the wild determination on his face as he reared back for an attack. The show of force triggered something in Todoroki, the intensity of Midoriya's assault stunning him. Instinctively his left side came ablaze as he found himself on the defensive.

The crowd held its breath.

Midoriya deflected Todoroki’s burning arm, grabbing at one of the headbands around the boy’s neck as his team slipped by.

Screams and cheers erupted from the crowd, the energy of the match palpable and maddening.

The teachers watched the screens as Midoriya's elation at retrieving a headband turned to horror.

He had not grabbed the ten million point headband. The camera panned over the red-numbers painted on the white cloth as Midoriya continued to stare at his hand, his world crumbling in real time.

_Seventy points._

“Oh no! Team Midoriya did not retrieve the ten million points! Time’s about up!” Mic screeched as Midoriya tore himself out his funk, launching into another attack while Bakugou erupted at them from the sky, his revenge on Monoma having been completed.

Here it was, the final push. The three top players coming together for one final epic clash--

_Time’s up!_”

Mic’s voice sliced through the tense showdown, immediately bringing things on the field to a grating stop. There were only scattered cheers -- the stadium crowd had mostly dissolved into groans tense discussions over the final battle they had been denied.

_“These kids are going to give me a heart attack,”_ Ectoplasm groaned, shifting in his seat. Yagi exhaled slowly. He was trying to temper his disappointment. He knew his feelings would pale in comparison to how Midoriya was feeling.

_“That’s the end of the second round calvary battle!”_  

Midoriya was doubled over in grief, Bakugou had fallen face-first to the ground and appeared to be throwing a temper tantrum at having, again, walked away a non-winner.

Despite having won the match, Todoroki looked just as upset as his competitors.

_“Now let's take a look at the top four teams right away!”_  

First place was Team Todoroki, second Team Bakugou.

Then things got weird.

In third was Team Shinso who had quietly replaced Tetsutetsu’s team during some point in the match when the cameras had been trained away. The upset of his loss hadn’t struck you yet, who felt
surprisingly distressed at Midoriya's failure.

At least, that was the case until Mic’s next announcement.

“In fourth place, Team Midoriya!”

You threw your head back and laughed as Midoriya launched into hysterics, sobbing as he received the information from his team members while the audience was treated to a slow-motion replay. Tokoyami’s Dark Shadow had managed to grab a second headband during Midoriya's scuffle with Todoroki, boosting their final score and keeping them all in the running.

Yagi released the breath he had been holding, unsettled at how close the match had been.

“See!” you said, nudging him playfully with your elbow. “There was nothing to worry about! I knew he had it under control!”

Your smile was large. It made your eyes, already dancing with good humor, crinkle.

You had long eyelashes, Yagi thought absentmindedly before catching himself and coughing lightly, turning his head to avoid hitting you with blood.

An hour lunch break was announced. The crowds, like ants, were shifting and moving out of their seats. Snipe stood cracking his back.

“Tough luck out there,” he said, gesturing to the scoreboard where Tetsutetsu’s team was counted as one of the zero pointers. Your team was out of the running. You had lost.

Yagi watched as you rolled your eyes at the cowboy.

“Bakugou has to win for you to win. We’re in the same boat, partner.”

The last word made Snipe chuckle.

“Lunch?” Power Loader asked his colleagues. You stood, stopping when you didn’t feel Yagi follow the crowd out of the box. You paused in the doorway, shooting an incredulous look at the man silently sitting and staring at the emptying stadium.

“Yagi!” you said, your voice abrupt and making him shift in surprise. “Come have lunch with everyone today! It’s the sports festival!”

Yagi regarded you, his mouth slightly agape as it usually was.

“O-oh, of course,” he said, standing and joining the rest of the teacher group who had waited in the hallway.

“I’m going to have gained ten kilograms by the time the festival is over,” Ectoplasm said with a strange glee. Vlad rolled his eyes.

“I think I’m going to do the crepe stand,” you said with a nod of your head, your internal debate coming to an end. “Something sweet to counteract all the savory I’ve had so far.”

“Sounds go-- Oh, there’s Mic.”

Surrounded by fans, Present Mic stood beside a sullen Mummy Man, gleefully handing out autographs and posing for pictures.
“Look! It’s Blood King Vlad!”

“And Ectoplasm!”

“Thirteen!”

Mic enthusiastically waved as some of his crowd broke off to swarm the other professional heroes. With Mic’s attention diverted, Mummy Man quietly slipped away from his friend’s side, heading to where he had stashed his sleeping bag behind the break room trailer.

Yagi inched away from the crowd as well, anxious to get away from the commotion in his current state. A massive part of him wanted to duck behind cover and expand into All Might. Spend some quality time greeting the crowd and the fans. But his time was short and he had to present the medals later. He couldn’t run the risk of poor time management.

He sighed.

Fan events were always his favorite.

Having already picked through his earlier bento, Yagi wasn’t feeling particularly hungry. However a nice cup of tea sounded wonderful and he started his shuffle down the first vendor aisle, noticing a familiar floral top a few paces in front of him.

You had also sidestepped the fan swarm.

Like him, he mused, you were an unknown. He quickened his gait -- you had been trapped behind a group of slow walkers, which made falling in line with you easy. Eventually, you looked over to see why the person beside you was keeping pace.

“Oh!” you blinked. “I’m sorry, I thought you were with the other teachers! I would have waited.”

“It’s no problem,” he said.

“It’s crazy how crowded this whole event is!” you said, gesturing to all the people surrounding you. “It’s like an amusement park!”

Yagi gave a lopsided smile, watching as you excitedly glanced at each of the vendors you passed. Food, souvenirs, clothing, toys -- it was essentially a flea market.

“Did you happen to see any tea stands earlier?” Yagi ventured to ask. You bit your lip, thinking back to when the vendors were first setting up. You had seen a tea cart, but you weren’t sure where it was. You told Yagi as much. He nodded, figuring he’d come across it eventually. You had other plans.

“Let’s find it!” you said with purpose. Yagi held up his hands.

“I thought you wanted to get food?”

“I want to taste the crepes more than eat them,” you admitted. “Now if I was a cart and not a stand…” You trailed off, your mind focused on the task at hand. “I would probably be toward the end of the row, right?”

Though the aisles of vendors weren’t particularly long, the crowds and paces of the people made walking from one end to the other a slow process. You let out a soft ‘awww’ when you passed a ramen vendor who had set up seating at his counter, inviting people to linger and eat. The getup was
adorably quaint.

Then there was a vendor selling some type of large, golden fish that were lazily floating in their tanks. Another had kites of various sizes and styles on display. Above his stand there was a large orange dragon serpentine in the air.

They were close enough that you could see the red price tags of the kites, your eyes widening at their cost.

Slowly you made your way to the endcap and, much to your surprise, your Sherlock deduction of the location of the tea cart had actually been correct. The green wooden structure was situated away from the hullabaloo of the vendor aisles, though there was still a decent-sized line. You hung back, window shopping, while Yagi went to join and wait in it.

Although you gave off no indication that you had wanted anything, Yagi ended up purchasing tea for you as well. You showered him in thanks, adding he had been in no obligation to get you anything.

“Nonsense,” he said. “It’s good practice to drink tea with someone!”

You shared with him another smile.

Rather than stand and drink, you both ended up walking up the second vendor aisle, chatting idly about the festival and the prowess of the students, pointedly avoiding discussing Midoriya in the open.

Yaoyorozu, they agreed, had been one of the breakout stars of the calvary match, followed by Tokoyami.

“Heroes use this event to scout for interns,” Yagi explained. You nodded -- you had heard Midnight make mention of it. “I’m sure those two will see plenty of offers.”

“We’ll see, though the final fig-- the last match,” you corrected, afraid of spoiling the next phase for anyone around them. “That will be the final impression the students can give. Hopefully they can continue with their momentum.”

“That Endeavor, talk about an asshole! He wouldn’t stop to sign an autograph for me! All he did was stand in the back walkway the entire match, it wasn’t like he was busy or anything!”

Yagi’s ears perked up at the conversation happening between two men off to the side. One was grousing about Endeavor’s lack of humility while the other ate a candied apple sympathetically. 

So Endeavor was here…

Obviously, he wanted to see his son’s performance, Yagi thought. But how long had it been since he had last seen him?

He walked a few more steps before realizing you were no longer by his side. He stopped, looking around to see where he could have lost you. In a break in the crowd, he caught a flash of floral and backtracked to you.

He stopped short of reaching you when he saw what booth you were standing in front of, uncertain if he wanted to join you. What were you doing there? Were you going to poke fun at him?

Painted in gold and red, the garish stand was a shrine to All Might. All Might shirts, sweaters, action
figures, posters, mugs, toys, candy, potato chips…

“Yagi!” you said, wildly waving him over. “Come here! Look at all this!”

“An All Might fan?” the vendor asked as Yagi walked up hesitantly.

“Who isn’t?” you asked with a laugh, pointedly looking to your coworker.

Yagi was unsure how to feel. There was pride and some humor, but a part of him felt like you were attempting to twist the situation into a joke. He stood, quietly sipping his tea, as you gazed in all the wares in delight.

“I have anything and everything related to the great All Might!” the vendor began. “Even some vintage goods!”

“You should get a poster!” you said to Yagi, eyes dancing.

“I have them all, young lady! Golden Age, Silver Age, New Years--”

You zoned out as the man pointed to the different costumes of All Might, your eyes settling on a smaller poster toward the back depicting just the upper torso of All Might, who was smiling and flashing a thumbs up.

There was also a poster taller than you of a flexing All Might…

“Believe me,” Yagi said, a smile in his voice though his mouth was hidden behind a paper cup. “I have them all.”

“Ahh, an All Might collector?” the vendor asked.

Yagi laughed awkwardly, scratching at the back of his head. “You could say that…”

To the shopkeeper’s disappointment, neither of you ended up purchasing anything, choosing instead to continue window shopping at some of the other stands.

“An All Might stand! “ You shook your head, still floored even though you really shouldn't be. Plenty of other heroes had merchandise of all forms out in the world. Yagi glanced over at hearing you speak up. “You’re something Yagi Toshinori. An entire stand dedicated to All Might...”

He was still grinning, puffing up his chest.

“You should see the gift shop we have at Might Tower,” he said, eyes dancing. “And the pop-up shops we do in Tokyo. That stand had a nice selection but All Might… All Might has a lot of memorabilia.”

The man was bigger than a superstar.

The man was the Symbol of Peace!

You ignored the melancholy nipping at your body.

Right.

The Symbol of Peace.

When you arrived back to where you had initially left the group of teachers, you found the spot
deserted. You glanced around and shrugged, turning to Yagi and asking what you should do next. Yagi checked the time of his phone as you downed the last of your cold tea, tossing the empty cup in a nearby trash bin.

“Perhaps we should go back to our seats?” he suggested. There were only about twenty minutes left in the break and already people were beginning to return to the stadium in an attempt to avoid the mass migration.

In silence, you walked up several flights up steps and down the hallway.

Yagi stopped with a start and you glanced at him curiously before following his gaze, watching a flaming man, deep in thought, walk toward the staircase in front of them. Yagi looked around.

The hallway, save for you, was empty.

Judging the area safe, you watched in mild surprise as Yagi expanded into All Might.

“I’ll be right back,” the ever-smiling All Might said, placing a hand on your shoulder as he passed, following after Endeavor.

“Endeavor!” he called from the top of the stairs.

You inched forward. Endeavor had stopped, obviously displeased at the appearance of All Might who was chatting animatedly about wanted to say hello.

“I see,” you heard Endeavor say. “Well, you’ve just done that. Now leave me.”

You heard the sounds of footsteps descending stairs. You didn’t dare peek around the corner for fear your big head would be seen.

You watched All Might crouch and leap out of view and down the stairs.

“Don’t be so cold!” you heard him plead. “Your son, Young Shoto, did wonderfully! And he was only using half of his power! Is it because you taught him so well!?”

“What are you trying to say?”

Oof, he sounded angry you thought, the urge to peep around the corner growing stronger. You inched closer to the corner. A quick glance wouldn’t kill you…

“Why, I seriously want to know how to raise the next generation!”

It was just a quick look -- All Might had blocked Endeavor’s way, trying to goad the burning hero into a friendly conversation. But the affable feeling was strictly one-sided. You had to give him credit -- somehow Endeavor was able to make his back look angry, the flames around him whipping in a frenzy.

“Do you think I’d tell you?” he snapped. He pushed passed All Might, uninterested in continuing the discussion. “You look completely clueless, as usual, and it’s getting on my nerves.”

“Ah, sorry…” All Might mumbled, shoulders drooping, his whole-hearted attempt to connect with the number two hero failing. You pulled your head back, leaning against the wall, your ears straining when you heard Endeavor speak up again.

“Just know this…” Endeavor had one last thought to share with All Might. “I will make that boy into a hero that will surpass you. That’s why I created him.”
Both All Might and you blanched at what he said. Surely, you argued, you had just misheard his
Japanese. The way he was speaking made his son sound more like an experiment than his child --

No, that couldn’t be true.

You furrowed your brows and listened as the heavy footsteps grew distant. You peeked from your
hiding place once more -- All Might was standing alone on the stairs. But his smile wasn’t a smile --
it had turned into a grimace.

All Might’s thoughts were swarming as he made his way back up the stairs, looking at you in
surprise when saw you.

He had forgotten he had left you there.

“Sorry about that!” he said cheerfully, the strain of his face disappearing.

You didn’t return his friendly smile.

“Todoroki...“ you muttered. “Poor kid.”

“I’m sure Endeavor isn’t a bad father!” All Might declared weakly. “He just has, uh, a certain way of
talking to me…”

You looked unconvinced.

Who was it that said Todoroki had a sad family story? Power Loader?

Already, you were looking at his personality with new eyes. Perhaps his usual stoic quietness wasn’t
just a general coldness toward his peers. What if it was actually an aching sadness? A boy who had
been denied the warmth of his father’s love...

“Hey now,” All Might placed a comforting hand on your shoulder. “Young Todoroki is a fine
student and--”

You reached up absentmindedly, placing a hand atop of his. You were distracted, attempting to find
meaning behind Todoroki’s daily actions and reactions.

All Might clenched his teeth.

He tried to maintain his blasé composure but the touch electrified him, making his insides lurch.

You were torn from the melancholy world of Todoroki, hearing loud cackling drifting up from the
stairwell. You suddenly looked at your hand, realizing what you had done in a slow kind of horror.

Oh god.

Oh god, you wanted to die.

You jumped away, your face a painful red.

The voices and laughter were growing closer and, having already spent more time then he intended
in his hero form, All Might relaxed into Yagi.

“We better get back to the seats!” you exclaimed, pushing forward without him.

Yagi trailed behind you, a few steps back.
Things were starting to get cruel.

*There was no hope.*

“Oh, there you two are!” Ectoplasm said when the door of the teacher’s box opened to reveal the two missing staff members. “We lost you at lunch.”

“I didn’t want to cramp your style.” You were trying to force playfulness in your voice to hide your lingering embarrassment. There was a hitch in your step when you saw Thirteen had not reclaimed their original seat.

It looked like you would be sitting next to Yagi.

On cue, the face of Present Mic appeared on the stadium screens and the buzzing crowd attempted to shush and quiet themselves.

The second half of the festival was poised to begin.

“Now that lunch is over, it’s finally time to reveal the last game! But before that, there’s good news for all of you who didn’t make it to the finals. This is a sports festival! So we’ve prepared recreational games that everyone can participate in too!”

A cheer arose as a group of cheerleaders jogged onto the field. Mic squealed in delight.

“We’ve even brought real cheerleaders from America to liven things up!”

Despite yourself, you laughed at the ridiculousness of chartering *American* cheerleaders, as if they were some kind of mythical beasts. You leaned closer to the edge of the box to see if they wore some specific uniform -- emblazoned on their bosoms were the initials for the school, ‘UA.’

You blinked when you realized one of the cheerleaders looked suspiciously like Jiro, down to the audio jacks hanging from her earlobes.

Wait…

No, that *was* Jiro.

And Ashido and Asui--

And the floating uniform…

Wait, there were *two* groups of cheerleaders on the field?

“What are they doing?” Vlad said, face screwed in confusion, having recognized the group of Class A students. He didn’t remember anything being said to *his* class about putting together a cheer team.

“I guess they wanted to support their class?” Ectoplasm suggested.

You laughed deeper, body shaking, glad you weren’t the only one making a fool of themselves. You watched the girls shift into cheering while you worked at untightening the knot in your stomach.

Before the recreation games were slated start, the final sixteen competing in the fighting bout were asked to draw lots.

Lots. It was supposed to be uneventful.
Just a bunch of kids reaching into a box and pulling out paper.

*What drama could come from that? A paper cut?*

Until a single hand raised, interrupting Midnight.

“Um, excuse me! I’m withdrawing.”

“Wha--” Thirteen breathed as you lowered your phone.

Ojiro had been the one who had spoken up. The crowd mumbled to one another at the development as he appeared to explain his decision to the rest of the students, the microphones not catching the exchange.

Nirengeki Shoda from Class B also stepped forward to announce his withdrawal.

“This is an unusual turn of events,” Mic commented, also caught by surprise. “We’ll have to see what the chief umpire, Midnight, has to say about all this…”

“Youthful talk like that is something I like!” she exclaimed, snapping her flogger with enthusiasm. “Shoda! Ojiro! I accept your withdrawal! In that case, we’ll have to move up two people from the fifth place cavalry battle team…”

Midnight hesitated as she looked at the students, unsure how to oversee the selection process. Kendo spoke up, however, having gathered what the hero was thinking. Her team would bow out of consideration in favor of Team Tetsutetsu, who had been the true frontrunners.

In quick order, Tetsutetsu and Shiozaki were nominated to move forward and fight by their teammates.

Snipe refused to look away from the field. He could see your attempts to catch his eye, ecstatic that you had been given *another* chance to win your wager.

“Looks like you’re still in the running,” Yagi pointed out.

You hesitated at his polite observation, shooting him a slightly pained look. His expression was friendly and disarming, as if your earlier touch wasn’t a big deal.

Truthfully, fans usually swarmed him with kisses and *worse*. A hand touch was mild. It was nothing.

*You're overthinking things.*

Relaxing, you grinned.

So, for Snipe and Adelaide’s, the fights to watch were Tetsutetsu vs. Kirishima and Bakugou vs. Urakaka.

Interesting.

“All right, let’s leave the tournament aside for a momentary interlude! Let’s have some fun with recreation!”

There was an explosion of fireworks overhead as the students moved to compete in more fun-based events. You stretched, glancing at the time. There were still several more hours left in the tournament.
Midnight and a few other helpers quickly set up scavenger cards facedown on the field while students, interested in participating in the hunt, milled around. When the decks had been properly scattered, and after another snap of Midnight’s flogger, the first recreational game began.

The participants immediately took to the field, turning and imploring for various items from spectators in the crowd. You watched as Sato struggled to finish his first card while the rest of his classmates found much more immediate success gathering things like shoes and jackets.

“Does anyone have a cat!?” you heard him cry as he passed underneath your box, jogging the perimeter. Power Loader cackled.

“I helped make some of the cards with Mic,” he revealed to curious eyes. “We didn’t want to make it too easy, so we got creative. My best card was definitely back fat…” he trailed off as he looked thoughtfully at the students. “I wonder if anyone got it yet…”

“Miss Lionheart!”

You blinked, looking up from your phone again. Did someone--

“Miss L! Lionheart!”

“Looks like you’re being called…” Thirteen muttered and you sat up higher, looking down from behind the railing.

Sero was on the ground, waving wildly up at you.

“I need you!”

“Sero, what--”

He was waving and pointing at a card that you couldn’t read.

“I need an American! The cheerleaders said no and Tsunotori is competing. Please, Miss Lionheart!”

“Is that allowed?” you asked, pulling back and consulting with your colleagues.

“Don’t see why not,” Snipe offered. No one else spoke up.

With a shrug you stood, placing your phone back in your purse while Sero danced back and forth in frustration.

“Come on Miss L, there’s a time limit!”

“Watch my purse for me guys,” you said with a wink before standing on the railing of the box.

“No!” Thirteen shouted. “Use the stairs--!”

It was too late. You leaped from the box, cardigan billowing behind you.

Your sudden drop frightened a group of management students who had been standing around, chatting nonchalantly about the advertisement opportunities the festival presented. Their fright didn’t register to you as you broke into a light jog down the rest of the stairs, throwing yourself over the last railing. You briefly disappeared from sight.

Thirteen groaned at the bad example you were setting while Yagi watched you reappear on the green, continuing your gallant jog to Sero, who was pumping his fists excitedly as he led you to the...
pile of items he had collected.

“Back fat…” you heard a tearful Mineta whimper as he mindlessly shuffled around the field.

After a quick thanks, Sero ditched you and ran for his next card. You blinked, looking down at the knick-knacks you had been lumped with.

Okay…

Well.

What to do now…?

“Honenuki!” you called with a wave as the skull-faced boy from Class B walked by. He didn’t appear to be in the same rush as everyone else on the field. His card dictated he had to find a lawnmower and, doubting there were any lawn care heroes in the crowd, he had chalked up the entire festival as a loss and gladly walked over to answer your call.

“Congratulations, you did amazing!” you gushed as the boy rubbed the back of his head. You assumed he was smiling -- it was hard to tell when someone lacked lips. “You finished in the top ten of the obstacle course, right? And the cavalry battle! Way to hang in there.”

“They deserved to move on,” the boy said with a slight strain, the absence of lips causing some pronunciation issues. He was obviously referencing Tetsutetsu and Shiozaki’s advancement.

“Still, you gave the other teams a run for their money with your quirk. I hope you’re proud of yourself, you put on a great fight. I’m so proud of Class B. What a great showing for UA!”

Honenuki politely thanked you for the praise. The pride in his achievement would come later. At that moment, he still felt the disappointment of disqualification.

Kamakiri also stopped by, asking to borrow your cardigan to complete his card of ‘flowers.’ You gladly handed the article of clothing over, though you did request its immediate return at the end of the game. In just a tank top and leggings, you felt entirely too casual as a teacher. The cardigan classed up your look.

Sero returned with a soccer ball, kicking it to you before disappearing without a word. You swayed back and forth with a protective foot placed on it, watching as the students continued to run about.

Sero returned again, dropping a crutch on the ground.

You wondered where he got that.

“Doing good Sero!” you called and the teenager raised his fist triumphantly, looking along the ground for any errant scavenger cards.

Mai and Shu from general studies were also competing in the game, taking a second to stop by to visit you. Shu revealed he had given up on attempting to find a prosthetic limb.

“Seems a bit… rude to ask for it,” he groaned when you asked to see what he had been searching for. You rolled your eyes, thinking of the two brilliant minds behind the hunt.

“I saw you guys really hanging in there during the obstacle course.”

“We knew we weren’t going to place,” Mai revealed as she sat on the grass. “We’re just here to make the heroes look good.”
“Hey now--” you warned but Shu sighed.

“Don’t patronize us, Miss L. We know the heroics courses have the sports festival. But everyone else has the Culture Festival… I just wish they would give us more of a fighting chance.”

“Shinso made it,” you offered, but the name resulted in glares.

“He used his quirk on a couple other gen studies kids during the obstacle course,” Mai snapped, pulling at the grass. “He’s not supposed to do it to us.”

“A lot of people are pissed at him. He broke a promise just so he could win.”

You frowned. You knew what Shinso’s quirk was, having been warned in case he tried to use it. But he hadn’t activated it frivolously in any of his classes, as tempting as it probably was. That was a sign of great self-restraint.

“It’s just the pressure of the festival,” you said, attempting to soothe them. “Try talking to him about it. Calmly,” you added when you saw Shu’s face.

“Time’s up!” Mic shouted into the speakers. Sero returned to you, panting, oblivious to the glares Mai and Shu shot toward him when they walked off.

Talk about bad blood between classes…

Sero, with eight cards completed, was declared the winner of the game. He pumped his fists while you accepted the return of your sweater from Kamakiri.

The participants walked off to attempt to return borrowed belongings to their rightful owners. Cards were collected and the next event, a ball race, was set up. You left the green, journeying into the lower levels of the stadium, waving at familiar faces as they passed.

Most looked tired.

“Ah, Lionheart,” Cementoss said as he rounded a corner, coming face to face you. “Enjoying the festival?”

“Talk about an event,” you said. “What have you been up to? I haven’t seen you since this morning!”

“Helping out backstage. After the bo-taoshi match, I’m going to have to create the final stage.”

“Bo-taoshi!” you said, surprised. “I don’t remember that being included in the event list!”

Cementoss shrugged.

“Last minute change? Perhaps Principal Nedzu wanted to give the students one last chance to show off their battle prowess? The final fighters are barred from participating.”

You let out a low whistle.

“Ah, just the people I wanted to see!”

Midnight had appeared behind them, mask sitting atop her head as she rolled her neck and stretched her shoulders.
“Nice work today, ump,” you said with a thumbs up. “Enjoying yourself?”

“These kids have me all fired up!” she said breathlessly, fanning her face. You averted your eyes, catching the secretive and burning look Midnight flashed to Cementoss.

‘Mic was right,’ you thought. ‘They probably were still seeing each other.’

Cementoss cleared his throat.

“I’ll need you two to stick around and help me umpire the bo-taoshi match,” Midnight continued without skipping a beat. “Right after, as soon as the stage is set up, we’re going directly into the final fight.”

“I haven’t actually played bo-taoshi before,” you said. Midnight waved off your concerns.

“Watch the pole -- if it falls below 30 degrees, it’s down. No fist fights, the pole can’t leave the ground and it’s physical attacks only. Don’t worry, we’re only going to do one match and Recovery Girl is here to treat anyone who gets too roughed up.”

“Are the girls playing?” Cementoss asked and Midnight smirked.

“Yes. And I’m sure they’ll be giving the men a run for their money.”

After the winner of the ball event was declared, the preparations for bo-taoshi began. According to Midnight, what UA was playing was some kind of a bastardized version of it. Girls were allowed to participate and the typical team size of 150 had been cut down as they did not have the numbers. There would be 50 defenders and 50 attackers on both teams, an even collection of heroic, support and general studies students. Even some adventurous management kids had been thrown into the mix.

Passing blue and red shirts between the attackers of each team, a serious Midnight reiterated the rules she had shared with her umpires earlier. The most important being quirk use.

“There will be no flames, ice, electricity, wind, water, shadows, bombs, explosions--” she started, spending an additional several seconds listing off all the prohibited quirks on her fingers. “Only physical attacks are allowed.”

The attack and defense players on each team separated to talk strategy for the allotted fifteen minutes. Roles were assigned, the pole support players consisting of the bulkiest students to create a solid ‘base.’ For the red team’s defense, Jiro was nominated to be the ninja -- the person who perched on top of the pole as a last line of defense. The blue team had selected Kendo.

The attack players on each team also selected their scrum and pole rushers.

The defensive groups wore white shirts, standing grouped up as the poles were lifted and the girls shimmied up it. Their attack groups stood several feet away, beside them, eyeing the poles they were to try and bring down. The attacks would happen simultaneously, blue descending on red’s defense and red descending on blue’s. The ultimate goal -- bring the pole down as quickly as possible before the other team could.

Mineta, on the red attack team, was vibrating with joy.

This festival had failed him. At every turn, he had been thrown under the bus, discarded or given an impossible task.
But now, he was about to participate in a game where he would run headfirst into a throng of people, some of which were women.

Buxom, beautiful women he had a reason to claw and paw at.

Kuroiro furrowed his brows, glancing at the small Class A kid beside him who was muttering and literally vibrating up and down, matching the speed and velocity of a washing machine on spin cycle.

“Are you ready?” Midnight asked, her flogger raised high, her perverted version of a flag. She glanced quickly at Cementoss, who stood behind the blue defense with a flag and whistle. You mirrored him on the red side.

“GO!”

Kaibara hunkered down as blue’s attack team rushed toward them. He had been assigned to be on the frontlines, a barrier member, as his quirk was one of the ‘banned’ powers. He grumbled under his breath as he waited for the first wave of bodies to smash into him -- his team had basically chosen him and the other non-physical quirk students to be fodder.

One small student had an insane burst of speed, Kaibara noticed, breaking away from his own group and beelining straight toward him. He went to open his mouth but caught himself, allowing the air that had swirled within his cheeks to die away.

_Damn it._

The boy leaped when he was in striking distance of Kaibara, his small frame somehow blocking out the sun as he soared overhead. Kaibara tried to jump and catch him, but he was out of reach and the others were coming. He could only briefly watch as the boy grabbed the balls situated on his head and began throwing them.

“Sticky!” someone behind him yelled, one of the purple spheres adhering to his head. Mineta paid him no mind, his prey had been marked. With ease, he avoided grasping hands, leaping from ball to ball, his speed a sight. The pole guards all made swipes at him, a last line of defense, as the crowd of people below him shuddered with the impact of the rest of his team members making contact. All climbing, grabbing, falling over the defense of the blue team.

All grabbing for the pole.

Strangled yells, cries of pain, the sound of ripping fabric -- it was all music to Mineta’s ears as he leaped up high once more. He could see her, the angel of Class B perched upon the pole. His eyes were not on her face, rather they had locked on to the exact spot on her chest where he planned on landing and burying himself. Two warm globes that would envelop him and make the entire stupid festival worth it.

The spring air had captured his body, the wind billowing around him to raise him ever higher.

He was flying, the earth and spirits all on his side.

_'Do it Mineta,’ the crowd seemed to chant. ‘Go for it!’_

He was closing the distance between them, closing his eyes and extending his arms as her white shirt came closer and closer. How sweet it was going to feel.

And he was going to make himself stick to the fabric, planning on forcing her to take off the shirt if she wanted to get rid of him.
“I’m coming for youuuu!” he screeched, his feelings erupting out, hands squeezing emptiness in preparation.

Kendo swung her enlarged hand, easily batting the lecherous boy away with one hard swipe.

Mineta lurched as he felt the impact, rocketing up and out of the game. He flew until he smashed into the back wall on the third level of stadium seating, falling into a crumple in the aisle.

Two audience members stood to check on the boy, who was sobbing.

His final chance. His final push.

The sweet young flesh…

You blew your whistle, your flag waving wildly in the air. Thanks to Mineta’s distraction, and the work of the rest of the red team’s attack forces, the push on the blue pole had been successful. A large mallet crafted by Yaoyorozu had bested Kendo’s hands and unseated her. Ojiro and Awase managed to pull the pole to the ground, barely passing the 30-degree mark.

“Winners! Red team!” Midnight said, raising her flogger on the winning side.

The blue team’s defense sighed in relief, Jiro had been unseated and their pole had been going down too. It had come down to seconds.

The crowd roared in appreciation as the students untangled, collecting shirts that had been ripped off in the frenzy. Shoda clutched his bloodied nose, Cementoss directing him and a few other mildly injured players off the field where Recovery Girl waited.

With that, the recreation games were over.

It was time for the final event.
When the field was finally cleared from the recreational games, Cementoss went to work crafting a large flat cement stage in the center of the stadium. You watched from the sidelines, impressed by the speed in which the hero worked and the fact that his cement dried almost instantly. The downtime between the final game and the start of the fight must have been, at most, twenty minutes.

“Hey guys, are you ready!?” Mic screeched, his face suddenly appearing on the stadium screens. Aizawa-- rather, *Mummy Man*, perked up slightly at the words, as if he had been dozing off. “A lot’s happened, but it’s now come to this! I’m talkin’ about some serious battles!”

You exhaled a laugh and shook your head when jets of fire shot up from the four corners of the fighting stage. An outlandish display that the crowd went absolutely wild for.

You stood with your back against the lowest wall of the field, trying to look inconspicuous while the media focused all their attention on the center ‘ring.’ Looking at the bracket, Midoriya and Shinso would be the inaugural match. You perked up when Mic introduced the two students, who strolled into the stage with mild crowd enthusiasm.

*Well, here goes nothing.*

At the prospect of **fighting**, a tremble rolled through you. God, how long had it been since you had seen a **fight**? Sure you weren’t going to be participating but there was something about watching two people struggle for superiority that pumped you up. You rolled your shoulders, falling into a few minor stretching poses.

Other than Cementoss and Midnight, you were the only other person protecting the crowds from any errant quirks or ring debris. Which meant you would have to pay close attention to the movements of the students in an attempt to foresee where debris could land.

*If things even got that bad.*

“Force your opponent out of bounds or immobilize them!” Mic instructed as Midoriya and Shinso two took center stage before Midnight, who stood on her own umpire platform off to the side. “You can also win by making your opponent concede”

Injuries, Mic added gleefully, were no issue with Recovery Girl sitting in wait.

“Put all your morals and ethics aside for just a moment and go **ham**!” Aizawa inclined his head toward Mic but Mic cut him off before he could speak. “But, of course, anything life-threatening is crap!”

*Such eloquence from the master of ceremonies.*

Cementoss had also stationed himself by the fights by creating a cement chair -- rather, a **throne** - - adding on to Mic's announcement that he would stop the fight from getting too rowdy.

They'd allow the kids to cross a canyon unassisted and hope for the best but UA draws the line at the students pummeling each other to death.

**“READY!? START!”**

Shinso was a good student, always so level-headed in class. Although he was quiet, he wasn’t off—
putting and would gladly speak to his classmates. He always seemed like a nice kid. But on that stage, he took on a very ominous persona. The students weren’t mic’d, so their words weren’t broadcasted to the media or those in the stands, but they were loud enough that you, Cementoss and Midnight could make them out.

“That monkey was going on about his pride, but don’t you think he was dumb for throwing away his chance?”

They were harsh words coming from Shinso and you felt a sudden swell of anger flare up in your gut. You blinked in surprise, unclenching your fist. Sure his words were untasteful, but they didn’t warrant the reaction you felt. You looked up at Cementoss and Midnight -- they too bore the same strained looks of people trying to keep their emotions in check.

Could this be part of Shinso’s quirk…?

Midoriya, however, wasn’t able to properly suppress his anger at Shinso’s taunt.

“What did you say!?” he roared, running toward his opponent.

At Midoriya’s answer, Shinso smirked.

Immediately Midoriya went still.

The world waited to see the green-haired teen's move, expecting that he had stopped simply to change tactics or got ahold of himself. But there was nothing. No movement, no running, no talking.

Nothing.

A beat passed. Then another.

“Hey what’s the matter?” Mic called down to Midoriya, his confusion matching that of the audience. “Come on guys, it’s the big first match! Liven things up!”

To have the fighting start on such a boring note…

Mic shuddered, imagining an unrealistic number of bored watchers shutting down their televisions and live streams choosing to turn their attention elsewhere or, worse, head outside instead. One of the camera bots displayed a close-up shot of Midoriya's face on the screens of the stadium. Murmurs of surprise collected in the air.

There was… nothing in his face. His eyes were empty, his mouth hung open. He looked to be in a trance, a body that had lost its spirit and was just an empty vessel.

“The match has just started and he’s completely frozen!” Mic said, his fears quickly fading when he realized Midoriya hadn’t been the victim of stage fright -- Shinso’s quirk was at work.

Aizawa, beneath his bandages, rolled his eyes.

"Shinso Hitoshi from general studies has gotten the better of Midoriya Izuku from the hero course!" Mic cried, holding his head and looking at the camera stationed in the announcer’s booth with obvious surprised delight. Now this, this was perfect! "Who could have imagined this!? Will the bottom really overthrow the top?"

Shinso regarded Midoriya. “Turn around and walk out of bounds.”

You frowned at Shinso’s apparent show of ‘force.’ It was one thing to make your opponent say ‘I
give up.’ But he wanted to draw it out.

No, it was far more impactful to see someone bending to your will.

*Look. Look what I can do.*

*Look at what I can do to someone in the ‘top.’*

Midoriya did as instructed, turning mindlessly shuffling toward the out of bounds line.

*Wait...*

You perked up when you caught a flash of yellow by the entryway he was facing directly.

It was undeniable who was standing there, partly obscured by shadow, wildly trying to wave the boy back to the match. So Yagi had also taken a break from his seat in the box to secretly try and coach his protege.

It was unfortunate that *this* was how Midoriya was going to lose, you thought with a mixture of regret and mild amusement over the great hero's obvious favoritism.

One. Step. At. A. Time.

Closer. To. The. Edge.

There was always next year.

A burst of energy erupted across the field, sending wind and dust flying barreling around all those standing on the green. You braced yourself as the wind smacked into you, hair whipping out wildly.

There was no need to raise your shield, your gut said as your clenched a fist, mind wanting you to be prepared to engage.

No, this was fine.

The energy around the stage settled.

Midoriya was still standing but the blankness was gone. Life had returned to his face, the stadium cameras zooming in on it. He was gasping as he looked down in horror, his toes about to brush the out of bounds line.

“This is--!” Mic said, his voice slicing through the shock. “Midoriya has stopped!”

Cheers erupted at the turn of events. Somehow, someway, Midoriya had bested Shinso’s control. For the moment he had control of his body again. He had done it.

The match wasn’t over yet, you thought as you observed Shinso’s persona shift from shock at being denied to rage. However, the match wasn’t close to being over. If his quirk somehow compelled people to answer him, Midoriya still had to keep from opening his mouth again and falling into another trap.

The general studies student was trying to bury his feelings and return to his smug stoicism.

Midoriya clapped his hand over his mouth, swallowing his answer. He didn’t turn to charge at Shinso right away. In fact, it looked like he was also processing how and why he had been able to break free from Shinso’s influence. He was staring at his hand and you tried to see what it was he
“What did you do!?” Shinso asked again, uncharacteristically animated, his frustration building as Midoriya remained silent.

He wasn’t just trying to get Midoriya to speak again, a large part of him wanted to know how Midoriya had done it. How, without any kind of outside help, he had broken his spell?

Midoriya lowered his head, squeezing his eyes closed as he focused on his silence. He was a battering ram now, running, shoving and pushing Shinso. He was momentarily stunned at the physical contact before realizing Midoryia wasn’t attacking him, he was trying to push him away, trying to get him out of bounds.

Shinso let free a punch that Midoriya didn’t counter -- he took it to the face and simply whipped his head back. Shinso released another strike, then another, his fury building and creating enough force that he was able to stagger Midoriya and turn the tides. Soon Shinso was behind Midoriya, pushing him to the line.

Fine, if he couldn’t make Midoriya walk out he would push him on his own.

He would win.

He had to win.

You watched Midoriya plant his foot and grab onto Shinso’s arm. In a surprising display of strength, and using his momentum, he lifted his opponent off the ground.

With a turn of his body, Shinso was flung through the air, landing with a groan as his body collided with the hard ground.

No, this wasn’t just a match at a sports festival. This meant something much more to them. Both of them.

Midnight’s voice cracked through the speaker system.

“Shinso is out of bounds. Midoriya advances to round two!”

A roar rose up and you were snapped out of your daze.

“Looks like the first person to advance to the second round is Izuku Midoriya from Class A!” Mic declared in his usual bravado, unable to get a sense of the field from his perch. The screens of the stadium switched from an image of Midoriya to Mic. “That was kind of a boring first match—” You rolled your eyes. “—but we should praise them both for fighting bravely! Alright, clap your hands, everybody!”

Under the watchful gaze of Cementoss, who was looking out for any signs of aggression, the two competitors squared up for an after-match handshake. Cradling an obviously injured arm, Midoriya was talking softly to his sullen opponent. From your position, he didn’t appear to be sharing any sort of boastful or inciteful words. But Shinso was uninterested. He turned from Midoriya, walking away, the hotness of his defeat burning a hole in his chest.

It was as he left the field that you noticed a collection of your other gen studies kids leaning and hanging off the railing above the field entrance, calling down as Shinso passed beneath them.

“You’re the star of general studies!” you heard Akihiko shout. Nakamura also said something,
gesturing to the crowd behind him.

“You hear that Shinso?” you heard Nakamura say. “You’re amazing!”

The defeat was there. Oh, it burned. But there was something more rising up in him.

Determination. Drive.

He had gotten into UA, after all. He still had the opportunity to be a hero.

“Lionheart--” Cementoss approached you as the boys were herded off the stage, preparations for the second match already underway. “If you see a vendor walk by above you… can you grab me a bottle of water?”

You promised you would as the cement hero waved his thanks, trudging back to inspect the stage for any signs of cracks or damage. When he determined everything was fine and in one piece, the fires were light once more and the second match was announced -- Todoroki versus Sero.

Immediately at Mic’s announcement of start, tape erupted from Sero’s elbows, binding an unmoving and borderline unresponsive Todoroki.

But...

The boy’s face was dark.

An alarm bell raised in your mind and you braced yourself, visualizing where Todoroki was facing.

Something wasn’t right.

When Sero whipped Todoroki to the side, sending him careening toward the out of bounds line, you fell into a jog, trying to keep behind Sero. The direction where Todoroki would launch his attack.

Something was definitely not right.

You hoped you were wrong but...

Endeavor's son...?

Todoroki had enough. He planted his foot and aimed his ice attack at Sero. However, his usual steady control over his quirk failed. Todoroki unleashed all his frustrations that had been building.

Just some relief was needed.

The ice he had created suddenly exploded out from the teenager with an astonishing fury, shaking the world as Sero was encased in a mountain of ice that burst from the ground. It was rising with enough speed to create a rush of air, growing up and out until it towered over the stadium and dwarfing the people inside it.

Your mouth fell open and you stumbled, taking in the sight of what a first-year teenager had done.

Oh no.

You had been too slow.

The ice mountain was enormous, its jagged peaks reaching and clawing toward the sky. Relatively quickly you found your feet again, running toward it, painfully aware of the silence of the stadium
that was eroding away to horror.

Part of the ice creation was slanted into the stands.

What you wouldn’t give to have Mic say something disarming.

You weren't able to clear the lower wall with one graceful leap, but you did get enough upward momentum to make it nearly all the way. You had to scamper and claw up the last bit, grabbing the edge of the first level. With a hissing groan, you pulled yourself up.

“Anyone hurt?” you cried out, eyes widening when you saw how many seats were hidden under the ice. It wasn't just one level either -- there must have been hundreds who had been trapped.

This was... going to be terrible. So many injured, the possible body count?

At least, that's what you thought at first, assuming the worst.

But, as you made your way up the stairs, you heard frantic chatter coming from beneath the ice. It wasn't until you fell to your knees to peer under the icy creation that you realized space had been left between the frozen surface the people sitting in seats.

No, no one was trapped -- the crowd's faces were just uncomfortably close to the newest addition to the stadium.

Relief. Such relief.

No bodies.

“Sero is immobilized!” Midnight’s voice was vibrating with a chill, though you were too preoccupied with your audience welfare check to see why. “Todoroki advances to the second round!”

“Anyone hurt?” you called repeatedly, forcing your voice to remain calm and act like the ice was more of an inconvenience rather than a believed deathtrap.

“Uhh,” someone called out to you and you paused, waiting for the bad news. “D-do you think the kid can... get rid of this?”

Somewhere else under the ice, a spectator had fallen into hysterical laughter, his wheezing and whistling breaths forcing a few to catch his contagious humor. You were just relieved there were no screams of pain or shrill crying. Laughter.

Now, laughter you could deal with.

What kind of event school-sanctioned event was this!?

Maybe it was because you were an American, but you could imagine the number of lawsuits a stunt like this would have resulted in had it happened in one of your schools. Not to mention the phone calls from angry parents and the news--

You looked over to the press box, watching a handful of reporters leave their seats in a hurry, undoubtedly coming over to your section of the stadium for footage and interviews.

While Todoroki worked on freeing a trapped Sero, who could only partially hear the cheers of ‘Don’t worry about it’ that the audience had dissolved into, you remained in the stands, waiting for the ice to be fully cleared in case someone had gotten hurt.
“Talk about amazing!” a deer-headed woman said, elbowing the man next to her. “That kid is going to go places. After seeing that, he’s a shoo-in to win the tournament.”

“Was he just showing off?” a man in front of her asked, drawn into the conversation. “I mean, that was overkill.”

“You know that’s Endeavor’s son, right?” a voice cried out.

“Oh,” the deer lady said. “That explains it.”

“Just as hotheaded as his father.”

“Cold headed,” someone corrected with a chortle, swelling with pride when someone else laughed at his joke.

“Maybe it was just the pressure of the match and he didn’t mean for it to happen?” A metal-haired woman had spoken up in defense of Todoroki. “I know if I’m too on edge, I can accidentally put too much energy into my quirk.”

“But there’s a line between a jolt of power and, well, that,” lame joke man said, gesturing to the mountain of ice that was starting to lose its girth.

“Yeah, but it sprung up fast, so I think it was just a jolt of power, like you said. It would be a different story if we were watching it grow bigger.”

“Go easy on him, he’s a high school kid,” someone further away shouted.

The deer woman gave a slight shrug and fell silent as Present Mic’s voice was finally heard.

“Looks like we’re gonna need a few more minutes to get this all cleaned up,” he said with a nervous laugh before cutting the feed to his microphone.

Laws of nature and physics told you that Todoroki’s fire should have only melted the bottom portion of his ice tower. With a weakened base, the upper half would have snapped off under its own weight and crashed into the crowd.

It appeared other heroes shared your mindset, as several bulky- quirked spectators were prepared to press against the ice to keep it from flattening anyone.

But Todoroki’s quirk defied science. He was able to route the heat to move from the perimeter of the mountain, inwards. In clouds of steam and condensation, the behemoth began growing smaller from the top down, receding back to the green in a slow, controlled speed. You matched its pace, walking and waiting as it passed each row, checking on the spectators who had been covered.

Thankfully, everyone looked to be in good health.

Eventually, the ice retreated enough that you felt comfortable returning to the field. No injuries had been declared. There was no need for emergency intermissions. Round three was going to start as planned.

You jogged up to Cementoss, offering a bottle of water you had bummed off a trapped vendor.

“Sorry about that…” you said, ashamed you hadn’t caught on to Todoroki’s attack before it happened. Cementoss gladly took the drink, taking a deep gulp in satisfaction before eyeing you.

“You’re not a mindreader,” he said. “If I had known, I would have thrown a wall up. Midnight is
already giving him a lecture on public safety.”

You glanced to where Cementoss gestured. A quiet Todoroki was being ripped into by Midnight, his eyes downcast.

Poor kid.

“Don’t feel too much sympathy,” Cementoss said, reading your face. “An outburst of power like that could have seriously injured someone... We’re teachers, not friends. We have to reprimand.”

“Alright everybody, sorry for the long wait!” Mic’s announced as Todoroki disappeared from sight and the event went on, already ridiculously behind schedule.

You opted to stand a bit closer to the stage, grabbing one of your legs and pulling it behind you, trying to keep limber. By decreasing the distance between you and the students, you would be better at tracking their movements. The downside? It increased the distance between you and the stands.

‘Just keep your eyes open,’ you told yourself, grabbing your other leg and praying you wouldn’t catch yourself in any of the event photos.

The next couple of fights, although interesting, were... tedious. It was like watching back-to-back games at a high school sports tournament. Sure, you may be rooting for someone in each game, but at some point you get bored of the general repetition of everything and you just want the whole thing to be over with.

Shiozaki and Kaminari -- that match was called in Shiozaki’s favor.

Iida and Hatsume’s match -- though Iida 'won,' he was not thrilled that, during his debut match, he had been mostly used as a prop for Hatsume's creations. Rather than engage at the end of the demonstration, Hatsume simply walked out of bounds, certain her infomercial had added more clout to her rising status as a support genius.

Aoyama and Ashido -- an uppercut to the jaw knocked the boy down and out, with Ashido announced the winner.

Tokoyami and Yaoyorozu’s match ended quickly, though you had been completely enthralled once Yaoyorozu created a shield to defend herself from Dark Shadow.

All it took was the sight of a self-created shield to instantly form a slight connection with the teenager. However, Yaoyorozu’s defense was lacking. Instead of planting herself and leaning into Dark Shadow’s strikes, creating a counterbalance, she allowed herself to be pushed around.

You folded your arms, drawing closer to the ring.

Her stance was abysmal. What defense was she offering? All she was doing was protecting her arms from being knicked. Unconsciously you felt your legs shifting, body tensing at each blow, trying to silently communicate to Yaoyorozu what she should be doing. But the girl could not read your thoughts and she continued her faux-defense.

It was unsurprising when she was pushed passed the out of bounds line.

Yaoyorozu was so consumed by her thoughts that she was even oblivious to the fact, only noticing when Midnight announced her defeat. She looked so upset at the turn of events and, with a start, you realized that it was the first time you hadn’t felt bad for a student.
It wasn’t that you disliked Yaoyorozu -- she was a brilliant girl with an amazing quirk and a bright future. But she had been caught unprepared, she had lost sight of the situation and been so consumed with reacting that she didn’t think a step ahead.

Yaoyorozu’s loss had been her own fault.

In the real world, a mistake like could result in death, injury or incapacitation.

Crossing your arms, you furrowed your brows and watched the replays on the screen -- the filler between matches.

What... kind of teacher were you?

So far, you had been happy to steal lessons plans offline, give easy or creative assignments to keep morale high and to keep your grading light so your weekends could be open. You heaped praises on students in what truthfully was an attempt to win favor. But what good was that in the long run? Being friendly and kind wasn’t bad but you had often kept criticism to yourself, unwilling to hurt feelings.

... What if criticism was truly helpful?

Tetsutetsu and Kirishima pulled you back to earth, though Yaoyorozu’s loss would linger in the back of your head for the rest of the day.

The match between the two hardening quirk teens was definitely a festival highlight. So matched were they in skill, speed and strength that their blows echoed throughout the ecstatic stadium. Both were unwilling to pull away, both opting for a straight offense. Occasionally their fists would parry off one another, but otherwise they would simply trade punches.

Midnight was paying close attention to the fight, the physicality of their quirks ran the risk of someone unintentionally seriously injuring themselves or their opponent. The boys played off any pain they fault, announcing to one another with frequency that a strike didn’t hurt or that they felt no pain.

Toward the end of the bout, however, they both began to pull back slightly, offering a slight defense instead of going straight offense. But they misread the body language of their opponent, blocking for the wrong punches and being caught by a sudden, surprise uppercut or jab.

In a last show of force, both boys approached one another, fists pulled back in what they hoped to be a finishing move.

Technically, Tetsutetsu and Kirishima were right in believing that their moves would seal the match - - in a stunning display of similarity, the two opponents landed large wallops on each other’s faces, sending them both crashing to the ground at the same time.

When no one jumped up, Midnight approached to check the status on the two. Surely they both didn’t get knockouts...

“Both contestants are down. It’s a draw!” she declared and the stadium went nuts over the fire that had been displayed.

You released the breath you held, thankful Tetsutetsu had managed to keep in the running. The Class B student was scrappy, you’d give him that.

If Tetsutetsu OR Kirishima had simply pulled back from a straight offense, they could have saved
some energy. There was no strategy in their match, only the desire to beat the opponent who had the painfully similar quirk.

You figuratively shook your head, trying to swipe away the thoughts.

Oh, because of your earlier personal revelation you were suddenly going to dissolve into an armchair analyst?

Try hard.

Bakugou and Uraraka were the last match of the first round.

Fortunately, though the bout kicked up a lot of dirt, the blasts were relatively contained within the confines of the stage.

You watched Uraraka throw herself again and again at Bakugou, whose strategy was more reactive than offensive. The inner strength of Uraraka was truly admirable, you thought to yourself. Despite getting knocked back repeatedly by Bakugou’s blasts, the girl wasn’t giving up.

But victory was not on her side. Several sparks ignited off his outstretched arm before erupting in a blast that sent Uraraka flying back and debris outward. In a fluid motion, you raised your arm and released your barrier, protecting yourself from being pelted by rocks. Cementoss was also unaffected by the projectiles, batting them away as they struck his hardened body, acting as if they were nothing more than an annoyance.

Midnight was not as lucky. Though she remained standing and did not seem worse for wear, internally she could already feel the bruises forming.

The match was declared in Bakugou’s favor.

“That was inspiring,” Midnight said to you as you approached, both women waiting for Cementoss to work his magic on fixing the battered stage. He also had to craft a table for Tetsutetsu and Kirishima’s upcoming arm-wrestling match.

“What did you think of the match?” you asked. “I can’t think of anything Uraraka could have done differently.”

“It came down to skill, speed and strength,” Midnight said, adjusting her mask, eyes sharp as the events replayed in her head. “Bakugou outplayed her in all of them. Sometimes there are simply people stronger and faster than you. So it’s up to Uraraka to continue to work and surpass her limits.”

The Tetsutetsu and Kirishima rematch did end with a winner. Although Kirishima walked away victorious, he showed an inspiring amount of sportsmanship to Tetsutetsu, his near equal. Tetsutetsu, in a testament to his own moral code, gratefully accepted Kirishima’s hand up. Midnight squealed in obvious delight at the energy the two let off.

“Tetsutetsu!” you called as the boys left the stage, still singing each other’s praises. The grey-haired boy looked over to you as you flashed him a thumbs up. “Talk about a rising star! Good job!”

He looked away in pride.

Kirishima simply waved at his English teacher, pleased to see you enjoying the festival.

“Keep your eyes open this next match,” Cementoss said as you passed him on your way back to your self-appointed spot. You glanced up at the bracket. So it would be Midoriya against
Todoroki.

You hadn’t seen the extent of Midoriya's power, but Todoroki had already proven how dangerous he could be.

You clenched your jaw.

When the boys were brought to the field and took their places on the stage, the looks in their faces said more than enough -- this would not be a match where they would hold back.

Todoroki immediately launched his attack upon Mic’s declaration of start, sending a controlled river of ice in the direction of Midoriya.

So he had gotten control of himself, you noted with relief as the river did not morph into another jagged monolith. Midoriya raised his hand to counter, flicking a finger and unleashing a blast of air that shattered Todoroki’s creation, sending bits of ice and a massive shockwave up the side of the stage.

You watched the attack -- although it created a powerful gust of cold air thanks to Todoroki’s ice, it wasn’t injury-producing. Your eyes returned to the match, watching as Midoriya and Todoroki repeated the same song and dance.

Midoryia dropped his right hand, his fingers bloated and purple.

Ah, so that’s how he injures himself.

Switching strategies, Todoroki rushed for a closer attack, sending Midoriya dodging backward while simultaneously unleashing another river of ice that managed to encase Midoriya's foot. Todoroki was smart -- you watched in an impressed sort of wonder as the boy created a wall of ice behind him, expecting Midoriya to release another shockwave. But the green-haired teen had taken notice of Todoroki’s creation as well and, instead of flicking a finger to unleash his power, he used his entire fist.

Although the attack cleared the stage of ice, Todoroki’s barriers had remained standing and prevented the boy from being blown out of bounds.

When the wind and condensation disappeared, the entirety of Midoryia’s left arm had turned a sickening, bloated purple.

It appeared Midoriya had used all of his available appendages -- when Todoroki unleashed another attack, most figured it would be Midoryia’s end.

Another punch of energy blew through the ice, surprising Todoroki who had to scramble to create another ice barrier to keep himself from being blown out of bounds.

Midoryia had used his broken finger, Cementoss noted, his eyes flashing to Midnight who had stepped forward on her stage. They were broaching a dangerous territory where permanent injury was on the horizon.

The boys had gone still, talking to one another. Your ears strained to hear the words Midoriya struggled to say, his pain obvious. It almost sounded like he was trying to get his opponent to use… his left side?

No… It had to be a mind game. Surely he wasn’t trying to goad his opponent into tapping into additional power? Midoriya was not going to find some hidden bastion of strength brought on by a
more difficult match. His one arm was broken, the fingers of his other one starting to look dangerously off-colored.

Yet he continued to talk, growing more passionate, before forcing his hand into a fist and demanding Todoroki attack him with the full brevity of his power.

Todoroki did not find inspiration in Midoriya's apparent taunts, his face clouding with anger as he ran at his opponent once more.

Midoriya sprung forward and landed a solid punch to Todoroki’s gut. But he had not been caught completely unawares, reaching out and freezing Midoriya's bad arm in the same attack.

Todoroki landed several feet away while Midoriya's pained attention alternated between his horrendously disfigured fingers and his frozen arm.

Their fight continued, both boys slowed considerably. Todoroki’s ice attacks came at a reduced rate while Midoriya mostly dodged. From where you stood, you could see the sickening way Midoriya's limbs fluttered and the patches of ice that had developed on Todoroki’s body.

You looked to Cementoss, wanting the hero to step in -- the fight was getting out of hand. But the hero sat steadfast, planted in his throne. You exhaled deeply, ignoring the voice in your head to help. Wiser teachers apparently believed the fight was still within acceptable parameters.

Right?

Using his cheek, Midoriya managed to snap his thumb, sending both boys flying backward before running at Todoroki, tackling him. Still, he was shouting, commanding that Todoroki use everything he had. Todoroki was frozen, only watching as Midoriya approached to land another powerful punch to his gut.

The force sent Todoroki backward once more, a panting Midoriya watching as he struggled to his knees. He must have said something too soft for you to hear because it enraged Midoriya.

“It’s your power isn’t it!?” Midoriya practically roared at the surprised Todoroki.

_His... power?_

The words struck a chord with Todoroki.

You watched as smoke first began to billow from the teenager, smoke that erupted into an inferno that blasted hot air and fire across half the platform.

He was... using fire.

_“Shotō!”_ A voice roared out, the obvious figure of Endeavor approaching the edge of the first level. “Have you finally accepted yourself?”

You blinked up at a leering Endeavor before focusing back on Todoroki. But his father’s words had not reached his ears -- he had been drawn into a world where only he and Midoriya mattered. They were both smiling, even when Todoroki pointed out Midoriya's injuries.

Midoriya's injuries!

With Todoroki using his flames, his body was warm again, which meant he had regained a lot of his power. Midoryia, however, still bore grievous injuries.
You turned to Midnight and Cementoss, as the boys wound back for another massive attack. Both teachers were standing, the situation finally warranting an intervention.

But were they moving fast enough?

It was like a supernova erupted in the center of the field, the power that Todoroki unleashed, a stupendous combination of fire and ice that erupted into a brilliant flash and rush of light and power. You raised your arm, squinting, trying to make out any kind of figures.

You could see a burst of power from the left, a bullet at the explosion's center -- it was Midoriya. To your right was a jet stream of fire -- Todoroki.

A series of cement slabs of increasing height erupted in the center of the field, slicing through the ice Todoroki had created, barriers to protect the two competitors from landing actual hits on one another.

The dueling forces smacked into the cement.

You watched, in surreally slow motion, as the walls shattered at the impacts. The attacks even breached the centermost block, the tallest.

A large slab broke off, propelled up and out by the dueling forces coming at it from both sides.

You were running before you realized it, eyes trained on the large projectile, ignoring the other smaller pieces that exploded around you.

Your legs were moving faster, adrenaline pumping as you ran to the southwest wall, leaping toward it. You didn't have to scramble that time, instead calling forth a jutting blade-like projection of energy that you dug into the wall when you made impact, using it as a means to throw yourself upward the rest of the way.

The cement was falling now. You could see where it was going to land in the stands, crushing several people beneath it. Your eyes flickered between the slab and the spot as you stepped beside and on surprised onlookers who were far more focused on devastation two teenagers had created, unaware of the danger above them.

When you finally made it to your destination you jumped, turning yourself in the air, the cement slab close enough that you could make out its porous surface clearly.

Your barrier erupted from the device on your forearm, blowing outward and surprising surrounding spectators with the sudden appearance of a wine-colored projection above their heads.

Your feet touched the bleachers.

The cement made contact with your barrier.

With a strangled cry, you pushed upward.

It was heavy, your arms immediately complained about the now-alien pressure, but there were people under you who did not deserve to get their heads caved in by an errant piece of rock.

The yell turned into a strangled grunt as you increased your strength output, stopping the downward momentum of the slab and finally reversing its course.

It was flying away from the stands now, back to the field.

You stood, panting, watching it eventually land with a thud in an open section of grass, embedding
itself there.

... You did it.

“Oh shit,” a man beside you managed to get out, his mouth dry. He had not seen the projectile until it was directly overhead. Though it shouted death, he had found himself unable to move out of the way, frozen.

With a shaky exhale, you lowered your arm, the barrier disintegrating without any fanfare. There were murmurs in the crowd at the finally-realized close call. You twitched your fingers.

You wanted more.

“Thank you miss!” someone called up to you. A few polite claps rang out. You let out large exhale, releasing a shaky smile and slight wave as you shuffled out of the aisle and down the stairs.

You tried to act nonchalant about the whole thing -- that saving people nowadays was normal for you. But a stitch in your side complained about the sudden running exertion and you could feel the earlier noodles and bento swirling together unpleasantly in your stomach.

Oh god, do not throw up.

What you just did was nothing compared to what you used to be able to do.

Jesus Christ, were you that far out of it?

You only partially comprehended Midoriya's defeat, the teen having been blown out of bounds. You took a second to collect yourself before jumping down back at the field, wincing at the soreness of your body.

Already!?

Oh come on!

The next three matches were a blur. Iida immediately started with what had become a signature move for him, pushing Shiozaki out of bounds within seconds. Tokoyami’s Dark Shadow overpowered Ashido and sent her tumbling out of bounds as well.

The match between Bakugou and Kirishima had a lot more excitement. Kirishima's hardening meant that Bakugou couldn’t rely on the power of his blasts to intimidate and overpower his foe. For most of the match, Bakugou was forced to dodge, only periodically countering.

Your moment self-hate had passed, though you made a seriously solemn vow to get back into your true hero shape. You used to be able to protect soldiers from rounds of artillery fire but now a single piece of concrete had winded you!

Disgusting.

You pushed the thoughts out of your head again, unwilling to spiral down another dark hole. You couldn’t change overnight, and festival day was supposed to be a celebration.

Guilt settled over you.

Did you really need to eat noodles and a bento?
Bakugou released a burst from his left hand, which Kirishima knocked aside.

*What happened to you?*

Bakugou unleashed another series of bursts that staggered Kirishima, the limit of his tough quirk finally reached.

Lord Explosion was the winner. Kirishima had broken.

The final four.

You looked up at the four portraits displayed on the monitors, selfishly disappointed that Bakugou was still there.

Snipe must have been beaming beneath that mask of his, glad his pick was ascending through the matches. Your bank account looked to be in danger.

Soon the four whittled down to two.

Bakugou.

You groaned, his face and Todoroki’s looking down on you from every television set in the stadium.

Snipe had been watching you from the loftiness of the box, pleased over how the festival was turning out -- in his favor. He wanted you to look up, he had a whole exchange planned out in his head. He would tip his hat to you in a smug sort of way, letting you know he expected victory. Truthfully, he was unsure on how you would react. He still didn't know you *that* well but you seemed pleasant enough. A scoff seemed likely, or maybe a bemused smile.

Or you could flip him off.

But that didn’t seem like you and you ran the risk of getting caught by the media.

“*The final matchup is coming up!*” Present Mic said, his face appearing across the stadium. “*Todoroki versus Bakugou, the ultimate clash of powers! But first, the audience of section 1-BC would like to give a shoutout to their winner of the festival -- UA English teaching star hero Lionheart!*”

Your eyes widened and mouth dropped in horror as a smaller viewpoint appeared beside Present Mic.

*IT WAS YOU!*

Apparently a camera bot had traced the dangerous cement block and had captured your chase and ultimate deflection of it.

There was the embarrassment of you being singled out, and horror when Mic gleeful launched into a second replay, but there was also *relief*. From an outside perspective, you didn’t look as beat-up as you had felt.

In fact, you looked… kind of cool--

The second replay tacked on a couple of additional seconds of footage. Of you gripping your side and panting as you walked down the stairs, red-faced and clearly winded.
You groaned and rubbed your forehead, the relief fading.

*You didn’t want to think of the millions you had just seen that.*

“Big hero Lionheart is fresh meat here at UA, straight from America and full of all the American charms. She likes eating, snorts when she laughs and--”

“Thank you,” you breathed when Aizawa’s bandaged elbow knocked into the unsuspecting DJ, sending him rolling sideways and out of view. His mummy face briefly flashed on-screen as he leaned over the MC’s controls to shut down the camera of the announcer’s box.

“Quite a catch,” Midnight sang, sauntering passed. You sighed as a more in-control Mic announced the impending start of the final match.

But the energy of the final battle was off.

Though Todoroki unleashed sudden and hard ice assault and appeared to have the intention of winning, he was lacking something. A spark. Motivation. Bakugou seemed willing to give his all into the fight while Todoroki looked to just be going through the motions.

Bakugou sensed it as well. Although he gave Todoroki a perfect opening, the boy did not use his left side to land a blow, instead tossing him to the side.

This enraged Bakugou who, disgusted at Todoroki’s self-control, launched another attack with every intent on beating sensing into his foe.

Your ears perked up as Midoriya distinctive voice echoed around the field. He had cried out to Todoroki to do his best, which Todoroki appeared to hear.

For a moment flames flashed around him and you felt adrenaline swell up in your body again, certain it would be round two of cement rain. But as quickly as it appeared, the fire within Todoroki died. His hand fell and he looked resigned, taking the full impact of Bakugou’s finishing move -- a massive bomb cyclone.

Smoke and broken shards of ice billowed upward.

When the figurative dust settled, a furious Bakugou remained.

Todoroki had extinguished his flames, not planning on giving the blond the all-out battle he thought he deserved. His first place victory, it appeared, had been handed to him.

Midnight followed behind Bakugou as he ran to confront the unconscious Todoroki, ripping at the sleeve of her body suit to release her quirk. Desperately he tried to shake the boy awake, to repair and restart the insult of a match, but Midnight’s quirk took effect before any progress could be made.

Though he lay asleep out of bounds in a field of ice, Bakugou Katsuki was announced the winner of the UA Sports Festival for first-years.

*That was that.*

It took some time for the field to get cleaned up and for Cementoss to remove the cement platform.

All that was left was the medal ceremony.

You stifled a yawn, the day catching up with you. It felt as if the single event had lasted *days* and not a handful of hours. Morning seemed so long ago.
All of the first-year students were eventually herded back on the green. The press had set up shop, calling out to the students, their cameras flashing wildly. Some ignored the journalists or offered mild smiles while others ate up the attention, posing and grinning, hoping their images would be the ones that decorated the media coverage.

At Midnight’s request, you stood off to the side of the press, making sure they didn’t try to rush the stage or the students. You realized, as everyone waited, that some were trying to get your attention, asking for comments on student and event safety, how you spelled your first and last name and why Mic had announced your interests during a worldwide televised event.

“Was it a way to announce you’re interested in marriage?” a reporter asked. You grit your teeth at the insinuation of desperate singleness, keeping your arms crossed and face tilted toward the stage. You were more irritated at Mic than the press but you had no intention of making a non-story credible by giving any kind of statement.

Fireworks erupted as Midnight announced the start of the awards ceremony. Somewhere, hidden in stands, a band was playing brass-heavy triumphant music.

In an explosion of confetti, fireworks and smoke, the three finalists arose from the center of Midnight’s stage on their placing platforms.

The clapping and cheers fell apart when the first-place winner was revealed. Wearing a muzzle and some serious-looking hand restraints, Bakugou had been secured to a cement post to keep from attacking the students around him in a rage.

Though truthfully, his sights and anger were only directed at the boy standing next to him on the second-place podium.

The media, surprisingly, did not make a big deal out of Bakugou’s shackles, mildly relieved that they wouldn’t be caught in an errant blast. After noting the reason for Iida’s absence on the platform, the master of medals was announced.

He hardly needed an introduction.

All Might’s laugh reverberated throughout the stadium, reinvigorating the crowd and sending them into what would be their last frenzy of the day. He was saying something as he leaped from the uppermost curb of the structure. You could hear his voice but you were unable to make it out over Midnight’s mic’d introduction.

It was Midnight’s mistake. She mumbled embarrassed apologies to a strained All Might, the displeasure at having his entrance ruined radiating off him.

The exchanges between All Might and the winners were not broadcasted -- a couple private words with number one hero were packaged as part of the prize.

The first medal All Might awarded was to Tokoyami, who accepted with a reserved dignity -- though the hug All Might added did catch the bird-headed teenager by surprise. He could only stand in stunned acceptance as the number one hero patted him on the back and offered some additional words of encouragement.

A similar exchange happened with Todoroki.

All Might was the one to unmuzzle Bakugou, whose disdain was clearly audible. It was entirely visible as well, his face borderline demonic as the number one hero tried to place a medal around the boy’s neck. He refused to accept it, his head dancing out of the way.
Inwardly All Might winced -- his time was coming to a close and he was expected to stick around for photos from the press. He ended catching the fabric of the medal in the boy’s mouth and tugged it so it was secure, calling it a day.

“Well, they were the winners this time, but listen here. Anyone here could have ended up on these podiums,” All Might declared. “It just as you saw -- competing, improving each other and climbing even further! The next generation of heroes is definitely sprouting!”

After the disastrous attempt of a final cheer, the festival officially came to a close.

Finally.

Spectators began to file out, the students stretched and called out congratulations to one another while you approached Cementoss and Midnight. All Might was standing at the platform, posing for pictures.

“They’re not going to release Bakugou until Todoroki leaves the podium,” Midnight said. You and Cementoss glanced at Bakugou, who had spit out the medal and was shouting some unkind words to a stoic Todoroki. After a brief photo-op, the teenager left the field, bypassing the students and disappearing from view.

Tokoyami politely took his pictures with All Might and answered a couple tasteful questions about Dark Shadow and his thoughts on how he did in the festival. When he felt he had gotten enough exposure, he left the stage as well to join Class A, who had all stuck around to congratulate him on his work.

With the other two students safely out of the way, All Might released Bakugou from his prison.

Upon his freedom the boy released a guttural yell, rocketing upward and out of the field, landing in the stands and exiting that way. Far away from All Might, the press and the other students.

“That boy has quite the spirit!” All Might said with a nervous chuckle, rubbing the back of his head as he eyed the medal Bakugou discarded.

“All Might, what did you think of the festival--?”

“Do you have any favorite students All Might--?”

“What is your salary--?”

“Was there concern of a villain attack--?”

Cementoss shared a glance with Midnight at the turn of the questions but All Might had sensed the press was starting to turn. He let out a loud laugh and, claiming he had places to go and people to save, disappeared in a burst, leaving the same way he had entered.

Tired, bruised and hungry, the students were moved quickly, returning to their homerooms for a debriefing before they were to be dismissed for good. Those teachers without homerooms met in the staff computer room, waiting to do their own form of decompressing.

“Another year, another sports festival,” Mic sang as he took a seat at his computer, logging on to do some quick searching on how the event was perceived, drumming his hands on the desk as he waited for things to load. Midnight had also taken a seat, her lower back throbbing.

Ectoplasm had been kind enough to bring your belongings with him so you didn’t have to run all the
way back up to the box. You stretched before checking your phone.

In your peripheral vision, you could see Snipe take a seat in the chair beside you.

It squeaked slightly under his weight.

“Gettin’ mighty thirsty,” he drawled. You sighed. There was no point in trying to get out of it.

“Congratulations on the win,” you said. “You chose well -- I’m not gonna break my word.”

“They bet on the students,” Ectoplasm explained to a curious Midnight and Present Mic. “Snipe won, so she has to buy him his drinks for the night.”

“Ohhhhh,” Mic said with a grin. “That’s a good prize.”

“Hello!” Yagi called out brightly as he entered the room, the teachers responding the same in turn.

“Good work today All Might!” Cementoss said as Yagi took his seat. He smiled politely at the compliment, nodding his head in thanks as he reached for his phone to send Midoriya a quick ‘good job’ text.

“I don’t think I’m going to stay out too late tonight guys,” you said as you tried to swallow your yawn. “I woke up too early this morning.”

“You did your makeup I see,” Midnight teased. You furrowed your brows, grinning and gesturing back to the hero.

“Same can be said for you! It also looks like you polished that bustier of yours, I could see that leather gleaming from the stands!”

“Festival coverage is lookin’ good!” Mic announced with two thumbs up, strolling through his newsfeed. Todoroki was by far the breakout star of the event but Bakugou’s antics were taking social media by storm.

As long as the headlines were positive and there were no grievous injuries, the teachers were happy.

“Good ratings means good exposure for the students,” Cementoss said with a nod of satisfaction.

Aizawa and Vlad's arrival meant that their students were gone and that the teacher's workday had ended. Although your usual watering hole was busier than normal, thanks to thirsty festival spectators, a table had been set aside for the UA staff and they settled in for an enjoyable night.

You ended up seated between Ectoplasm and Mic, sipping on a beer as Mic captivated the table with his top ten moments of the festival. Snipe sat a little further down, his mask pushed up slightly so he could drink his beer, the first of what he hoped to be many.

Truthfully though, he didn’t plan on going overboard. The bet between you two had only been for fun and he had no intentions of making you pay out an arm and a leg.

He just wanted to make you sweat a bit, that's all.

While Mic was reenacting Todoroki’s ice mountain rising from the ground, you excused yourself to use the bathroom. You had only been gone for a couple of minutes -- there had been a line to use the women’s restroom, but when you returned to the table you saw Midnight had stolen your seat and was talking animatedly with Ectoplasm.
Rather than make a stink, you figured you could just take Midnight’s seat, which had been between Cementoss and… **Yagi**.

Yagi shared a small smile with you, unsurprised, having witnessed Midnight’s switch. He continued his conversation with Power Loader on augmented hero costumes. After waving at Midnight to pass your beer down to your new location, you did briefly speak with Cementoss about the weekend’s weather before taking out your phone and skimming through your news stories.

As expected, UA’s sports festival was dominating coverage in Japan. In the US, it was featured highly but reports of a bus accident with multiple fatalities had also broken and was receiving ample morning breaking news attention.

“Did you enjoy the festival?”

You glanced up at Yagi who was gripping his large water.

If he was starting a conversation with you, that was a good sign?

Right?

“It was *fantastic,*” you responded, brows raising in slight disbelief. “The power these kids have at their age... It’s insane.”

“I’ve been told that the power of quirks increases each generation,” Yagi said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully as he stared down at his water. “It stands to reason that the power of our students will eventually surpass ours.”

“That is both comforting and horrifying,” you said.

“That’s why we have to make our students into fine heroes.”

You tapped your nails on the glass of your beer. Yagi was the fundamental heroics instructor. Would he be the best person to talk about the suggestion that had been nagging at you? You had also considered approaching Aizawa...

“Yagi...” you said before hesitating. He was facing you -- it was too late now. “Have you gone over defensive techniques with your students yet? In class?”

He blinked. Had he? Well, he had given them some advice on parries and counters during their simulations...

“I bring it up because...” How should you word it? “Class A has a lot of great offensive quirks. They’re very capable fighters. But it looks like they’re more likely to try and dodge and counter than buckle down and brace for a hit. It’s not a bad thing, obviously,” you added. “But Kirishima, Todoroki, Shoji, Yaoyorozu... they should be building up their defense since they could take some pretty solid hits and still keep rolling. I’m thinking in group situations where they could try and be like, well, tanks.”

You glanced up. He was listening intently.

"Take Yaoyorozu,” you continued. "Her fight with Tokoyami is what really got me thinking. She *tried* to be defensive with her shields but she was pretty easily pushed out of bounds. She didn’t plant and absorb, she didn’t deflect. It was like... it was like she was defending herself from a knife attack but her opponent was wielding a mallet, you know? I’m not trying to overstep--”
“No, no, no, continue,” he squeezed in during your hesitation.

“But the type of force between a knife and a mallet hitting you is different. Piercing versus bludgeoning. To properly protect yourself you have to change how you take the hit. So with Yaoyorozu, what she had to do was reorient where her weight was, her center of gravity. When her arms are up and the attack is coming from the front--”

You stopped, realizing you had lifted your arms in your chair and was acting out the motions. Cementoss was interested as well, amused by your charades.

Your arms fell to your sides and you gave an apologetic wince.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to--”

“You do have a very defensive quirk.” The gears in Yagi’s mind were turning. “I did see the replays of you in the stands with your shield. I was… distracted during the match and didn’t catch it when it happened, sorry. A defense sim would be a good break… Would you be interested in assisting me in a class?”

Excitement.

“Oh! Well, I--”

“You’d be a good test on how to handle someone with a shielding quirk!”

“I don’t want to step on your toes--”

“Nonsense. I have them sparring with each other now, they should taste what it’s like to fight a pro-hero.”

You accepted the invitation eagerly when you were positive it wasn’t just offered out of pity. Yagi dug into his messenger bag, pulling out a notebook clearly branded with ‘Teacher Ideas.’ You smiled as he flipped through the pages, catching bits of class and assignment scripts he had written up before coming across a blank page. He was mumbling to you about ways he could incorporate a defense lesson into his plans and you leaned in toward him, conspiring.

You brainstormed what quickly morphed into a two-class, two-part lesson.

It was Yagi who suggested you try and do the lessons during the upcoming week.

Unbeknownst to you, the reason was simple -- he had not yet planned out what he wanted the kids to do, having been so busy between past-due grading and hero work. He had hoped the sports festival would drum up some ideas or that he would be able to work in something that was related to internships.

The first day’s lesson, he decided, would be something akin to the cavalry battle where you would be the target.

“Not individually and not all at once,” you said with a shake of your head imagining twenty students swarming you. “Teams of five maybe? That will be easier to handle and it would give us enough of a buffer that we can focus on individuals.”

Yagi furiously scribbled down the plan, branching off with possible team combinations.

“Do you want me to do some light attacks?” you asked. “Reactive stuff if they come from behind? If
I just use my axe husk, I can give them a wallop that would knock them back. I won’t put energy into it though. I won't gore them.”

“Axe husk?” Yagi repeated slowly, imagining an axe with an empty cicada shell on its end.

“That’s my weapon. Hero Lionheart with her shield and axe combo,” you flicked a thumbs up, grinning. “I’ll go full-power with my shield but if I just use my empty axe, I could probably knock some kids back if they come at me from behind without laying them out.”

“That could work,” Yagi said, returning to his notes.

Four teams were created, an even collection of physical, ranged and non-traditional quirks.

“This will be fun,” you said reaching for your empty beer. You felt a hand on your shoulder -- Snipe was standing over you.

“I’m headin’ out,” he said and you reached for your bag. “Nah, I covered my drinks for tonight since you two looked busy. Next time, you can treat.” He paused. "I'm gonna hold it to you now."

Although you knew that a couple of teachers had left during your and Yagi’s planning -- you had both paused to say goodbye every time someone stood to go -- you didn’t realize that a majority of the table had disappeared. All that was left was Aizawa, a droopy Mic, Power Loader and Cementoss. You promised Snipe you would fulfill your obligation at the next get-together.

As he walked away, you took it as a sign you should head home as too.

The siren’s call of your bed was deafening.

“I should head out,” you said, adding some yen to the table’s collection before standing. Yagi jumped slightly.

“I’ll leave with you!” he said quickly. You watched with confusion as he also put money toward the bill.

But... he hadn’t drummed up a tab.

“Didn’t you just get water?” you asked and he waved away your question.

Aizawa, Cementoss and Power Loader gave their goodbyes, as did Mic when Aizawa nudged him awake.

“How’s Midoriya doing?” you asked after they squeezed out of the busy bar into the quiet night. They had a couple of blocks to walk before they would even reach the train station -- school was a safe subject. “I didn’t get a chance to ask.”

“He’s in good spirits. He’ll recover, but we have to work on his quirk. His attacks take too much of a toll on his body.”

You thought of his horrendously purple fingers.

Awkwardness began to creep in as you kept pace with Yagi, both quiet. In the bar, you had been distracted by lesson plans. Now, you felt suddenly awake and your stomach knotted as you recalled grabbing All Might’s hand. You debated bringing it up and playing it off as a touchy mistake but decided not to.

You couldn’t think of a suave way to retroactively diffuse it.
Also, why bring attention to something that may already be forgotten by him.

It wasn't forgotten by you though.

Chances were it was going to haunt you for the rest of your life.

It wasn’t that you were averse to expressing romantic interest in someone. But with Yagi the situation was different. It was delicate. This wasn’t some guy you randomly met, this was a co-worker you saw on a near-daily basis. He hadn’t reacted overly positive to any of your slight flirts.

Most importantly, he was the number one hero.

He was a symbol.

He was... far too good for you.

“It’s nice out tonight,” you blurted, looking up at the cloudless sky. You could see a handful of stars peeking through the light pollution.

“Yes,” he agreed.

Walking to the train station that night, their faces masked by shadow, he thought of the softness of your hand when it had touched his. You smelled nice, like spring flowers, an observation that had echoed in his head when you were leaning next to him at your table.

Don’t play into it, his common sense told him.

Invite her to your class to spend time with her, everything else in him shouted back.

It was obvious what part of him won.

“Something’s been bugging me… If it’s not inappropriate…” Your voice cut through the night. “How do you… get All Might sized?”

“Posturing and flexing,” he declared, though he didn’t like how you dissolved into giggles.

“You’re something else, Yagi Toshinori.”

Blood lurched into his mouth and he turned slightly to disguise wiping it away. Hearing you say his full name felt so foreign. He also felt a vibration in his pocket -- his phone.

It looked like Midoriya had finally responded to his earlier text, apologizing it took so long to answer it. He had fallen asleep and his mother had made him a large victory dinner.

Thanks for everything today, All Might!

The hero smiled.

He was a good kid.
That Monday, you approached Principal Nedzu about getting access to UA’s files. The principal was surprised that he hadn’t already granted the rights and remedied the situation -- after classes that afternoon, you fell into the rabbit hole of reading about past and present classes and events. Quirks were detailed, personal accomplishments noted, official reprimands documented.

Aizawa really did expel an entire class!

It was informative but it was also borderline gossip. UA's records were extensive and you had to wonder if alumni realized how closely they had been watched while they were in school. Eventually, you had to pull yourself away from years-old files and, instead, focus on the quirks of Class A -- they were the ones you’d be ‘fighting’ after all.

When All Might’s lesson with you took place later in the week, you felt like you were prepared enough to go head-to-head with a bunch of teenagers. No one was going to launch a surprising quirk at you. And, by then, everyone’s (Midoriya’s) lingering injuries from the sports festival had been healed enough that they could be functional in a ‘surprise’ simulator without being a hindrance to their team.

You had packed away a bastardized version of your hero costume in a duffle bag you lugged to school that morning, changing when your morning classes were over. In your heyday, your costume was borderline platemail. But in a class with a bunch of teenagers, heavy armor seemed like overkill. Not to mention most of your pieces needed to be refitted -- you were no longer a lean and tone 20-something.

In fact, you were certain you would never reach your peak body again. Refitted?

No, you needed an entirely new costume.

The thought was depressing.

But you were working on it. Training for Lionheart version 2.0 had begun and, so far, you had only vomited once from physical exertion. You had also made plans to do yoga on campus in the mornings before the start of school with Midnight, who was thrilled that you were attempting to get back into hero-shape.

With great sadness and trepidation, you had also dumped out the candy pocket of your work backpack, giving away its sweet contents to the students who answered questions correctly as 'prizes.'

Now that was difficult to do.

You told Yagi you would meet him at UA’s Site B cityscape during lunch, so they could go over some final preparations before the start of class. Unsurprisingly, you were the first to arrive.

It was eerie, the city simulator. By all accounts, it looked like a functioning city complete with sewer drains and light posts. But there was no traffic. There were no people. It was like being in one of those apocalyptic movies where society had fallen, except the city was kept in pristine condition. Seeing no figures coming immediately up the walkway, you made a quick side trip to
check out the inside of one of the buildings, curious to see what was inside of it. Would UA go so far as to furnish the buildings?

It turned out, no.

From the outside the building looked a little sad, having been rebuilt and refitted with furnishings hundreds of times over the years. The inside did have rooms, doors and debris. You kicked over a long-forgotten chair leg that sat off to the side of the main room. Perhaps, at one point, there had been some furniture but the pieces were never replaced or repaired after countless cycles of destruction.

Curiosity sated, you went to make your way back to the entrance but stopped once you caught sight of Yagi’s unmistakable form standing deeper in the city.

“Hey stranger!” you said merrily, walking to meet him. He jumped at the voice, surprised you had snuck up to him from behind.

You were wearing a black bodysuit, Yagi immediately noticed, a sleek and formatting piece. Two bulky bronze gauntlets and knee-high boots were the only outstanding thing you wore -- that and a bronze belt that hung across your hips, a severe-looking lion’s head on the buckle.

“Too much?” you asked with a wince, noticing his silent assessment. He lurched and waved his hands, keeping his teeth clenched so he wouldn’t reveal the blood in his mouth at having been caught staring.

“No!” he said with a slight wheeze. Should he compliment her? Would that be perceived as lecherous, too inappropriate? “Your belt is nice.”

You looked down at your belt, tapping the lion’s head affectionately. Yagi looked away, mortified to be looking near your crotch.

“Thank you! These are all pieces of a bigger outfit, but I decided to keep things lowkey today.”

“And you have your shield and your… “

He didn’t get to finish. Your ears had perked up and you eagerly waved your arm and pulled a bronze pole from your belt.

“I’m all set for the children today,” you said, grinning. He noticed a slightly wicked glint had appeared in your eye.

Still, he was calmed by your obvious enthusiasm and let out a deep exhale.

“Good.”

After the details were worked out, and positionings determined, Yagi left you to your own devices while he went to go change into his hero costume and collect the class. As expected, another battle simulator announcement had a majority of the teenagers fired up. They had frustrations they wanted to work out that stemmed from the sports festival and fighting was the perfect opportunity to let loose. However, their faces either perked up or fell when All Might announced the fighting wouldn’t be against each other.

“Let’s go check it out!” he said with an enthusiastic arm thrust, leading his ducklings out of the classroom and to the cityscape.
Where you were waiting for them.

Alone, you had been working on what poses you should be holding when the students arrived and how you should act, trying to get into your role.

You wanted to be... cool.

Maybe, at the end of class, they would all talk amongst themselves about how cool Miss Lionheart was.

They knew easygoing Miss L, their civilian-clothes-wearing English teacher. You frowned. You were concerned they wouldn’t view you as a true opponent -- you didn’t want them to hold back for fear of hurting you. No, you wanted them to view you as a threat.

You would have to play the part.

All Might glanced around with some trepidation as he led his ducklings to the center of the city, concerned over the fact you seemingly disappeared. He stopped in front of a faux-butcher shop where he had dropped a dummy victim earlier.

Where had she--

“Well now!” All Might said loudly, placing his hands on his hips. “Looks like we’re here. In the city. Ready to start class.”

“What’s the assignment, All Might?” Sero asked.

Looks like he was going to have to do the introduction without you.

“Today’s focus will be on defense!” he exclaimed. “Breaking a defense! I had actually requested help from your teacher Lionheart for this lesson, I wonder where she’s run off to.”

“Miss L…?”

“That’s right!” a voice above them called out.

You had been listening from the roof of the building across the street from the class, hoping and praying there would be a moment that you could turn into a flashy entrance. But All Might had been stumbling, unaware of your theatrical plans, and you didn’t want to risk fizzling out.

So that was good enough.

You jumped, painfully aware how much cooler you would have looked if you had been wearing some sort of cape, landing with a ‘thud’ in the street. You swelled with pride -- you had made the asphalt beneath you buckle by pooling a bit of energy at the bottoms of your feet.

The boots and gloves were additional support items, but you wouldn’t key any of the students in on that just yet. You stood straighter and placed a hand on your hip.

Please look cool.

“Er…” All Might was caught momentarily off guard by your shift of personality. Your face missing its usual genial nature and warmth, having been replaced by hard eyes and a slight smirk. Focus!

“Right, hero Lionheart will be the target of today’s class.”

“Target?” Bakugou spoke up.
“That is correct Young Bakugou! Your assignment is to break Lionheart’s defense!” He pulled a card from his costume where he had written his lines for that afternoon’s class. “Lionheart, playing the villain, has captured a young girl and taken her hostage! You have two objectives: either rescue the girl,” he gestured to the dummy on the ground wearing a pink dress and a blonde wig, “Or snatch the headband from around Lionheart’s neck signifying a KO!”

He produced a white headband and held it up for his students to see. Kirishima squinted, the red lettering painted on it looked oddly familiar…

Wait, those weren’t letters, they were numbers.

“Is that from the cavalry battle…?” Kirishima asked.

“Heroes always recycle when they can!” All Might said boisterously. “They never waste perfectly good materials! Only villains do that.”

Several students shared glances.

“No holding back either,” you said, cutting through the students to stand beside All Might. “Think of this as a true battle and I’m a real villain. I want you to come at me. Hard.”

Mineta’s head almost exploded.

It was further explained that the classes would be divided into teams and sent to seek you out. The rest would wait in one of the grounds’ observation buildings where video feeds for the city were playing.

It was in that observation area that the class waited while you took your position with the doll.

“What if we… what if we hurt Miss L?” Kaminari asked receiving incredulous looks from the girls of his class. Mineta’s hands were grasping at air, picturing your squeezable assets stuffed in a relatively form-fitting suit… His plan was simple -- launch and attach.

All Might’s smile weakened as he looked at the two, a slight sweat breaking out as he envisioned the boys as future heroes.

“Alright,” he announced after five minutes had passed. You should be in position. It was time to release the hounds. “Let’s get started! Team A will be Aoyama, Ojiro, Kaminari, Hagakure and Sato! Good luck out there, young ones!”

The five students gathered and exited the building while All Might turned on the feeds. After switching camera views he found what street you had chosen.

“We know she has a shield quirk,” he heard Sero mutter as they watched the screens, waiting for the eventual contact. “So if we come at her from behind we should be good, right?”

“Yeah -- we can do a distraction!” Ashido announced, jumping at her idea as it formed in her head. “Have your team split up and attack from the front and back!”

Midoriya frowned, Team A was only a couple blocks away and getting closer.

“That seems like a too obvious weakness,” he said, holding his chin as he envisioned you with a shield.

“Something she would have had to overcome to become a pro-hero,” Iida said in agreement,
mirroring Midoriya's posture.

“Bingo! Contact!” All Might said as Team A turned the corner right in front of you.

_Lionheart._

So it was Aoyama, Ojiro, Kaminari and Sato… you noticed a pair of floating gloves. Hagakure. He hadn’t changed the teams.

“Hey guys,” you said with a grin, your right hand twitching, ready to call your axe out. “Looking for something?”

Ojiro hunkered down, his tail flicking in agitation. You could see their mouths moving -- they were talking to one another. _Planning._ For this match, your biggest concern was Hagakure, whose invisibility would make defense tricky out in the open like this. All it would take was a concentrated attack to distract you and the invisible girl could strike. Her target would probably be the headband as moving the dummy would be far too noticeable.

Your eyes flickered down to the dummy.

You would grab your new friend and make a break to better coverage. It would put you in a disadvantage, backing up against a wall, but it would prevent Hagakure--

The students leaped forward, their plan in motion. Sato let a guttural yell as he closed the distance the quickest and would be the first to strike. Your heart started pumping, the thrill of a fight electrifying you, the symphony beginning.

That’s what you had always imagined in your head as you moved the energy around your body -- the rising and falling melodies of an orchestra. In fights, there was clashing brass and percussion, protecting was soft strings and flutes. You were the conductor, swaying and guiding the music as it swirled within you.

Right now, the music was building, thrumming in anticipation of a clash. You watched Sato run, timing when both feet were in the air as he moved. When he was close, feet having briefly cleared the ground, you instinctively jumped forward and called forth a small barrier that you whipped to the side, catching Sato and sending him flying into the building beside them.

You quickly returned to your spot, standing protectively over the dummy as Ojiro made his move. But your mind was only partly on him -- Kaminari posed a bigger threat. Physical attacks were your speciality, his electricity was going to pose a problem.

You disengaged your shield, heaving the dummy over your shoulder and sidestepping a swat from Ojiro’s tale. You felt the fur of his mane graze your arm as you moved -- unwilling to admit how close he had been and how surprisingly fast he was. He was on your tail (_ha!_), as was Sato, who had pulled himself out of the wall.

You reached for your belt, gripping your pole, not summoning it forward quite yet. It was a beast of a creation that wanted to guzzle its fill -- you had to be careful. It would be easy to unintentionally feed too much into it.

Kaminari’s momentary surprise at being the target faded as he watched you beeline toward him. He held his hands out, static shooting between them.

“Looks like I’ll hit her with a million volts-!”
You jumped, pooling energy in your boots to add more upward velocity. Kaminari watched you spin as you passed above him, flicking out your pole. It grew larger, expanding, forming into something else. That something connected with his back, sending the sparking boy forward and into Sato, discharging his electricity. Ojiro, you noticed with irritation, had dodged the move.

You were running now, putting yourself at another disadvantage as your speed was lacking. It also cut into your stamina -- you were burning what powered your weapon and shield.

You cursed to yourself, sliding to a stop when you reached a new street, turning and putting your back to a wall.

*Come on now, these were high school kids.*

You looked at the ground, the female dummy looking back up at you. All Might had drawn his own face on it.

*This* was what was holding you back.

You were a villain, weren't you? Couldn't you just... *kill* it?

You looked up, summoning a barrier just as Ojiro’s tail came crashing down by your head, pushing him back. His tail flicked out as he tumbled back, helping him settle on his feet. With you standing still, he could see what you had used to strike Kamanari. That pole you had been holding had expanded into some strange... contraption. Was it a weapon? It looked like it was only partially made -- all he could see were the bare bones of something unfinished.

Until you lit it up.

The head of the weapon burst to life, the wine-color of your shield molding and forming into the shape of an axe.

*While* Ojiro observed, you grit your teeth.

You forgot how hungry you axe was. You needed to be careful. And you needed to be considerate. He watched you turn your weapon in your hand, facing the blunt end of your axe toward him.

*Goring* children was not in your plans.

He was launching another attack, massive tail striking out at you. Rather than pull up another shield, you countered his blows with your weapon, the energy siphoning flexing after each strike. You could feel the vibrations run up your arm. They were barely tingles.

Sato appeared from the alleyway you had both run down, panting and looking slightly worse for wear. Kaminari’s friendly fire had apparently done a number on him.

You felt it then, the slight brush against your shoulder, a shifting of the headband.

Your eyes widened.

With a snarl you pushed back on Ojiro’s attack, sending the boy staggering backward. In the break, you also sidestepped away from where you assumed Hagakure had slithered. You brought your arm across your chest, flaring up your shield and moving it out in a sweeping motion. You felt it connect with an invisible force -- Hagakure.

With a gasp, the girl struck a dumpster.
Ojiro had made the mistake of following Hagakure’s path, concerned for his unarmored teammate. You took advantage of his distraction, dissolving your shield and turning to offensive strikes with your axe. One upswing to the torso sent him into the air, you followed with a side swing, throwing him further back.

“10 minutes left,” All Might’s voice whispered in your earpiece. You ignored it, thrusting your axe into an approaching Sato’s gut before smacking a returning Ojiro with it in the same motion. Kaminari had reappeared, eyes glazed as he hummed and watched you smash into his classmates--

“Victory!” All Might’s voice echoed not just in your earpiece, but throughout the city as well. You blinked and stood, your shield disappearing as you felt your neck. The headband was there but--

The hostage!

You turned to see the dummy dancing around wildly by itself. You sighed, you had gotten too far away from the dummy and gave Hagakure the perfect opening.

“Good job guys,” you said, shouldering your axe and rubbing the back of your head. “You saved Yamato!”

“Is that her name!?” Hagakure squealed. You nodded, sharing a wink as you walked to reclaim your hostage. “I’ve got her whole story planned out. I’ll have to tell you later. It’s a great teenage drama.”

The first team collected themselves and made their way back to headquarters while you went to find a new starting point.

“Doing okay?” All Might whispered into your ear, his voice low. You could hear the chatter of students in the background.

“They gave me a run for my money,” you grumbled back, as if your voice could carry. “It’s hard to defend against an invisible girl. I don’t look too haggard right?”

“No, you look like you’re barely breaking a sweat. That was a good first round, though you did get a little too offensive toward the end there,” he chided lightly and you snorted, rubbing one of the weights on your wrist, hidden beneath your gauntlet.

“You’ve basically hobbed me,” you complained. “These things are so heavy! And the dummy--”

“Hey, hey, hey, you helped me make this lesson plan!” he countered. But his voice became slightly more urgent. “We don’t have time to waste, ready for the next group?”

You threw the dummy to the ground, rolling your shoulders and neck side to side.

“Yeah, send ‘em out.”

Minutes passed before Team B arrived -- Bakugou, Jiro, Shoji, Koda and Tokoyami.

You locked eyes with Bakugou, whose face had taken on a sinister grin.

A fight!

Your shield blazed up between you.

Your quirk was drilled to be a counter for ballistics.

There was no planning like with Team A. Bakugou rocketed toward you, throwing blast after blast
into your shield. You braced yourself, feeling the vibrations travel up your arm with each contact. Judging from the tingles, they were only testing blasts. He was checking the strength of your barrier. It wouldn’t be long before he switched to more impactful attacks.

“Dark Shadow!”

You kicked the dummy away from you as Tokoyami and his quirk appeared from above, aiming for the hostage.

*Come on! Pull yourself together!*

*Your showing was pathetic -- already one team had bested you. Don’t let there be a second one.*

Despite your earlier belief that you would use just the husk of your axe, the students had proven themselves of pretty capable fighters.

“I’m going to get a bit more into it, All Might,” you hissed, hoping that the earpiece would catch your words.

“Eh-?” his voice cackled back.

You dropped your shield, tucking and rolling from Bakugou’s blast and back to where you had kicked the dummy. You had to be fast -- Bakugou’s attacks were following you as you moved.

You revealed your axe.

You let out a strangled yell as you swung it, slamming into Dark Shadow and Tokoyami and sending them both hurtling backward. The weight and intensity had been bumped up slightly, you could feel the slow, constant drain of the axe nursing from your body. You had to be careful -- it was at about ten percent now and you didn’t want to fill it up anymore. You rolled and turned again, just in time to raise a barrier to block Bakugou.

The vibrations were turning into slight trembles now -- he was bumping up the strength of his attacks as well. Still, you had no fears of your barrier failing, it was far from reaching that point.

Jiro was off to the side and you braced yourself, a wall of amplified sound striking your shield and joining Bakugou’s ongoing frontal assault. You clenched your teeth, the impact rattling up your arm and into your skull. It wasn’t just a physical attack, there was as deafening bass that felt like it was shaking the very liquids of your body.

*Think. Think. You're in a corner now…*

Koda. Your eyes fell on the quiet boy who had taken cover. You buried the empathy you felt for him, shifting slightly so that the dummy was laying across the top of your foot. Where was Tokoyami -- *there* he was. You saw him and his Dark Shadow pulling back. He was going to try and launch an attack from behind, knowing that your attention was on the frontal assault.

It was only a second opening -- you watched Bakugou bring his hands close to him, irritated that the fight had gone on this long already. Jiro was also preparing for another sound-based attack.

You kicked the dummy toward Koda, launching after it. The boy’s eyes widened as his teacher, glaring, rocketed toward him. The dummy crashed at his feet and he looked down at it, his inner-voice yelling for him to grab it. But he moved too slow, your hard gloves dug into his arm and side. With a surprising amount of strength, you flung Koda toward his teammates, glad when the boy struck and pinned an unsuspecting Jiro.
Your eyes were on Bakugou now, who had gone airborne, his face taking on a sinister glint.

“Die!” you heard the boy screech as he began to spin himself into a frenzy. Your barrier flew up and you braced yourself for the move you had seen him perform during the sports festival.

He didn’t want to stun you with Stun Grenade.

No, he wanted to shatter that stupid barrier of yours.

“Howitzer Impact!” he bellowed as the tornado formed, growing in size and intensity. You could hear the his teammates cry out, but so consumed was he in destroying you that he paid their protests no mind.

You inhaled and waited.

The explosion hit your shield hard, your arm rattling as you held strong. He had the impact of a missile, you noted. But this was what your shield was made to deflect. Missiles, bombs, gunfire, rockets -- something flared up in your heart and you stood a little stronger, eyes briefly looking down to Doll Might gazing up at you.

*Shield hero Lionheart.*

Bakugou landed with a thud, trying to keep his breath even as he waited for the dust and debris blown by his attack to settle. He had ruined the facades of the buildings around them and he could hear the groanings of his classmates behind as they tried to gather themselves, having been caught in his blast.

“Dammit Bakugou,” Jiro grunted, rubbing her head and looking at the barely conscience Koda. Tokoyami was further behind them, staggered as well, trying to comfort a weeping Dark Shadow that had taken cover behind him.

His face registered surprise, then rage, when the first glimpses of your barrier were visible through the settling dust. Your eyes met.

There was a similar hardness reflected in both of you.

You lurched forward, shield dropping as you raised your axe in the air. Bakugou was fast though, dodging the weapon as it crashed down on where he stood, shattering the asphalt. You played a cat and mouse game, trading blows and dodges. You managed to strike Bakugou with an upswing after faking him out, Bakugou released a few explosive blasts on your chest and back.

Your shield erupted between them and he was caught by surprise, rocketing into it. Your eyes had moved from Bakugou to Jiro, who was making a run for the dummy. The axe strike hit her in the back and she overshot Doll Might, hurdling into a wall.

“Die!” Bakugou yelled as he exploded to you. “Die! Die! Die!”

“Time! Bakugou my boy, time’s up!”

All Might’s voice didn’t register to the attacking teenager. This had moved beyond a simple lesson -- you needed to be destroyed.

*He needed to win!*

“Bakugou!” Tokoyami snapped and your eyes flashed. With no need to keep an eye on your
organized with Team C, you ran to meet him, throwing yourself into a slide. The move was unexpected as was the thrust upward of the axe that struck Bakugou in the gut, slightly winding him and ruining his momentum. He fell to the earth but had no time to react, the blunt side of the axe struck his back, expelling the rest of the air from his lungs.

“Time. Is. Up.” You rasped, the top of your weapon keeping him pinned.

“Bakugou…” All Might’s voice was terse. “And the rest of Team B, return now.”

Bakugou was livid, his rage palpable at having registered a loss. His teammates were equally as enraged, disappointed with the hodgepodge of an assault they had tried to lump together. When they had turned out of sight to head back to their headquarters, you collapsed against the wall you had been leaning against.

“Are you--”

“I’m fine,” you snapped, aware your ragged breathing probably made things sound worse than what they were. “That Bakugou is something else. If they had actually drummed up a plan, they probably would have won.”

“If you’re hurt--”

“I’m not hurt, Yag- All Might,” you corrected, almost able to visualize his wince. “The hits I can take. It’s just… I’m so out of shape!” you bemoaned. “Oh god,” you muttered to yourself, closing your eyes and willing the stitch in your side to disappear, your breaths still in huffs. “Oh god.”

All Might felt a hot tingle run up his back at the sounds you were unintentionally whispering in his ear.

“Let me catch my breath and I’ll be ready for round three.”

“R-right… of course.”

The lesson was not turning out as you expected.

Team C was composed of Yaoyorozu, Kirishima, Midoriya, Iida and Ashido. Privately, Midoriya had informed his team that he had to take it easy with the punches -- he was taking Recovery Girl’s refusal to heal his damaged limbs very seriously.

“Don’t worry man,” Kirishima said, patting Midoriya on the back. “Just do what you can!”

A plan had been developed while watching Team B fail, their lack of teamwork their downfall. Yaoyorozu, Kirishima and Ashido would attack from multiple angles while Iida and Midoriya would be Team Hostage Recovery.

Ashido playfully bumped into Yaoyorozu, seeing the dark look on her face as they walked through the streets.

“It’ll be fine!” she said. “We’re gonna do great!”

Yaoyorozu offered a smile at the encouragement but it did nothing to settle her nerves or the lack of confidence that had been plaguing her the past several days.

“In and out,” Iida instructed, ever on his guard as he glanced around the streets. “In and out. That’s
all, we won’t give her time to attack. We’ll just go in--”

“And then come out,” Kirishima finished with a toothy grin.

With their headquarters behind them, the group opted to go a more stealthy route, carefully checking corners before moving on. The hope was that they would launch a surprise attack initially at you, further helping their odds.

“You have twenty minutes,” All Might’s voice crackled in their earpieces.

“In and out,” Iida whispered.

They were startled to find you crossing an intersection in front of them -- Kirishima pushed them off of the road and into the empty building after catching sight of your boots. You were moving away from them, heading further down the block. The dummy was tossed over your shoulder and your head was moving side to side, scanning for any students.

“Did she change strategies?” Yaoyorozu whispered, glancing from the doorway. Midoriya crawled beneath her, wanting to also get a look. You weren’t settling down, maybe you did plan to keep moving...

Would that change things?

“I don’t think it does,” Kirishima argued when Midoriya voiced his thoughts.

“Grab the dummy or the headband,” Ashido said, as if their concerns were invalid. Iida blinked and looked to Midoriya.

“If we keep to her back left, she won’t be able to swing her hammer at us without turning,” Midoriya said. “If we stay at the right angle, her shield won’t be able to reach us either.”

“Let’s do it!” Ashido said excitedly, gripping Kirishima’s upper arm and bouncing, unwilling to stand around and waste anymore time.

They planned on staggering their attacks, communicating in whispers via their private channel. Ashido and Kirishima had run ahead -- she would attack first before being joined by Kirishima. Then Yaoyorozu would come for a side attack, already working to form the cannon she would use to hopefully blast a hole in your shield.

Midoriya and Iida trailed behind, waiting for their opportunity.

“Surprise!” Ashido sang, sliding into your path, flinging acid at your already-forming barrier. You blinked, watching the liquid burn holes that were immediately reformed. But you got ahold of yourself as the girl skated toward you, using her acid for additional propulsion.

You lowered yourself into a charge that made Ashido skid to a stop. You weren't backing down -- your shield was approaching Ashido threateningly.

“Uhh...” The pink girl squeaked as she sidestepping your bullish form.

Kirishima, concerned that Ashido was in a bind, revealed himself early. Their plan had already changed -- due to the charge, he and Ashido were coming from behind you, who had turned and dropped your shoulder, expecting attacks in response to your charge.

Iida, Midoriya and Yaoyorozu would have to adapt.
“Dammit,” Kirishima said, his voice in their heads. He ran at you, his arms hardening into spears as he pelted your shield with physical attacks. Ashido jumped into the fray as well, moving slightly to the left. They needed to push you back to the next intersection where, hopefully, Yaoyorozu had repositioned herself.

The two teens were relieved when they heard Iida making contact with Yaoyorozu.

“R-right,” she answered, pulling back to move to the new spot, the cannon starting to sprout from her stomach. She felt butterflies in her chest, a weight was on her shoulders. If she timed her attack wrong, she would be a hindrance to the team. She was already a disadvantage to them...

She needed to collect her thoughts, she berated herself.

Yaoyorozu was waiting, cannon in hand, when the back of you started to come into view. The velocity of Kirishima’s attacks, coupled with Ashido’s acid, was forcing you to retreat slightly.

Okay. She could do this. Aim and--

Yaoyorozu met your gaze.

You had caught sight of her when you instinctively looked down the road for signs of the rest of Team C. If they were trying to do a divide and conquer strategy, it made sense someone would try to flank you.

There was a voice inside Yaoyorozu yelling fire, but her movements felt slow. She watched you stop and push back against your attackers, staggering them. Then, you were running toward Yaoyorozu.

She fired the cannon but horror was burning a hole in her chest -- she had let the entire team down. She had missed the opportunity to strike an unprotected Lionheart. The cannonball struck your shield but you batted it away, holding your axe high. You brought it down onto Yaoyorozu’s creation, destroying it and sending shards spraying outward. Most bounced and reflected off of your shield. The rest pelted Yaoyorozu.

She cried out slightly in the pain but braced for the inevitable wallop.

It was your shield that hit her, tossing her out of the street and into the window of an adjacent storefront. You paused to backtrack and return to the dummy -- it had fallen off your shoulder when you had blocked the cannonball.

Yaoyorozu groaned as she shifted, wincing at the broken glass that pierced her back and dug into her hands as she sat up.

“Iida, Midoriya,” she could hear Kirishima say in the earpiece. “We need you guys…”

“Keep her attention!” Midoriya crackled back and Yaoyorozu clenched her eyes shut, her failures thunderous.

“Are you okay?” Ashido was leaping through the window, helping her stand. Kirishima was the only one attacking your shield. Yaoyorozu nodded, her face contorted in shame. “Can you make anything else?”

Her stomach rumbled, the cannon had taken a lot out of her.

“Nothing big,” Yaoyorozu replied. Ashido frowned slightly before flashing a thumbs up.
“Whatever you can use to help, make it! Backup is coming!”

Iida and Midoriya watched from their cover, hiding out of sight as Ashido and Yaoyorozu appeared to join in Kirishima’s assault. With three out of five having shown themselves, you had once again pushed them back with your shield, focusing on offensive attacks by striking Kirishima and taking aim at Ashido and Yaoyorozu. The dummy was bouncing around, unsecured on your shoulder.

“Ready?” Iida asked and Midoriya, on his shoulders, hunkered down. He had yet to feel the speed of Recipro Burst, though he had been told it had been mind boggling. Powering through the strain of Midoriya’s additional weight, Iida lowered himself into a runner’s pose. “Ten seconds,” he reminded Midoriya before firing up his engines.

They began to move--

‘This is what a rocket must feel like ’ Midoriya thought, feeling as if time and space were bending around them. The acceleration was incredible, they cleared the first block in milliseconds, your back in their sights, Midoriya worked to keep his eyes open, ignoring the stinging rush of air that was drying them out.

The doll appeared to be reaching out for the duo. Fighting against the enormous force generated by the momentum, Midoriya reached back.

A gauntlet fist stuck Midoriya on the side of the head.

No.

With a grunt, he was thrown from Iida, who was caught by surprise by the unbalancing weight. He worked to right himself but the opportunity to grab the dummy had passed. He skidded to a stop, feeling the heat radiating off his mufflers. He looked up to the dazed Midoriya, who had rolled several feet.

Standing on shaky legs, Midoriya looked at you.

How could you have seen them? Their speed was-

He unconsciously summoned power to his legs and leapt away from an axe swing that cracked the earth where he had been standing. You had followed him, your axe striking the ground around him as he ducked and dodged. You were faster than he expected with an axe that large -- you swung it with little resistance.

Kirishima tried to launch a surprise attack from behind but was swatted away. Yaoyorozu’s own weapon, a mallet, cracked when your weapon parried with hers.

Midoriya felt the power of One for All electrify him, feeling as if his teammates’ hope rested on him. If he used the fingers on his undamaged hand he could create enough wind to perhaps push you back.

But Recovery Girl…

An axe strike broke his thoughts, the weapon smacking him upside the head and making him see stars.

“Midoriya!” he heard Yaoyorozu cry, having seen his face at the impact, genuinely concerned. You hesitated, Midoriya saw as he fell to the ground.
The steel in your eyes had melted away.

You were worried.

Ashido seized the moment.

Gaining speed by skating on her acid bursts she bypassed Kirishima and grabbed at the distracted teacher.

“GOT HER!” she screeched, whipping the dummy around her as she stumbled from suddenly losing her speed. Kirishima erupted into cheers, Iida sighing in relief. Yaoyorozu frowned, ashamed at her showing.

“Hey, are you okay?”

You were ignoring their celebrations, your attention on Midoriya. He blinked and stood, trying to smile though the world was a bit unsteady.

“I’m fine!”

“Shit,” you swore, heart beating slightly faster as blood trickled down Midoriya’s scalp. It was an odd fear you were feeling -- what if you had seriously injured All Might’s favorite student? You went a little too hard on him but you were expecting him to come at you with his quirk. But he hadn’t used it at all! “How’s your head? Be honest Midoriya, if I cracked your skull--”

“Victory!” All Might called, seemingly unperturbed by Midoriya’s possible injury. “Head on back Team C!”

“Keep an eye on him, see if you can take him to Recovery Girl,” you fretted as Iida helped steady Midoriya, your hands reaching out to catch him if he accidentally stumbled. “Don’t let him fall asleep or anything--”

“He’s all good, Miss A,” Kirishima said, punching Midoriya on the shoulder for good measure. He let out a slight squeak and, with horror, the group watched him rub the incorrect arm.

“Brain damage,” Ashido whispered and your eyes widened.

“Come on back and we’ll take a look at Young Midoriya!” All Might instructed, apparently still unfazed.

You wondered if he had seen what just occurred.

“I thought he was going to use his quirk!” you said to All Might over their channel when the students disappeared. “I wouldn’t have hit him so hard--”

“He’ll be fine,” All Might said and you let out a quiet ‘unsure’ groan. “Young Midoriya’s got a thick head! I’ll take care of him, you just prep for Team D.”

It was embarrassing how quickly Team D defeated you. Though, you would argue, in your defense, worries of permanently injuring All Might’s favorite student (and thus destroying your good relationship) had taken root in your brain. Maybe you were going too hard on the kids, the desire to show off overpowering your other motives.

Most of your attacks were focused on Todoroki, who repeatedly fought back just as savagely as you did with ice creations in an attempt to freeze you. A few times you had to strike at your own feet
with the blunt end of your axe just to free yourself, clenching your teeth as your ankles rattled in your boots. Incapacitating him would mean knocking him out but having almost burst Midoriya's head open...

While Uraraka and Asui planned on launching a sneak attack, Mineta and Sero had devised their own plan.

“Listen, listen, just whip me at her,” Mineta begged Sero with clenched fists. “I’ll grab the headband!”

Sero ignored the teenager at first, trying to swing in from the side to save the day and dummy. But after receiving an elbow to the gut by a reactive Lionheart, he caved into the boy’s demands.

Mineta was whipped toward you, bypassing a confused Uraraka who had given weightlessness to herself and Asui as part of their own mini plan to distract and surprise.

You had lifted your axe to swing down on another one of Todoroki’s ice masterpieces when you felt something strike your chest and latch on.

You looked down, weapon still raised, startled that Mineta had nuzzled himself between your breasts, inhaling the scent of your cleavage.

Mortification and rage flared within you.

You tried to rip Mineta off and strike him down. But he had literally stuck himself on with his quirk, determined to make the handfuls of flesh his new home.

“Mineta!” you snarled, dropping your axe and, with both hands, throwing the boy off you. His purple balls remained on your uniform but at least you had broken his contact with them.

He picked himself up off the ground, his face devoid of all emotion but serenity. You reached for your axe, determined to smash the little bug into the ground, but the boy held up a secret prize.

The headband.

A beat passed. Then another.

“Er... that’s a victory,” All Might’s voice said weakly.

Team D stood around Mineta awkwardly, unsure whether it was a victory worth celebrating. Uraraka and Asui appeared to be disgusted at Mineta’s tactics, Sero trying to hide a grin while Todoroki stood off to the side, staring uncomfortably.

“You.” You were pointing at Mineta, your rage evident.

Mineta was undisturbed, having finally reached nirvana. He had buried himself between an ample bosom and seen god.

Asui’s tongue lashed out, striking the boy upside the head.

Didn’t matter.

He no longer recognized pain.

You followed the students back to headquarters in shame, reaching to try and pull Mineta’s balls from your chest before Asui stopped you, warning that your hands would stick to them if you
touched them.

“They’ll be there for at least a day,” Asui informed the teacher privately, ending her sentence with a soft ‘ribbit.’ “He can’t make them fall off, they’ll have to do so on their own.”

All Might stood with uncertainty, waiting for their arrival. When they entered, you stood scowling while most of the class looked on with unease. Bakugou didn’t care -- was still enraged, stewing in the corner and counting down the minutes until the end of class.

“So you’ve claimed victory,” All Might said. “But by using undignified tactics. You’re heroes,” he stressed looking at Mineta. “As heroes, you should act nobly, no matter who you fight. Now, head back to locker room and change. Young Iida, will you escort Young Midoriya to Recovery Girl?”

“Yes, of course!” Iida proclaimed, nudging Midoriya who was staring at nothing.

“Brain damage,” Ashido repeated more earnestly.

You walked the students out to confirm they had all exited the cityscape and posed no risk of running back. Returning inside the headquarters, you saw All Might had deflated into Yagi, his costume hanging off his lanky frame.

“That was an interesting class,” he said with minor trepidation.

You groaned and rubbed your face. You look agitated as you removed your gauntlets and unclasped the wrist weights beneath them, all while you avoided touching the purple spheres on your chest.

“That was embarrassing,” you said, a mixture of anger and disbelief. “I should have been able to lay those kids out! Instead, they gave me a run for my money. I need to train more. If I can’t handle five teenagers coming at me, how am I going to save them if there’s another villain attack?”

“I think—”

“I’ll have to do weight training. More running. Get my stamina up. Why did I let myself get so out of—”

Yagi sighed as you started muttering to yourself, mentally preparing a workout regime in your head. But the slight annoyance he felt over your fretting dissolved as your rantings turning into fears.

“If they had seventy-something villains their last attack I’ve proven today I can’t handle numbers. I couldn’t protect Doll Might—”

“Doll Might!” Yagi cut in with humorous surprise. You were torn from your thoughts, realization coming to your face. You cracked a smile and walked over to the dummy. “Well, I named her Yamato but she also goes by Doll Might since she has a striking resemblance to a well-known number one hero. I thought of a whole backstory for her, don’t you worry.”

“Oh?” he said.

“Yamato here moonlights as an All Might impersonator,” you said with a wink. He flushed.

You momentarily parted ways to change out of your respected costumes, with plans to meet up your usual teacher’s lounge to go over the results of the class.

Mineta’s quirk balls proved to be a problem when it came to undressing, attaching to additional
fabric the more you moved. Disgusted with what they represented, you ended up rolling the bodysuit into a ball and tossing it into your duffle bag -- you'd deal with it later.

You were the first to the lounge and, with not much else to do, you began prepping tea for Yagi’s inevitable arrival. By the time he showed up, a cup was sitting on the table before him.

“Oh! Thank you.”

He took out his class roster and hesitated. You watched as you sipped your tea, mildly concerned. What was…

“I… I’m not very good as this teacher job,” he sheepishly admitted and you tried to fight the smile that threatened to spill across your face. When he glanced up, you noted the slight distress and your hidden smile disappeared. You put your tea down and reached into your bag, pulling out a notebook.

“In learning you will teach and in teaching you will learn,” you intoned. Yagi furrowed his brows at your sudden burst of zen. “It was a saying on the website I was ‘borrowing’ lesson plans from. Come on Yagi, most of the teachers here are just winging it. You’re doing fine.”

He seemed unconvinced but settled in.

“Aoyama,” Yagi said, the first student on his list. He opened his mouth, prepared to give his opinion on the boy’s contribution to the simulator, but found he couldn’t find the words or collect his thoughts.

Actually, he couldn’t recall the boy fighting at all.

Wait…

He blinked.

You too were speechless.

“I don’t… I don’t remember him attacking me,” you admitted. Yagi looked down at the table, thinking back to the video feeds of Team A. He had walked out of the headquarters with the team…right?

Wait…

Had he been in class?

You both decided to come back to Aoyama.

Chapter End Notes

Oof, Roses is my baby boi and also my problem child. I apologize for this chapter being late!

Anyway, just wanted to let you know that I love you all and I hope you have a wonderful Thanksgiving if you celebrate it! I am thankful for all of you -- seriously, reading your comments and seeing your responses to my stuff makes me giddy. I am
genuinely thankful for you all.
Yagi was staring.

The orange haze of sunset had settled across the sky outside the teacher’s lounge but neither of you brought any attention to it. You were on your phone and he was watching you, having not yet realized what he was doing.

You were… pretty.

You both had spent hours debriefing from your initial class together, going over the performance of each student and gradually falling more and more off topic. Eventually, you were just… talking. The sports festival, grading, homework, plans for the weekend, Aizawa’s personality…

Then the topic shifted to All Might and, like a sneeze, Yagi started to blurt out stories about his experiences because he was All Might – everyone loved All Might – and he had decades of material at his mental disposal.

*Not to mention it was a safe, comfortable topic.*

He was also goaded on by your reactions – you were an active listener, asking questions and laughing at all the appropriate times. It motivated him to keep going, to regale you with all the tales he had up his sleeve.

When he took a break from his storytelling to check his phone, he saw to his horror that forty-minutes had passed.

*Forty minutes!*

*He had just talked about himself for close to an hour!*

His inner All Might was pummeling his brain for being so thoughtless. Number one hero or not, *no one* wants to sit around and listen to a person talk about themselves. You must have thought he had an ego the size of a house, which is why he looked up to you – he was going to apologize for hijacking the conversation. For being so clueless and obtuse.

He should ask about *you*.

That’s when he caught you looking at something on your phone, smiling to yourself as your thumbs traveled across the glass screen, seemingly unbothered by his presence and unintentional selfishness.

You seemed so… pleasant. A good teacher. A lovely and kind person. You got along with your coworkers. You smiled often.

Which was perfect – you had such a *nice* smile. And beautiful eyes!

*Your body was soft in all the right places.*

*His hand on yours.*

*Panting in his earpiece.*
He liked you.

A blush blossomed across his face and he jerked his head away abruptly, ending his ogling, flustered at how nonchalantly his mind had dropped his... attraction to you.

“Oh!” Your voice broke the silence and his eyes darted over toward you. For some reason he was worried that, perhaps, you could read his thoughts. “Here, don’t forget our notes…”

Your voice trailed away as you caught a second look at the papers, seeing your own chicken scratch with outside eyes. He caught sight of what you had been working so diligently on during the course of your meeting and was surprised to see a Frankenstein mixture of kanji, kana and a few English words seemingly inserted at random.

Still, he didn’t hesitate to thank you for the assistance.

“Let me know if you don’t understand anything,” you said with a grimace, adding that maybe you hadn’t been the best person to take notes.

“Nonsense,” he said firmly. “You’ve been nothing but a help. Thank you.”

Silence deafened the room.

New topic? Yagi was staring at the notes you had given him, seemingly reading the words but truthfully he was trying to determine his next move.

Ask about her! Make a joke!

Talk about All Might!

No, don’t talk about All Might.

“So... to recap...” you had spoken up, sitting back on the couch and crossing your arms. His shoulders slumped at having missed the opportunity to be... charming. To keep the conversation rolling. “Divide Class A into two groups – the mostly-attackers and mostly-defenders. You’ll work with the attackers, I’ll handle the others. Should be a nice, instructional class, right?”

There were just some quirks, you had argued when you first floated the idea to him, that were made to be offensive and had to be twisted to be defensive. All Might’s quirk was like that – with his punches and jabs.

“We gotta teach them to throw a punch,” you had said. “But we gotta teach them how to block one too.”

He happily accepted your lesson suggestion. He didn’t have any better ideas, truthfully.

Internally, he balked at the idea.

When was the last time All Might had to go on the defensive?

Years.

A large yawn split your face that you half-heartedly tried to cover with your palm.

"It’s getting late...” you murmured, putting on a show to check your phone again to look at the time.

“It is,” Yagi agreed with a sigh, aware your one-on-one time together was coming to an end. The
night was over, there was no point in trying to prolong it.

He wanted to though.

*Ask her to coffee. Ask her to dinner. Ask her to dancing—*

Dancing? He was thrown for a loop by his own thoughts. When was the last time All Might went *dancing*?

No, he wasn’t going to ask you out.


*Smiling. Her on your arm.*

*Her arm clutching your arm.*

*Fingers intertwining.*

“Are you heading to the train station?” you asked, kindly interrupting his incessant inner voice. Yagi paused before nodding. “Want to walk together?”

Again, hesitation.

*You know you want to.*

He cleared his throat.

“… That would be nice,” he said with a tight, albeit friendly, smile.

You returned his smile.

And you did – you walked to the train together that night.

Yagi forced himself to ignore the breathy chuckles you released at his bad jokes or the slight side-smile you gave when he mentioned Young Midoriya for what had to have been the eighth time. Though, ‘ignoring’ your loveliness only led to his thoughts wandering…

Which traveled back to your voice in his earpiece, breathless and soft…

His Adam’s Apple bobbed sharply, an uncomfortable anxiety settling across him at the sudden hotness flooding his veins.

*You in his bed, arms twisted around his neck, hands in his hair.*

*Breathy whispers of his name—*

Your pace faltered when All Might materialized beside you in a burst of power, his sudden booming laugh making your heart leap into your throat.

"Sorry! Sorry!” He said through a clenched smile, sweat beading along his hairline when he noticed your reaction. “I just needed some… air!”

“Oh, *erm,* okay!” You were furrowing your brows at him, words on the tip of your tongue that never materialized.

You fell into a quiet walk beside him.
He was All Might. He was at his best. Nothing could trip All Might!

But the nerves–

*They were still there.*

“All Might!”

The hero turned to see a group of older teenagers waving at him, floored to see *the* All Might walking down the street so nonchalantly in civilian attire. Their cries were a call to arms – suddenly all types of people were crawling out of the woodwork, all eagerly approaching the number one hero to spend time in his presence, completely oblivious to the person who had been walking alongside him.

All Might stood barrel-chested and proud in the eye of the crowd, laughing and grinning, just as enthusiastic in interacting with his fans as they were at seeing him. There were requests for pictures, questions shouted out and general exclamations filling the air. Of course, he graciously responded to each request and call-out because he was *All Might* and that’s just what he did.

A too-happy woman gave the grinning All Might a quick kiss on the cheek during a selfie.

That’s when you popped back into his mind.

You!

With a start, he stood upright and scanned the crowd, trying to locate you in the writhing mass of people. It wasn’t a particularly large grouping – his heart sank when he didn’t catch your face amongst the gawkers.

“All Might, please! A picture?” A man cried up to him, waving his phone. All Might held up his hand, beckoning for him to stay calm.

“Of course, of course! Just a second…”

He was reaching into his pocket, retrieving his cell phone. He’d send a text to you and apologize for the swarm and being caught up in it. If you gave him ten more minutes, he’d finish up and sneak to an alley to change into his smaller form. Then you’d be able to continue your walk uninterrupted.

A text was waiting for him.

It was from you.

’*Didn’t want to hold you up, so I went ahead. It was fun today, see you in class tomorrow!*’

All Might’s disappointment was close to immeasurable.

You hadn’t even sent him an emoji.

---

You were thrilled when the students complimenting your quirk during the next English class you had with them. It had been far too long since someone had said such nice things about your abilities to the point you thought you might cry. Midoriya, one of the most vocal in singing your praises, was back to his normal self and showed no signs of a concussion or potential brain damage.

You were *so* relieved.
He was also the most interested in what your quirk was capable of, peppering you with questions on how your shield was powered, how your support items worked and whether you had the ability to transfer power to your arms and legs. You blinked, surprised at how perceptive he was.

“I’m going to be in your hero class later today,” you revealed as Midoriya scribbled away in a beat-up notebook, already preparing a page for you. “I’ll talk a little bit more about myself then. For now, let’s talk English and your new essay assignment…”

You lost the interest of most of the kids right away, which stung more than you cared to admit. The students in your other classes had no idea you had even demonstrated your quirk -- you were just still regular ol’Lionheart with your constant need for them to read and write things.

It wasn't your fault! That's how you teach language!

It was pathetic, really. You were legitimately looking for personal validation from a bunch of teenagers.

Did they think you were heroic?

Did you still have it?

No.

Those were thoughts you needed to smother.

All Might and Class A were waiting in the designated practice field that afternoon, having arrived moments before you did. You were wearing the same getup the previous day, sans the purple spheres that had been glued to your chest. Asui had been right -- they were stubborn things that hadn't budged off your costume. Luckily, you had a backup black jumpsuit stashed away that still fit.

“Hiya Miss L!” Ashido called, waving when she saw you walking up to them. You said your hellos to the students, save for Mineta who you fixed with a very pointed glare. With yesterday’s high wearing off, the teenage boy wilted a bit under your look, aware he may have fallen out of favor with you. Tremendously.

It had been worth it, though.

All Might was the one to explain the purpose of the class. He spoke with his usual bravado, detailing how that day’s class would be more of a workshop; some students would be with him, others with you.

Midoriya's hand shot up.

“Are you going to tell us about your quirk now, Miss Lionheart?”

You grinned, still thrilled over the interest in you -- in your quirk and your abilities -- despite the voice in your head telling you to drop it. Midoriya's question caught All Might by surprise, he had not planned for personal questions. Now they were deviating from the nice outline he had created on how he planned to introduce the class.

You felt him glance down at you, waiting to see what you would do.

“Of course!” you said, stepping off to the side to give yourself some room, more than happy to talk about your quirk. “You saw some of my abilities yesterday…”
With a flash, a bright barrier, roughly the size of a trashcan lid, appeared from a device wrapped around your left forearm.

“I was, er, am a defensive hero,” you said. “My quirk is energy projection. If I concentrate I can mold my body’s energy into something physical. Like a shield or…” In your free hand, there was a flash of light and a crude spear-like creation appeared.

Someone let out a low whistle that made you puff out your chest a little more.

“A weapon,” you finished. “What I can make depends on my knowledge -- swords, axes, spears, shields. The more I've made it, the better the projection is. I can’t make a rocket launcher or a machine gun -- nothing with components. Just smack ‘em weapons. Visually, right now, there’s a difference between my sword and shield. You see it, right?”

While your shield was smooth and crisp, with slight ripples traveling over the mostly-transparent surface, your sword was not as neatly defined. It was narrow and resembled a whittled stick more than a weapon. The edges were jagged, casting off sparks that dissolved into nothing, much like a downed power line.

The two creations disappeared as you lifted your left arm to show the students the device attached there.

“Energy is tricky to keep steady since it naturally comes in waves,” you said. "Although my sword can punch a mean hole when needed, alone its strength isn’t uniform. If I ended up in a fight and someone was to parry it, they could hit a weak spot and shatter the whole thing."

All Might furrowed his brows slightly as you babbled to the class.

You were being very open with your abilities.

Very open.

Was that... smart?

"If I’m trying to protect a group of people and I’ve got a shield with weak spots... it's just a recipe for disaster. So a support scientist created a couple of devices for me to help me keep things solid."

Midoriya was nodding along, concentrating on what you were saying and committing it to memory.

“This is an energy apparatus that I use for my shield generation. It’s a device that acts like a lightning rod and channels my energy into a central point. So when I go to create a shield, it’s solid and strong. There’s basically a metal nub that digs into the side of my arm. Mildly uncomfortable, sure, but it really helps me focus on where I want to send my energy. How big I want my shield just depends on how much energy I want to use. I can make it small, like just now, or big like you’ve seen out on the field.”

A hand raised hesitantly and you smiled, nodding to Ojiro.

“Won’t you run out of energy eventually?” he asked and you shrugged.

“Of course, that’s one of my drawbacks to my quirk. What I can do depends on my energy levels, my stamina. When I first was accepted into my hero academy, I could only hold a creation for maybe an hour before things would start to flicker. By my senior year and beyond, depending on what I was doing and the strain I was in, I could last hours. I trained to be more of a long-distance runner than a sprinter, if you want to think of it that way.”
“Shield and weapons created by energy,” Midoriya muttered, his thoughts racing through his mind as he tried his best to keep up with them. “She demonstrated the energy she creates is best channeled by focusing on support devices she uses, but if she’s able to create projections without support, potentially she could focus on different areas of her body and create from there? Though it would probably boil down to ease of use and accessibility. Using her arm for shield projection probably offers better stabilization instead of using a hand. There’s also the question of how much strain her shield can take. Wouldn’t she run into the issue of injury? Wouldn’t a hit push her back--”

“I’m dense,” you said and the teenager looked up to see much of the class looking at him in horrified curiosity. His hands slapped to cover his mouth.

“Think of it as my quirk part two, the cherry on top that made me an interest to America’s military. It’s not really super strength like what All Might has --” His ears instantly perked up “-- I can’t rip a bus in half. But if my shield is up and you throw a bus at me? I’ll still be standing and everyone behind me will be fine. A girl with a shield ability? That’s something a hero agency might want to recruit. A girl with a shield that can also take artillery fire and a couple rounds from a tank and still be standing and alive? Suddenly she’s a lot more appealing to the big-wigs.”

You created a shield again, lazily moving it back and forth, studying it.

“What is it that doctors say, humans reach their peak in their twenties? I think it’s true, five years ago I was probably at my peak. In ten years, I’ll be weaker than I am today. Take this as a sobering moment kids -- you want to be good heroes with long careers? Make sure you take care of your bodies and stay active. My quirk relies on my energy so unless I’m one of those tiger grandmoms you see running laps in the park, I may wake up one morning an old lady that barely has the energy to walk down a flight of stairs, let alone make a shield.”

You gave your creation one last thoughtful look before it disappeared and you turned back to your class. Your exhibition had taken on a depressing turn and the students were attempting to accept it.

“Well, that’s pretty much all there is about me, guys,” you said, holding up your hands. “I did some military protecting back in my heyday and, when I left school, I just never broke into professional heroism. But let me know if any military bodies in Japan, or elsewhere, approach you. I can be some guidance there.”

“I thought world militaries have focused on the creation of war machines to fight?” Tokoyami spoke up. You sighed, hiding your twitching fingers by crossing your arms.

“I wish that was the way the world worked, Tokoyami. But if you have one person with a quirk that can take down one, eight, ten machines at once, and their lifetime earnings are a fraction of what the government would pay to create a single machine… There’s always going to people in war. I don’t think we’ll ever break away from that.”

“Just one more thing Miss L…” Midoriya said, part curiosity and part wanting to change the subject. “When you punched me yesterday… are you also able to make your physical attacks stronger with your energy manifestation? Like punches and kicks?”

An impressed grin erupted across your face at Midoriya's question and you debated the best way to answer it.

“Here’s a lesson for you guys.” You spoke slowly, not wanting to reveal your entire bag of secrets to the crowd. “No one is ever, truly, a one trick pony. Keep that in mind if you’re ever fighting a villain. Even if their quirk seems obvious, and you think you’ve seen the breadth of their abilities, expect something else is squirreled away. And, as budding heroes, always think outside the box
when it comes to your quirks. It’s good to have a hidden talent or two up your sleeve that you can pull out when in dicey situations. That’s all I’m going to say about that.”

You shared a wink with Midoriya, whose brain was still churning, storing away the information.

“Thanks for sharing all that information about yourself Miss L,” Kaminari said with a studious nod of his head. He wanted to keep the momentum going. “Now, All Might, what about your quirk?”

The hero laughed, placing his hands on his waist.

“My quirk is to make sure you all turn into fine heroes!” All Might declared. “Now, let’s really get this class started. Ojiro, Mineta, Shoji, Kirishima, Tokoyami, Todoroki and Yaoyorozu -- you will be training under Lionheart today. The rest, come with me!”

You looked at your group, clapping your hands, hoping you were projecting a cool confidence.

“So, I wanted to specifically work with you guys because I believe your quirks are could build a decent defense. When you break out into the world of pro heroes, chances are you’re going to be working at an agency while you build up your reputation. Agencies mean working with a group and sometimes there has to be someone who can withstand some heavy blows to protect people.”

You broke the teens into parrying teams -- Kirishima and Ojiro, Tokoyami and Todoroki and Yaoyorozu and Shoji.

“Miss L,” Mineta called out softly, shrinking under your look. “What about me?”

“You Mineta,” you said, your voice soft and low. Dangerous. “You will run. You will run long. You will run hard. For this class, I want you doing laps around the field. If I see you break into a walk at any point, I’ll have Aizawa run you during homeroom too.”

He waited for you to tell him why he was running, how it would benefit his defense. But there was no explanation -- you just wanted to punish him. He bit his lip, hiding the tears that threatened to spill. This was no joke, Lionheart held no sympathy for him. With a shaky inhale he started his assignment.

“No cutting corners either,” you spat after the fleeing boy.

The teams alternated between attacking and defending hits, with you roaming to dish out advice. Mostly your pointers revolved around foot placement, proper stances and where to distribute weight when taking a hit. Kirishima easily took to your instruction, much to your glee. With Tokoyami, you found yourself addressing Dark Shadow.

Yaoyorozu was a special case for you. After the girl created her shield, you summoned your own barrier and stood beside her, allowing her to mirror what you were doing, though she didn't seem... self-assured. She was doing the motions and copying your moves but every strike Shoji unleashed on her, she would stagger back.

Your words weren’t landing with her. It was frustrating because you didn’t know why they weren’t.

For All Might, his part of class had dissolved into an almost battle royale, with everyone equally attacking and defending. As no winner would be declared, there was no reason for repeated attacks against one person -- it was all about getting a taste of different kinds of quirks and how to best protect oneself from them. He would call out instruction, praise and inspiration, only mildly scolding Bakugou when it looked like the boy was getting too rough.
He found his eyes wandering toward you, almost jealous of your more hands-on approach. You had pulled out your axe, lightly tapping at Yaoyorozu’s shield while pointing at her feet. All Might returned his attention to his group -- Bakugou was chasing down a crying Koda, Midoriya was attempting to dodge electricity and Jiro was walloping a queasy Aoyama with her earlobe jacks.

“Doing great everyone!” All Might called, unsure on how to even start to give feedback in a group so large with so many different personalities. With Midoriya it was easy; it was one-on-one and All Might had firsthand knowledge on how to control One For All. And his successor didn't need much instruction, per se. It was more about guidance.

How could he give feedback Kaminari and his electricity? Or Ashido and her acid?

It was easier to observe and critique.

Uraraka made Sato lazily rise in the air, though the field was quickly filled with his shrieking over a fear of heights.

“You can do it Sato!” All Might shouted as the boy turned to flailing in a desperate attempt to return to Earth. “Your body can easily take a fall from that height! Focus on keeping calm and landing on your feet when she releases you!”

He didn’t land on his feet when he finally fell, crashing back to earth in a moaning heap.

“Bakugou! Leave Koda alone, move to someone else! Young Midoriya, what did I tell you about breathing when running? In through your nose, out of your mouth!”

“Mineta!” All Might heard you snarl. “I know I did not catch you walking!”

He looked back to you -- your teams had switched roles again, changing who was on defense.

You weren't by your students though -- you were a bit further down the field, walking after your axe. It appeared you had thrown it at Mineta, who was back to running with gusto. You held your weapon over your shoulder, turning and noticing All Might's stare. Even from across the field he could see your smile. You were doing something with your hand -- oh, you were giving him thumbs up.

He returned the gesture and your attention moved from him back to your assigned students. His eyes traveled down to the way your hips moved as you walked, the slightest of sways, and how your suit melded with your body, displaying the soft curves of your--

All Might jerked away, teeth clenching tighter as blood bubbled up into his mouth, hotness rushing to his face at his less-than-heroic thoughts. He swallowed, batting away his feelings and forcing his mind back on his students.

Things were getting out of hand.

Stop looking at her like a piece of meat!

Bakugou had moved to Midoriya by that point, a clash All Might had been expecting -- it was actually surprising Bakugou had waited so long to launch an attack against his perceived lesser. All Might cleared his throat, disguising a bloody hack into his hand, before speaking up to cast some advice to Aoyama.

Aoyama nodding became much more pronounced as the teacher rambled on about pelvic thrusting.

Then, the poor boy couldn't take it anymore.
With a sudden heave, he was emptying his stomach on the grassy field.

All Might froze.

Goodness.

“I have a favor to ask…” you said as you watched the students leave the field at the end of class, the overwhelming majority battered and bruised. You were standing beside All Might, whose time was nearing a critical end. He turned to you, his hands still on his hips, waiting for you to finish your thought. “Will you punch my shield?”

“You want me… to what?” he said, eyebrows twitching into a slight furrow, his smile faltering the slightest bit at the stupidity that just left your mouth.

You rubbed the back of your head, embarrassed you had the courage to even bring it up. But, standing before you was the greatest and strongest hero of all time. A man who had no equal. His very punches were known to change the weather.

You wanted to feel him.

“I just want one good All Might punch at my shield,” you said. “I’ve blocked it all Yagi, outside of major bombs and nukes. It’s… I want to know what it feels like.”

"No," he said, smile still tight. "No, I couldn't do that. What if you got hurt--"

"Then Recovery Girl will patch me up! Please, we have our students throw themselves at each one another daily. You know this type of stuff happens all the time at agencies, too. I just want a good All Might punch. I want to feel what league you're in."

All Might did not need much more convincing, which actually surprised you. Maybe he wasn't as much of a goody-two-shoes as he let on? You thought your argument had been weak but apparently the man was susceptible to peer pressure.

He watched you take position, jumping from one foot to the next, shaking your hands to rid yourself of the odd giddiness that had taken hold of you.

“I want a good one,” you called to him before exhaling and calling forth your shield. You hunkered down, he watched, and your face became a mask of solid resolve. He would have to be quick.

In fact, it was ridiculous he was even playing into your request.

Stop. Be an adult. Walk away. This is NOT a good idea.

But he wanted to show you a fraction of what he could do.

He wanted to be a bit of a showoff.

He wanted you to be in awe of him and his abilities.

“Texas--” he began, pulling his arm back for his straight punch.

You didn’t hear him finish calling out his move, your brain more focused on the visual.

As the massive shockwave charged, you realized that your wildest estimates paled in comparison to the actual power All Might wielded. You didn’t have time to properly conduct the orchestra within you to change where your energy was collecting -- you did it in a rush, pooling everything you had
into your feet and shield, ignoring the aching feeling in your head at the sudden shift in your internal
dynamic.

Then, it hit you.

At the initial strike, you felt snaps and cracks in your forearm as his concentrated wind gust slammed
into your barrier with a bone-aching amount of force. You grit your teeth to prevent yourself from
crying out in pain as a red-hot fire shot up your arm and into your chest. Still, you continued to push
energy into your shield, crouching as you felt your body slide further back, the wind pressure
physically moving you.

The force seemed unending. The power was insane.

It was an entire army’s worth of ammunition pelting you at once.

Your stamina was failing, eyes were beginning to droop, exhaustion ravaging your body.

You could feel your toes leaving the ground as the world began to blacken, your body’s gas tank
broaching a bold red ‘E.’ Although you dug your heels into the earth, a valiant attempt to remain
standing, you were mentally preparing yourself for failure.

But there was no more.

It was over.

A slight breeze caressed your barrier.

What seemed like an eternity in your head had only been seconds.

All Might smile clenched tighter as he surveyed results.

Your shield, once so large and proud, had been nearly eradicated. All that remained was enough of a
cracked barrier to protect your body. Your face was ghastly white, eyes barely open. You were
panting, trying to come to grips with the fact the attack was over.

“Shit,” he muttered to himself, horrified that ego had gotten the best of him.

All Might had lowered his power output to maybe 60 percent and it appeared you had been able to
handle it, albeit barely. He walked over, gingerly holding out his hands to help you step up -- your
legs had been pushed back and dug almost a foot into the ground.

“I didn’t mean--”

“That was incredible,” you groaned, walking a few feet before stumbling. All Might was there to
hold out a steadying hand to prevent you from hitting the ground. “I’ve never felt anything like that.
Was that even your full power?”

“No,” he admitted after a brief hesitation. You gave a dreamy sigh, though the pain was starting to
break through your exhaustion.

“All Might,” you said softly. “What a fitting name.”

He waited to see if you would say anything else, but you were still. Just standing and breathing
with your eyes closed.

“You should head back,” you finally said, voice heavy with fatigue. “I don’t want you to get stuck
out here in the open when, you know...”

“You--”

“I’ll be fine,” you interrupted. “I just need a second. Go get changed, will you?”

Much to his dismay, you clumsily took a seat on the field, cradling one of your arms carefully against your chest. He ignored the thudding, throbbing pain in his gut signaling time was up -- you looked too much like a broken bird at that moment for him to just leave you.

*Oh no, what had he done?*

*He had hurt you.*

Irritated that he was still hovering, you opened your eyes. He watched as they slowly journeyed up his body, resting on his face as a sickly satisfied grin appeared on yours.

“Go,” you said, an ounce of warmth returning to your persona. “I’m more than okay. But I’ll be pissed if I have to try and distract the school from seeing the skinny man walking around wearing All Might’s costume.”

All Might stood over you for a couple seconds more before sighing.

"Please, just... wait here," he said, voice strained as his chest heaved -- he was trying to bury a coughing fit. "I'll be back for you. Let me go change into my suit. I'm *sorry*, I shouldn't have done that. It was--"

"Go, All Might. Stop your worrying, I'll be fine!"

*He was an ass.*

"I will be. Right. Back." he repeated. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have--"

Before he could finish, he was breaking out into a run to change out of his costume, already losing mass, growing more horrified at each passing second. You watched as the hero disappeared in another rush of power before falling to your back, gazing up at the scattered wispy clouds in the sky.

*All Might.*

Exhaustion had blanketed your body completely and your heavy eyes blinked closed without you realizing it. But your nap was light and very quick -- you awoke with a start, as if your conscious finally snapped back to attention, the agony of your broken bones finally cutting through the fog of your head.

*Get up and get yourself taken care of.*

It took a bit, but you managed to roll and unsteadily bring yourself to your feet using your one good arm. After trudging back to the main building, you stopped a student walking in the hall, who was horrified to see a teacher in such a state of disrepair, who led you to Recovery Girl’s Infirmary. You had to swear to the healer (and the older student who was tittering over you) that a villain attack wasn’t the cause of your injuries -- they had come about during a training class.

A half-truth that Recovery Girl accepted, though her face told you that she didn’t *believe* it.

It was the first time, you realized, that you had met the older woman. She was hospitable and talkative, though she had an air of no-nonsense as she berated you over the state of your arm.
Both your ulna and radius had been broken in several places, there was a fracture in your humerus, and you had intense bruising along your chest with a chance that your sternum had also suffered a hairline fracture.

*All from one punch.*

“Normally I can have these breaks healed up in a couple hours,” she said as she brought out a cart of supplies. “But I need to use the body’s stamina to heal them. Somehow, you’ve got almost nothing left. I’ll wrap your arm for now and send you home with some mild painkillers. Come see me on Monday and I’ll see what I can do then.”

Your bandages were almost cast-like and were wrapped up to your shoulder, completely immobilizing your left arm. A sling Recovery Girl fashioned kept it tight against your chest. You furrowed your brows when the woman brought out and began applying additional, unnecessary bandages to keep your arm against your torso.

In the end, most of your upper body had been mummified.

“Don’t get it wet,” she ordered before dismissing you with a handful of hard candies.

You stopped by the teacher’s locker room, sighing as you eyed your civilian clothes that were folded so nicely, waiting for your return. There was no way you could change now without undoing most of Recovery Girl’s work. Stashed under your arm were your left gauntlet and shield projector -- at least you had been smart enough to remove them prior to bandaging. You threw them into your duffle bag and, to keep things even, you added your other gauntlet to the bag as well.

It looked like you would be wearing your costume home from school.

“What happened to you!?” Mic said with surprise when you entered the staff room afterward. You still needed to add grades from your latest homework to UA’s reporting system before you would be able to go home and to bed.

“I broke my arm,” you said, taking a seat at your computer, your body melting into the normally uncomfortable chair. “And maybe my chest.”

“We can see that,” Aizawa muttered across from you.

“Now we have two recklessly injured teachers!” Mic said with a shake of his head. “Hero Mummy Man and his sidekick, Almost-Mummy Girl.”

You rubbed the back of your neck, mouth pulled in a ‘what-can-you-do’ line. Your eyes were heavy again and, with your arm secure and the pain minimal, the fog had returned to your head.

Aizawa watched as you appeared to type your login credentials with one heavy hand. Your head slowly bobbed forward as the key-typing slowed.

You had nothing left, your quirk had consumed every bit of energy you had stored away.

“Sleeping?” Mic whispered as softly as he could when he saw you hung over your keyboard, unmoving.

Aizawa didn’t respond, the bandages wrapped around his body masking his face as he continued his work. Mic gave you a once over before shrugging and returning his headphones to his ears, nodding along to the music as his attention turned back to his computer.
You slept through the appearance of Ectoplasm and Midnight, who tutted over her sleeping friend with concern.

“I’ll see if we can get a car to drive her home,” she said to no one in particular as she adjusted your form to keep you from falling sideways and onto the floor. “She can’t take the train home in a state like this.”

Then there was Yagi, who barged into the room in a panic, relaxing when he found your unconscious form, having finally found you. To his additional relief, it looked like you had sought medical attention as well -- when he had last checked, you weren’t with Recovery Girl and he had run off to search the grounds, certain you had been carted away in your defenseless state.

“You, do you know how she ended up like this?” Midnight asked as the blond gingerly sat at his desk.

“It happened during our… defense training class today,” he offered, praying Midnight wouldn’t ask any who’s or how’s. He released a relieved breath when she sat down at her chair with a ‘tsk,’ the dreaded questions never coming.

There was nothing like punching and injuring the woman you were interested in and having to explain to your co-workers that she wanted it.

He sunk lower in his chair.

You eventually stirred after Aizawa, Ectoplasm and Mic had left for the day. You shifted and groaned at the sudden stab of pain in the center of your chest, reaching for your phone out of your work backpack to check the time.

You had one message -- Mic had texted you a gif of himself dancing behind a DJ booth. ‘Feel better soon!’ he wrote and you felt a surge of affection for the voice hero, sending back your thanks.

“Sweetie,” Midnight called, seeing her friend awake. You looked up, having not realized she was there. “I’m going to have one of the school’s cars take you home.”

You frowned as you went to stand only to realize that you hadn’t gotten your grades in yet.

“Don’t worry about it, Mid,” you said, waving your good hand. “All I needed was a quick power nap. Besides, I have to submit grades and I don’t know how long it will take.”

Midnight frowned and glanced at the clock.

“I would walk you home--”

“Go,” you said, aware of your friend’s plans for the evening. Her date. “Have fun. Tell me about it later, okay?”

“I’ll text you,” she was standing and grabbing her things. “We’ll grab lunch this weekend.”

“On Sunday, I’ll be out of commission tomorrow.”

And then she was gone and you were alone.

With a sigh, you logged onto your computer.

The fatigue was making concentrating hard; you immediately pulled up your internet browser and were idly scrolling through news stories before you realized what you were doing. You wanted
to get things done -- you had five classes to get through.

The door slid open, deliberately soft and slow to keep the noise down. You watched Yagi slink in, a soda in hand, as he slowly closed it behind him.

“Oh!” he gasped with a start, finding you awake and staring at him with confusion. “I… I, er…” He was caught off guard by you being conscience. His eyes traveled around the room to where Midnight sat -- her chair was empty and her computer was off. Did she leave? Were they alone? What should he say? Were you mad at him?

Your laughter cut through the silence.

“Talking about packing a punch!” you said, face void of any kind of unhappiness though he caught a wince of pain. “Now I can only imagine what full power All Might is like!”

“How are you feeling?” he was approaching you, his hands out gingerly. You looked down at yourself and gave as much of a shrug as you could muster with your bandages.

“I’m a little beat up. Broken arm mostly, so nothing too bad.”

“I shouldn’t have done that,” he said, shaking his head, arms failing limply at his sides. “That was reckless and stupid--”

“I asked you to do it, Yags,” you said with a roll of your eyes.

He was caught off guard by the nickname.

Did you want to use a more personal name for him? Should he suggest it?

He felt a ball of anxiety form in his chest.

No, it had to be too soon, right?

Yagi forced the thoughts away -- he shouldn’t even be thinking along those lines. He wanted to keep things platonic, right? Safe?

“What are you hanging around here for anyway?” you asked. Yagi took a seat at his station.

“I wanted to make sure you make it home okay,” you heard him mutter.

“Come on now, you don’t have to do it. I know what stop you get off Yagi, you’d be going too far out of your way.”

“We’ll be in a car so it’ll be fine.”

“Oh, no, I told Midnight not to bother with the car. I’m taking the train home.”

Yagi shot you a clear ‘are you stupid’ look.

“It’s a free car ride,” he said incredulously. “It will drop you off right at your doorstep. It’ll be much safer--”

“It’s fine.” You spoke with a finality that surprised the older man. He looked over to you but you were staring at your computer.

He stared back at his soda.
“Okay,” he said. “Sorry.”

It was approaching dusk when you finally stood, work complete. You started collecting your things, shoving them in your backpack, sighing when you realized you still had to go claim your duffle bag out of the locker room. The train ride suddenly seemed like a stupid idea but you had dug your hole and had to commit.

Yagi, you noticed slyly, had also begun packing up.

“Oh, you’re heading out too?” you said, the humor dancing back in your voice. He nodded but didn’t look at you with a sheepish glance like you had expected. He seemed resigned. Tired.

_Goddammit._

“I’ll walk with you to the station,” you said, your voice still light. You wanted to fix this -- you had snapped at him earlier, hadn't you? It hadn't been anything personal it's just... you didn't like feeling... _useless_. “I just have to swing by the locker room and grab my duffle bag.”

Yagi looked at you with a frown, eyeing your decommissioned arm. You would have to carry a lot of things with one hand.

A hero couldn't leave you alone to struggle. So, he waited outside the women’s locker room as you grabbed your bag, which he promptly took in his hand when you struggled out. He was surprised at the weight of it.

“You can’t carry everything _and_ swipe your train pass,” he argued and your smile grew, enraptured by his decisiveness. At your look, his seriousness dissolved and he floundered lightly as he rubbed the back of his head. "Please, it's the least I can do."

"It's totally unnecessary... but I'd appreciate the company."

Yagi flushed.

Chapter End Notes

I can just imagine heroes, during their off time or when they're bored, showing their quirks off to one another, especially if they're working on new moves.

Please, you know All Might has gone up to people and asked them to throw their best at him, particularly when he was rowdy and in his prime. Because he's an excitable dork.
“Where are you from?”

You had just left UA’s campus, their conversation having centered on the day’s earlier hero lesson with Class A when Yagi abruptly asked the question. You blinked.

“The United--”

“I know that,” he stressed politely. “But where? Did you go to a hero school?”

“I lived outside of Washington DC,” you said. “Went to the ECA. East Coast Academy... for Heroes,” you added after you realized the school might be unknown to him.

Yagi nodded, thinking back the news article he had unearthed some time back. So that was you.

“I’ve heard of that school,” he said, a murky recollection popping up. “It’s a good school.”

“It’s not in the same league as UA, but it’s pretty respectable back in the US.”

“And you went into the military after.”

“Technically not military but close enough. What about you? Where are you from?”

Answer a question, ask a question. It’s how conversations worked. Why shouldn’t you do a little digging too? He let out a laugh that didn’t peter out into an answer -- it just kept going. Your brows furrowed but you couldn’t help the goofy grin that appeared at his blatant attempt to dissuade you from poking into his background.

“Alright, alright” you said, shaking your head and laughing at him, quickly catching on to what he was doing. “I won’t pry.”

He didn’t even offer you any kind of apology or a half-ass mysterious ‘I don’t take about my past.’ He just let the question fade to the background before disappearing from existence.

“Have you ever been to the United States, Yagi?” you asked, hoping that was an acceptable question. He nodded.

“A few times. Spent several years there back in the day.”

“Did you enjoy it? Your time there?”

“Of course.”

“Why the American city names? For your moves?”

He slowed at the question, tilting his head toward the darkening sky as he thought of a response.

*Wait, was he going to answer it?*

“Well, I loved American movies when I was a kid… I still do!” he said with a chuckle before trailing off. He glanced at you, debating whether to go deeper and caved when he saw how intently you
were watching him. So, you were genuinely curious. Or, at the very least, a very good actor. “I grew up reading all the old American hero comics. When I dreamt of becoming a hero, I would always think back to the superheroes I used to read and the virtues they stood for.”

Yagi looked at the ground, uncomfortable at sharing such a simple personal detail.

“So All Might pays tribute to America because it inspired him,” you said. You weren’t looking at him, but you could feel his unease. He was a private person. “I think that’s very sweet, Yagi.”

He relaxed, closing his slightly gaping mouth into a smile. He was looking ahead, taking in the serenity of the spring sunset.

He really did enjoy your company.

You both walked in comfortable silence, the train station only a few short blocks away. The streetlights had already flickered on, the sun had gone down. You couldn’t wait for summer and the longer, warmer days.

“Oh,” you said, suddenly struck by a thought. “I forgot to tell you, Midoriya aced his last English test. He had one of the top grades in Class A.”

Pride.

He didn’t answer -- he didn’t have to. It just had been a private comment shared for his information. A small boost to his mood.

“Are you hungry?”

Momentary good fortune had swelled in his chest, a strong optimism rising up that only the thought of Midoriya could produce. It was if All Might had burst into his own persona for that second, blasting away nerves and voicing an idea that had sprouted up as the smell of frying food carried through the air.

The surprise at the suggestion was evident in your face. He ignored the twitching of his gut, pushing away that dark cloud that usually trailed behind him, a constant hovering reminder of failures and fears.

“There’s that karaage stand you talked about--” You were close, you could see it. By the bottom of the train station with a dinner crowd already gathered around it. “We could stop eat, if you’re hungry.”

A flower bloomed within your chest and your face erupted into a clearcut, dazzling smile that made your eyes crinkle and Yagi feel a mixture of elation and shyness.

And guilt.

“Chicken would be wonderful,” you said.

“Good. Yes. Chicken.”

You kept sneaking peeks at the man beside you as you waited in line. His hair was messy, his face at rest was a scowl, his teeth were usually on display which further accentuated his skeletal appearance, and he walked with a hunch. But there was something about him that drew you in.

He wasn’t conventionally attractive but you would be hard pressed to find a more handsome man
than Yagi.

Blue irises, shining from within sunken eye sockets, flickered over in your direction. You watched his face morph from a scowl to surprise, then confusion to self-conscious discomfort.

You broke from your mild daydream with a start when you realized that, not only were you were openly *staring*, it was your turn to order. Quickly, with only one arm usable, you tried to dig into your backpack for your wallet as Yagi ordered on your behalves. You were too slow, too clumsy. He paid for the food, snorting a ‘tsk’ at your display and demanding that you stop your attempts -- he would cover it.

“It’s the least I can do,” he said before turning away, looking back toward the vendor.

You caught the pass of his eyes across your arm though.

_Ah. So he did feel bad._

_He shouldn’t._

When food was finally in hand, you backtracked to an empty bench, you balancing the fryboat filled with bite-sized chicken pieces on your lap, gingerly picking at them with unnecessary chopsticks.

Yagi watched your struggles before plainly suggesting for you to just use your fingers, but you declined.

You wanted to seem… dainty. You, of all people.

_You wanted him to like you._

Early season moths danced above your heads, all bathed under the yellow light of a lamp post.

“Today was a good day,” you declared once you figured out a good topic of conversation.

“Today was a long day,” Yagi answered.

“Well, I want my good days to be long.”

“That’s a positive mindset.”

“I should have brought a jacket.”

“Goodness, are you cold? You can wear my suit jacket--”

“No thank you. No honestly, I don’t need it. Oh no, Yagi, stop. Please sit down. I don’t need it. Please, I’m not going to wear it.”

It was a peaceful moment in time, accompanied by another silence that held no unease. You were just two people sitting on a bench stealing secretive glances at one another, simultaneously wanting to prolong the moment while also fearing it was dragging on.

“CHICKEN!!”

The shrill cry reverberated down the street, breaking your spell. You winced as your ears rang, a metallic echo jostling your brain.

“I’M NOT BEING LOUD! ERASER IT--”
The voice suddenly cut out, as if a microphone attached to a speaker system had been switched off. Both you and Yagi looked expectantly down the street, watching as two figures approached the train station. Mic was still chattering away while Aizawa hung back, his hair standing upright, a sign he was using his quirk to prevent Mic’s boisterous voice from bothering (or injuring) anyone.

Ah, apparently the two friends had stopped for some after-work beers.

It was Mic, rapping about karaage, who took notice of the two people on the bench. He squawked with excitement when he realized who the two people were.

Aizawa appeared to be uninterested.

“Long time no see!” Mic cried. Even in the night, they could see how flushed his face was and how loosely he moved. “Stroll in the dark, eh? OH! You have karaage~”

“Do you want mine?” Yagi asked, offering his barely-eaten dinner. Mic pounced on the offer, greedily inhaling the fried meat with his fingers.

“Did you two want a private moment?” Aizawa asked and Mic stopped gorging himself, looking at the two in a sudden new light.

You and All Might sitting on a bench at night.

You and All Might eating food together.

You and All Might going to the train station… together.

At night.

Then visions of previous interactions between the two of you danced in his mind -- his version of sugar-plums.

Sitting next to one another during outings.

Making lessons together.

Hosting classes together.

Ding.

“Are you two secret lovers!?” he cried in a harsh whisper, almost dropping his food as he pointed an accusing finger at the two of you. You went red, Yagi did his best to cover a heavy, wet hacking that had blood streaming from out the corners of his mouth.

Of course not! No! You had just stopped to get something to eat!

You both were answering in a rush, mortified. Aizawa closed his eyes as Mic gaped, your denials falling on deaf ears.

“Let’s go,” Aizawa said, his hair settling back to his shoulders as he released his quirk’s hold on Mic’s voice. The implication had startled the DJ enough that he was speaking conspiracies to Aizawa in a low voice to avoid being overheard as they left, no goodbyes exchanged.

You rubbed your forehead with your good hand, Yagi was fidgeting with the baggy sleeves of his suit.
It was a total high school moment. As adults, you should be able to talk through attractions, right? Admit that you like someone and deal with any potential rejection. Why did you have to pretend? What, was some unknown person going to make fun of you?

But your rationality didn’t hold up to reality. Truth was, there was something deeply frightening about telling someone you liked them.

Yagi wasn’t a passing stranger -- no, Yagi was a co-worker. Someone you would have to face every single day.

... Was it worth it?

Then Yagi was moving and you wondered if he was going to laugh off Mic’s childishness or, you know, confess. He sat straighter, releasing a deep exhale as he realized you were watching him out of the corner of your eye, undoubtedly dwelling over how pitiful he must have looked. Your chicken, he noticed, had been knocked onto the ground.

He stood, face set, and picked up the minor mess without a word. Then, he shuffled to a trash can, taking the time away from your presence to organize his thoughts.

You scrutinized Yagi’s back as he stood over the trash can, partially obscured by the night.

This was an unnecessary distraction. He had bigger things he needed to focus on. Priorities more important than himself. He couldn’t afford to become preoccupied with you.

You weren’t worth it.

“We should... head out,” he finally said with a pleasant smile when he returned to your bench. You blinked up at him, letting a few hopeful seconds pass before you returned with your own, forced, Stepford smile.

Was it lame that you were disappointed by his response to Mic’s accusation?

Rather, the lack thereof?

Course, you weren’t much better -- if he wasn’t going to address it, neither were you. That was a plainly obvious rejection waiting that you didn’t want to walk into.

Suddenly, you were very tired.

“Well,” you said, standing and reaching for your bag, fixing Yagi with a wry smile. “Mic sure knows how to make an impression, doesn’t he?”

Oh come on, after all that you couldn’t not address it. You had to lighten the mood somehow, poke fun at the whole situation. Otherwise, the worms in your belly would continue to wiggle and complain until time eventually dulled and stilled them.

Yagi seemed startled by the obvious callout, wide eyes blankly looking at you as he attempted desperately to search for a response. His inner All Might told him to flex and laugh -- mostly at himself. Maybe throw out a bad pun or two.

But... Yagi just nodded offering his own, tired smile, better adjusting your dufflebag that was still balanced on his shoulder.

“I’m a little worried about Monday,” he admitted. “Goodness knows Mic’s not...” he shifted his jaw,
looking for the best word. “... *Muted.*”

At that, you laughed. And it was real -- an actual, organic laugh.

“Muted!” you said, suppressing your feelings, doing your best to focus on the tangible relationship in front of you. A friendship you didn’t want to ruin or sully, despite whatever you were feeling. It was just a schoolkid crush that would pass. “That’s a good one.”

Relieved, Yagi offered a lopsided grin.

“I thought so too.”

Though you tried valiantly to get Yagi to get off at his regular train stop, telling him you could handle the rest of the ride with your bags, the hero would not allow it. He ended up walking you to your apartment door, respectfully declining your weak offers of tea as your overall fatigue was evident by then. You had exhausted any stamina regained from your earlier nap -- he watched as you rested your forehead against your front door while you struggled to unlock it with your one hand.

Once you and your bags were stowed inside safely, Yagi left with an awkward wave goodbye to head back to the train station and, finally, *go home.*

You crashed as soon as your body hit your bed, uncaring that you had only managed to kick off your boots and were still in your costume.

There were no dreams as you slept.

It was just recovery.

Sunday afternoon was when you finally stirred, aware of how hot you felt under layers of covers with no fan or window open. It was stifling, your body was stiff, everything hurt and you weren’t able to change into anything more comfortable or even *shower* thanks to the way your arm was bandaged.

You were also thirsty and ravenous. In order to create energy, your body needed fuel -- *food.* The influx of sleep and a lack of nourishment combined to create a disgustingly wicked hangover-like feeling that soured your general mood toward life. You were relieved to find Thursday’s cold leftovers still in the refrigerator -- they lacked any sort of sign that they turned. So you inhaled them, not bothering to heat them up, checking your phone while you shoveled as much food down your throat as you could. Only a handful of messages and some minor breaking news alerts awaited you.

Midnight had texted you about a possible Sunday lunch date the previous evening. You responded, apologizing for the delay and admitting that there was no way you could leave your house in the state you were in as you were in danger of passing out at random locations.

Present Mic had texted you several times. The first few were obvious conversation baits, a poor attempt at tricking you into talking with him. When several hours passed with no answers, he sent two more texts -- one fearing you were mad at him for outing your secret affair with Yagi, another promising that he had told no one else but Aizawa.

You would text him once your head felt a little clearer.

The last one from Yagi. It was a single message sent the previous morning asking if you felt any
You would wait to respond to that one as well.

You ate anything else you could find until your stomach was uncomfortably full.

Then, you passed out again until the cruel screech of your alarm pulled you from your dreams.

It was Monday.

Your entire weekend was over.

Gone.

That was it.

It was Monday.

You had work.

Oh god, you had work.

You were aware you looked like an utter mess as you shuffled to school that early morning. Despite your massive overindulgence in sleep, you had somehow ended up with angry darken bags under your eyes. You had also been unable to shower or change your clothes in your rush to get to campus to see Recovery Girl.

It was also raining, a fitting ode to your mood.

Recovery Girl gave you the good and bad news when you went to visit her -- the first stop you made when you got on campus. The older woman hadn’t even gotten a chance to take off her coat before you were there, asking to be seen. To be healed. Your stamina was high enough that most of your injuries could be healed -- the good news.

But it wasn’t enough to completely mend the multiple breaks in your forearm -- you’d have to visit later in the week. The bad.

“After that, any additional healing you’ll need to do on your own,” the elderly woman said with a final shake of her head.

But at least your mummification had been downgraded to just lower arm bandages and a sling. After stealing a trash bag from one of the school’s cleaning closets, you were able to take a quick shower in the locker room before your first class, painfully aware of how unprofessional your wet appearance was.

But at least you had on nice, clean clothes -- thank god you had the presence of mind to bring them with you.

It also helped that, on that particular morning, your first class was also scheduled to start on a slight delay due to a special homeroom announcement. What that ‘special announcement’ was, you had no idea, but you weren’t about to complain.

Fortunately for you, Class A was your first period on Mondays and Fridays. After fielding questions on how you had injured yourself -- “Don’t worry, it was an after-class accident! I’m totally fine!” -- Ashido was the first one to burst from excitement and blab on the grade’s exciting news.
“Hero names!” you said, your face lighting up, matching the expressions of most of your students. “And internships? Talk about an exciting morning for you guys!”

It wasn’t an act -- you were legitimately happy for them. Picking a hero name and getting that first on-the-job experience was a major highlight of hero high school. To witness it again, to feel the bubbling energy… it made you nostalgic for your teenagehood.

All of the students were eager to share their names, including Bakugou, who declared he had chosen Lord Explosion Murder. Though, he found himself gripping his desk in annoyed rage when Red Riot scoffed, pointing out that Midnight had rejected that suggestion.

“SHUT THE HELL UP DUMB HAIR!”

“We’re on our way to getting recognized by the world,” Can’t Stop Twinkling sang, ignoring Lord Explosion Murder’s snarling. Pinky squealed in excitement, her energy still high, starting a hero name roll call for your benefit.

“This is so exciting for you all,” you said once everyone’s names had been recited. “Remember all the great little moments like this. It isn’t a lie when people say these are the best years of your life.”

A few of your more intuitive students were looking at you curiously, hearing some layer of melancholy in your voice. But you quickly moved on from wisened words, bringing up a topic a majority of the class had hoped you’d forgotten--

“Now why don’t you all pass up those English papers!”

“Who assigns a paper during a sports festival?” Kaminari groaned as he passed up his work. Jiro looked over to him, hiding a teasing giggle in her hand as she imagined a short-circuited Kaminari sitting down to write several pages worth of ‘yay.’ Though he didn’t know what she was laughing about, the electric teen knew it was at his expense and shot a glare in her direction.

Eventually, the exuberance of Class A’s morning snagged, however, when it became clear their ‘normal’ classes would continue as usual, despite such an important homeroom moment.

Their hero futures had been put on hold in favor of an ever-important school subject -- English sentence structure.

Pinky sighed, returning to Ashido as she rolled her head in a small circle, doodling in the corner of her notebook while class ticked by ever so slowly. Even Bakugou had a far-off look in his eye, tapping his pencil on his desk as he daydreamed other hero names while you babbled on.

Seeing you had lost your students, you ended class early in favor of light discussions on internships. Most of the teens had already decided where they wanted to head to, but they had time to change their minds -- their final decisions weren’t due until the end of the day.

“Be sure to let me know what agencies you all end up picking!” you called before leaving to head to your second period -- English with Class B.

Class B’s elation levels over picking names and internships were on par with Class A’s, though you kept that information to yourself. Like their sister class, Class B also dissolved into a hero name roll call, though they didn’t appear to care as much when you also remembered to collect their English papers.

“I’m a little scared, Miss L,” Tsunotori -- rather Pony -- admitted to you raising a sheepish hand and speaking quickly in English.
“What are you afraid of?” you responded, concerned, in the same quick English. The rest of Class B fell quiet, eager to see if they could keep up and understand the two people talking in fluent English.

“What if I don’t understand what they’re saying to me?” she asked, sliding further down in her seat in shame. “I didn’t get any agency offers -- I’ll have to pick from the list. What if I mess up?”

“Come now, I’ve heard you talking to your classmates in Japanese. I think you’re just being hard on yourself.”

“I don’t know…”

“You’ll do great, Pony!!”

It was Tokage who had spoken up, catching enough to understand Pony’s fears.

“Yeah, don’t worry about it!” Tetsutetsu shouted, standing quickly and clenching his hand into a fist, fired up. “You’re a great hero and any agency will be lucky to have you!”

“Just tell them to talk really slow to you,” Monoma suggested, also attempting to boost his classmate’s confidence.

You gave him a wishy-washy shrug, unsure if he hit the same inspiring mark as his peers. But their positive words both pleased and embarrassed the girl, who muttered her thanks as she tried to hide her blushing face.

The English teacher was a comfort to Pony and vice versa. Although, during class, you would refer to Pony by her last name, during one-on-one conversations the Japanese social norms they paid heed to would fade away and they would chat freely.

The one slightly annoying thing about Pony was that you couldn’t lump her in with the rest of the class. She was on a different curriculum - one you had been forced to steal in its entirety off a teacher website. While the class was learning English as a second language, Pony was doing the typical English work of a western high schooler.

At least for the time being. You had been successful in petitioning Principal Nedzu about Pony’s education, though it had been done without Pony’s knowledge. Citing the unfairness of it all, you had suggested that Pony work with a Japanese tutor the next school term instead of sitting through an unnecessary English-language class. It would be better for her in the long run.

It would also lessen your workload, but you didn’t call attention to that.

That afternoon, after lunch and classes, you caught Yagi sitting clenched fist in the staff room staring at a black computer monitor. He wasn’t teaching his usual class in favor of additional homeroom workshops regarding internship selections.

He responded to your hello with a forced, tight-mouthed smile that made you stumble slightly -- he was shaking and sweating.

Had… something happened?

*Did he hate you?*

Cementoss looked up from his seat, catching your eye and shaking his head.

“What’s wrong?” you asked, ignoring Cementoss’ look, the fear making you feel mildly shrill.
“Nothing’s wrong!”

“Yagi, I can see the vein of your neck from here. There’s something wrong.”

“It’s nothing!” he said, contorting his face into a worry-free grimace that did not, in fact, look worry-free. Quite the opposite, actually -- it was filled with worry. He excused himself shortly after, leaving in a rush. Cementoss shrugged under your questioning.

“He’s been acting like that ever since he saw Midoriya Izuku’s offer this morning.”

“Offer?” You were secretly relieved, but the nosy-ness was still there. “For an internship?”

“Yes, an offer from some hero named Gran Torino. I haven’t heard of him, but apparently All Might has.”

You dismissed Yagi’s odd behavior at hearing that, assuming it was some simmering hero drama. Whatever it was, it couldn’t be that bad. Besides, it was just an internship offer that Midoriya could always decline.

Unless Gran Torino was actually a villain from All Might’s past who had sent Midoriya the offer as a taunt to All Might--

You pushed your kdrama thoughts out of your head and took a seat in front of Cementoss, a wicked glint in your eye. The hero stopped typing with a start and glanced around. You were the only two in the room.

“So…” you said quietly, eager to bury your romantic issues by pouncing on someone else’s. “How’d it go Friday night?”

Cementoss sighed and rubbed his face.

“Nemuri told you?”

“Have the flames of love been stroked once more?” you teased in an I’m-joking-but-I’m-also-being-totally-serious manner. He was embarrassed Midnight had blabbed to someone about their date.

“It went… very well. But you can’t say a word.”

You giggled and clapped your hands, though you settled down when he sent you a dark look. Zipping your lips, you held up your hand silently telling him that, on your Girl Scout’s honor, you wouldn’t blab.

But Cementoss and Midnight weren’t the only ones who had a relationship they wanted to keep under-wraps.

“Lionheart!”

Present Mic’s shrill and sudden, loud entrance made the two of you jump. He was standing in the doorway, having ripped the door open, hurt on his face.

“Why are you ignoring me!?”

Oh no.

You stumbled to your feet, suspiciously ushering him out of the staff room and away from Cementoss’ obvious curiosity, safely hiding away in a teacher’s lounge you hadn’t used before. You
went to explain how you had been asleep most of the weekend and that’s why you hadn’t responded to his texts, but it was Mic who stepped forward first, putting a sympathetic hand on your shoulder.

“Love,” he said solemnly before looking out the window, gazing into the distance. “Love is burning thing.”

“Please don’t do this,” you groaned, good hand reaching out to try and settle him before he got too carried away. “It’s honestly not what you think--”

“And it makes a fiery ring.”

“Mic, all he did was walk me home because he broke my arm.”

*That* got his attention.

“All Might broke your arm?”

The flabbergast was apparent and you groaned again, afraid Mic was going to walk away from the conversation thinking All Might was a secret woman beater. It looked like you had to be very specific with him.

“I convinced him to take a punch at my shield to see if I could block it and I couldn’t. He felt bad, even though it was my fault, and made sure I got home okay. That’s it. There’s no secret love affairs. Nothing. Just him being a good person.”

Present Mic blinked before releasing an exhausted exhale.

“Why didn’t you say so!?” he said, immediately bursting into his usual good-time persona. “I’m thinking I’ve got to keep the world’s biggest secret -- turns out it was just a playground accident! It’s been eating away at me all weekend! You *were* right Eraser!”

Of course he was there, you thought, turning as a figure clad in a yellow sleeping bag rose from behind the room’s couch.

At least he looked human -- his bandages had finally been removed.

“The teachers in this school are just as bad as high school students,” Aizawa grumbled, unamused by yours and Mic’s conversation. Mic drooped an arm over your shoulder, though he was surprisingly considerate of your injury, and tsked at his friend.

“You’ve got to lighten up, man! You should be taking an interest in the personal lives of our listeners! Otherwise, they’re just going to end up thinking you’re the school groucher.”

That was the first time you saw Aizawa smile, though it looked a little… off-kilter.

He wanted to be known as the groucher.

---

Fate was on your side. Yagi hadn’t returned to the staff room that afternoon and, still feeding into that internal teenager with a crush, you considered hanging around the school in an attempt to, ‘by chance,’ bump into him.

Until you realized that was a little weird and you were an adult.

No, you would go home at a normal time. There would be no weird mild stalking. You wouldn’t
feed into any crushes. You would just treat Yagi Toshinori like a regular co-worker.

You had rounded a corner, legitimately visiting the vending machine for a can of coffee, when you noticed Midoriya walking several steps in front of you, disappearing down a set of stairs. You thought nothing of it--

Until All Might appeared beside you, stepping out from a hallway leading to a bathroom and making you twitch away in surprise.

“Oh!” he said, caught off guard by your appearance as well. “... Hello!”

He was sweating and shaking, you realized. All Might. Thinking back to your earlier fear about this Gran Torino character being a villain, you sighed and herded him back into the same bathroom hallway he had been obviously talking to Midoriya in.

“This leads to the men’s room,” he tried to explain but you cut him off.

“Are you in trouble?” you demanded.

The question surprised him enough to settle his shaking.

“Trouble?” he repeated, genuinely confused. “No, why would I be in trouble--”

“Cementoss told me about the offer from Gran Torino.” Upon hearing the name, the sweats and shakes were back, his face showing obvious signs of fear. “See! Yag- All Might, is he threatening you or Midoriya? Is this a villain--”

“A villain!” he exclaimed, his turn to interrupt you. “He’s not a villain! He’s... he’s...”

With a groan his shoulders sagged and, he leaned closer to you.

“Gran Torino was my mentor,” he said through clenched teeth.

“Mentor,” you said, stepping back and staring at him. The concern melted to irritated relief. “Mentor! You’re this afraid of your own mentor!?"

“He was a very... hands-on mentor,” All Might said in a strained voice, flashbacks to training sessions thundering in his head. He could still see the ice in the man’s eyes, could feel the wallops on his arms, chest and torso.

Oh no, his legs were trembling again.

You were legitimately concerned for the adult man in front of you -- this was not normal behavior. Not a normal reaction.

“All Might did he... Are you...” you trailed off, unsure what to say in such a delicate situation. You tentatively reached out and rubbed his arm in an attempt to comfort him. “Midoriya doesn’t have to go, there are plenty of other agencies he can intern at.”

All Might sighed and rubbed his forehead, desperately trying to get ahold of himself.

“It’s up to young Midoriya,” he said, his hand still hiding a good portion of his face before looking down at your touch.

You jerked your hand away, laughing awkwardly.
You left him in that hallway after he silenced you by kindly, but sternly, telling you he was fine. Though he was nice enough about it, the dismissal did hurt your feelings. Perhaps you had overstepped a boundary in trying to console him? You left school soon after, scolding yourself at how addled your brain had been lately.

Seriously, thinking about walking around school to try and ‘run into him?’ That was a bit much.

Unfortunately, you wouldn’t have your students and classes to re-engage your focus -- all of the first-year students, from heroics to management, were participating in their first internships at agencies, businesses and laboratories across Japan. Monday the students had selected their choices, Tuesday the agencies were notified and, come Wednesday, they would all be shipped off for a week.

*Talk about a short-timeline, god.*

“I’m not going,” Hatsume informed you, sitting on her desk with a mad twinkle in her eye as your Tuesday English class with the first-year support students came to an end. “I’ve got too much work here. So Power Loader said I can be his intern. I’ll be down at the development studio for the week.”

“I might stop by,” you said, thinking about your suit pieces. “I’ve wanted to see what can be done to update my suit and now that I’ll have the time--”

With surprising speed, Hatsume bolted so she was standing in front of you.

“You have to come down! I’ll create the perfect babies for you!”

… *Babies.*

Ignoring the girl’s closeness, you awkwardly promised you would try. With your students gone, what else would you be doing?

You weren’t the only one who had reservations of life without students.

“It’s gonna be the woorst,” Mic complained, sprawled in his computer chair as he rolled over to where you sat in the staff room. You were happily typing away, for once ahead of schedule when it came to grading, and generally ecstatic to finally have full use of both your arms thanks to another visit to Recovery Girl. “Workshops. Every day. Workshops. No leaving. No vacation. No fun. So booooring.”

“It’s a job,” Aizawa said from his chair. “Did you expect it to be fun?”

“A job at a hero school! Hero school is fun!”

“You and I have very different memories of school,” came the monotone reply.

“We’ll have plenty of team building time after school though,” Midnight sang.

“Not every day,” you piped up. “My liver wouldn’t be able to take it. Plus, I’d like to have a savings. While you guys have your pro hero side hustles, some of us have to rely on just a teacher paycheck.”

“You can always work as a hero... We can start an agency!” Midnight said, pushing out from her desk and standing up. You gawked before furiously shaking your head at the idea. “Come work with me! Be my sidekick!”

Mic had dissolved into quiet giggles imagining the strange sight of Midnight and Lionheart standing side-by-side and over a pile of defeated villains.
“No thank you, I’m more than happy living my life as a civilian.”

“What workshops are we having anyway?” Ectoplasm asked. “I know there’s one on active learning techniques and another on facilitating media relations.”

“I didn’t look at the schedule,” Mic said with a wave of his hand. “I wanted them all to be a surprise. Inject some fun into it.”

“Will you be here?”

Aizawa had posed the question to a quiet Yagi, who looked at his colleague thoughtfully.

“Yes, I’ll be here.”

“The entire week?”

“Yes, I hope to be!”

Aizawa seemed unconvinced that Yagi would be in, returning his attention to his computer with a ‘tsk.’ He seriously doubted All Might would have the resolve to spend an entire week -- including his usual days off -- sitting in a room learning about teaching. The man was normally a rarity around the school.

But Yagi was unperturbed or, at least, acted like Aizawa’s skepticism didn’t bother him.

Frankly, All Might’s power was dissolving by the day and Midoriya's future was more on his mind. But it wasn’t just Midoriya that he had to worry about, he had been realizing. More than one student was looking at him for guidance. And with Gran Torino obviously doubting his teaching abilities…

Well, how could he turn down free teaching workshops?

“At least there won’t be any grading,” you said, rolling your shoulders and grinning over at Mic. “Or homework. So it is like a mini-vacation.”

“Meaning we get out of school on time?” Mic said, his ears perking up. “I do like the sound of that. Means more airtime for me!”

He was standing now, the radio special ideas circling around him.

“A weeklong extended Present Mic Radio Spectacular taking over the airwaves near you. A triumphant—”

“And temporary,” Aizawa muttered

“-- return of the voice hero with a heart. A cool educator rocking the school system with his fresh moves and take on teaching, returning to his loyal listeners who have gone too long without the sound of his voice! AW YEAH! PUT THOSE HANDS UP PEOPLE! ADD MIC BACK TO YOUR EVENING WEEKDAY SCHEDULE!”

“A event of heroic proportions,” Ectoplasm said, humoring Mic who erupted into finger guns at him, digging the subtitle. Midnight rolled her eyes, Yagi had also paused his work, idly smiling as the voice hero continued his ravings.

“No show on Friday,” Midnight declared. “Friday will be another teacher night out.”

“Karaoke?” asked the ever-hopeful Ectoplasm.
“I’ll go to a happy hour but I’m not doing karaoke,” you said. “I’m gonna bail before that point.”

“But why,” Midnight whined, walking behind you and wrapping her arms around your upper body, swaying you back and forth. “Karaoke is the best way to bond with your coworkers! Your fellow teachers!”

You sighed, pulling out of Midnight’s weak embrace. You had walked to the doorway. Obviously, something was on your mind. Should you tell them? Or should you keep it quiet?

“It’s because…” you were hanging your head solemnly in the doorway, pulling the door slightly in and out of its opening, keeping your focus on it and not the room. All eyes were on you, waiting for the apparently dramatic admission. “I was a secret popstar back in the US and I’ve sworn never to sing again. I just want to leave that life behind.”

The room was looking at you, surprised at the new nugget of information on your origin story.

“Woah,” Mic said, tilting his sunglasses down to look at you. “Seriously?”

You snorted, staring at the teachers incredulously.

“No, of course not!” you said, a wicked smile on your face. Seriously, they were going to believe that!? “I just don’t like singing off-key in front of people!”

Your laughter could be heard down the hallway as you left to head to the vending machine, your third visit of the day. You had clearly become addicted to the canned coffees stocked there.

Yagi looked back down at his work, a slight smile twitching on his lips while Present Mic sighed.

“Bummer.”

Mic had been incorrect. The bummer wasn’t that Lionheart didn’t possess a secret pop star background. The true bummer was the workshops Nedzu had set up for the teachers while the students were on their internships.

Perhaps it was because the principal was the only one who had overseen the material that would be covered, but they were terrible. Instead of an active dialogue between educators and professionals, the workshops were long lectures with material so dense that not even Thirteen could point out the positives by the second day.

“We need a vice principal,” you hissed to Mic during your lunch break Thursday. “Someone to keep Nedzu in check. This isn’t education. This is torture.”

“I have no idea what we did yesterday,” Mic answered, attempting to match your volume but failing. “I sat in one lecture for three hours. I don’t know what it was about. This is killing me. It is literally killing me that people can be this boring. Where’s the spark? The entertainment? They should be ashamed of their failings as presenters!”

By the end of the week, feeling particularly brave and seriously believing a scolding from Nedzu would be preferable over being stuck in a three-hour lecture on the ‘passive mind,’ you skipped your educational obligation.

Instead, you took time to visit UA’s development lab.
“How’s the learning going?” Power Loader asked with a lighthearted sneer, chuckling at the glare you fixed him with. You made your way to a table near the center of the room, depositing your dufflebag on it as the innards clanked together.

Due to his sole intern, Power Loader had been exempt from the workshops in favor of helping Hatsume. While the rest of UA’s teaching body wasted away in classrooms, he was happily tinkering in his studio watching television and doing whatever else he usually did. You said as much to him, which Power Loader disputed.

“But my intern is Hatsume,” he argued.

You understood his infliction. The girl was an obvious genius, even her English was superb. But she played into the stereotype of a gifted, but strange, inventor. You had no doubt that Hatsume would change the world someday but it might come at the cost of personal relationships. For now, the only bonds the teen needed were with her ‘children.’

“I heard my name!” the girl stuck her head in from an adjacent room and gasped. She -- literally -- rocketed over, gleefully showing you the devices on her feet.

“Rocket boots,” she said as she posed. “Version 4.0. My earlier babies packed too much power at initial fire up and were slightly unstable if you didn’t account for the kick but these--”

A wrench struck Hatsume in the chest and you choked, looking at Power Loader in horror.

This… this was an issue.

“Oh she’s fine,” Power Loader said, ignoring your face. Hatsume had bounced back from the physical abuse and was eagerly opening your bag, ruffling through your possessions without care. The invasion of privacy was just as startling as the physical abuse at the hand of a teacher, but the feelings changed to indignation when you witnessed Hatsume’s face twist in disgust.

“What are these?” the girl said, frowning as she pulled apart the pieces of bronzed armor. “Did you seriously wear this?”

“Well yes-”

“Whoever made this should be shot.”

“Hey,” Power Loader called from his own creation, waving a screwdriver threateningly. “What did I say about threats?”

Seriously?

“These are antiques,” she pushed them away. “I can’t work with these. They need to be tossed in the garbage.”

“That’s my-”

“But lucky for you, I have some babies that might be right up your alley. Look at this wingsuit I just fashioned up -- I added a minor propulsion system that will get you airborne and keep you there. Or! This is better-- a glove that can shoot out synthetic netting, perfect for villain capturing!”

“I don’t do any of that Hat-”

“Actually, have you considered going the rocket boot route? What shoe size are you? Your feet are a
bit bigger than the average woman’s size--"

“Not in America!” you snapped.

“Yeah, look at that, there’s no way you can fit in these. I’m going to have to make you a pair--”

A well-aimed screwdriver struck Hatsume in the side of the head, stunning her.

“He attack,” she said, slightly dazed, as you pulled your foot from her iron grip.

“What did I say about talking to customers?” Power Loader called again. “You can’t just shove your junk down their throats.”

“Not junk!” Hatsume said, horrified that he would use that word. “They’re my babies! Beautiful creations that will change the world!”

“Listen, I don’t need rocket shoes or web guns. Some of my costume pieces don’t fit anymore so I was hoping to get them expanded.”

“That I won’t do,” she said with odd clarity, shaking her head at a stunned you. She lifted a breastplate and turned it over in her hands. “These are far too old. It would be a waste of time for me put work into them. It’s time you upgrade.”

“Now Hatsume, this is my armor,” you argued, taking the chest piece in your hand and holding it against you protectively. “This is a part of Lionheart, part of my identity. To lose or change that would be… it would be… sacrilegious!”

Power Loader’s interest had been peaked and he appeared beside you, taking another armor piece in his hands and examining it. He sighed.

“Listen, I have to side with the girl on this one. I’ve seen costumes with this kind of shock absorbing and adaptive metal back in the day and it was some quality stuff. But times change, quirks get stronger. This won’t protect you. This is just going to become the tin can paramedics have to pry you from after the fight.”

You looked at your chest piece.

“We’re not gonna melt it down,” he argued, tossing the arm brace back on the table. “You can keep it and, I don’t know, pray to it nightly. But you’re due for an upgrade. We can’t, in good conscience, let you keep on using this.”


“My first hero fitting!” Hatsume squealed, clapping her hands as she -- again, literally -- rocketed back to her station to grab her notebook and measuring tape.

“Why were you interested in trading in any way?” Power Loader asked as they watched Hatsume. “You planning on going pro?”

“This villain business is still fresh on my mind,” you said and he snorted, assuming the breach was the last time villains would get into the school. “And, I don’t know, being around heroes… It’s getting me amped up. Maybe I should make a better effort to be more, you know heroic.”

“Hey, whatever you want to do is your business. But I’ve got some paperwork I’m going to need you to fill out. Teachers have to submit proposals and request forms just like students and I’m gonna
need to take a copy of your hero license -- you have an up to date one, right? I assume you do, to get a job here. I think it’s still a requirement…”

“I’ve never let it lapse,” you admitted, following him to a nearby desk.

Hatsune was chattering away about her plans for a modern set of hero armor as she circled around you, taking measurements and writing down little notes to herself. But before Hatsune got too excited, you were able to calm her down enough to explain the symbolic importance of Lionheart’s armor. You showed her an old picture you had on your phone of a fresh-faced, just out of high school Lionheart in full armor posing with her axe over her shoulder.

“I’m a defender,” you explained. “People need to see me as their protector.”

Hatsune glanced at the picture before zooming in on your weapon and shield.

“These… tell me about these.”

So you did, going so far as to demonstrate them to your audience, explaining how the devices worked. The young inventor was eager to get her hands on them, asking about the metal nub that dug into your arm and how you were able to feed energy into each device.

“So it’s like conducting electricity,” Hatsune breathed to herself, mind awash with a million ideas she would have to whittle down. “And this axe -- are you set on a axe? What about a sword? Hammer?”

Hammer? You mulled over the suggestion but cited previous issues you had with weapon choices; the goal was to disable villains, not dismember them.

That was also an interest to Hatsune, who was suddenly struck by a second wind of enthusiasm.

“You don’t understand,” she snapped at Power Loader after he complained that his intern had already spent too much time with you and was slacking off on her assigned work. “We’re talking about creating a suit that can pull on the user’s energy. A direct connection between a costume and quirk. My first! Not only that, but a shield generator and a hammer!?”

“Well, at least try an axe first--”

“This is the full package! I will be creating not just a baby but an entire family!”

Before leaving, you stressed again the importance of Lionheart’s costume and how you didn’t want it to stray too far from its roots.

“And it would be great if you kept it bronze colored,” you added, a request which Hatsune snorted in disgust at. The teenager preferred sleekness when it came to her designs, bronze was too antiquated.

To get an idea of how your support devices worked, you were forced to leave behind the older model of your shield generator and your collapsed axe. As that axe was the only working one you had left, you would be without a proper weapon for the foreseeable future.

Hatsune had also wanted the compact shield apparatus you had taken to wearing daily, as it was newer, but you wouldn’t acquiesce to that. Instead, the teen had settled on taking nearly a thousand pictures of the device at conceivable every angle.

“I’ll email you when I’m done,” was the only timeline she gave up before disappearing back to her
other room with what was the essence of Lionheart.

“Now I am looking forward to drinks later,” Power Loader said tiredly as the sound of crashing metal reverberated around their studio.

Chapter End Notes

I didn't forget about Roses, don't you worry! Sorry guys, I've gotten backlogged with my work -- not just with Roses and Attachment -- so I've been running to catch up. Not to mention I'm changing the timeline of things I had planned in this fic, which was grounds for some major rewrites. I think I'm going to change my chapter posting schedule on all my fics to give me a better break (so I don't lose my mind), but I'll let you know once I finalize it. Until then, I hope you enjoy the chapter and the next update won't take another month.

And check out my Twitter [NSFW] if you want to shoot the shit with me. With Tumblr sacrificing all NSFW content to help bring the end of days, I've been hanging around Twitter a lot more. Posting stupid things. Acting a fool. You know, the usual.
The call about Stain came on Sunday evening.

You had just finished demolishing some of those low-calorie frozen meals you had stashed away in your freezer when your phone started vibrating across your coffee table with an explosion of messages. Before you had a chance to check what all the buzz was about, your phone screen flashed, changing to show an incoming call from Ectoplasm.

“There’s been a situation with some of the students,” the hero said calmly after pleasantries were exchanged. “You know that Stain fellow, the guy that calls himself the hero killer? He attacked three students and a couple of heroes. Everyone is alive but some are hospitalized. Stain is also in custody.”

“Shit,” you said, plopping onto your couch, staring blankly at the wall.

“Yeah. I know,” Ectoplasm said, his voice changing with a sigh, revealing how tired he truly was. “Nedzu said we aren’t going to end any internships early, so the students are still due back Wednesday. I’ve just been working on getting the word out.”

“How bad are the injuries?”

“Dunno. I know the three students involved were all from Class A: Iida, Todoroki and Midoriya. I don’t know any of the pros. It only happened an hour ago, so I’m sure we’ll know more by tomorrow morning.”

“Thanks for telling me, Ecto,” you stressed. “Keep me updated, yeah?”

“Promise. G’night.”

The teacher chat was what had made your phone come alive with activity -- everyone was chiming in for a status update or dropping an attempted mood booster.

You bit your lip -- one name had yet to pop up with a response.

But the kids were all okay, you reminded yourself. And they caught the bad guy.

It was all okay.

Right?

You slept like a log that night.

Yeah, you felt guilty that you didn’t stay up fretting all night over your injured students, but a general lack of sleep, coupled with sleeping pills and a quirk that basically ate energy finally caught up with you and you were out.

But your thoughts were on the injured boys when you awoke for work Monday.

Nedzu had sent out an email to the staff in the early morning hours officially informing everyone of the internship situation. There were no additional details, but he did call a morning meeting in place
of a morning workshop, which were still going on. With not much to do, and somewhat anxious, you arrived at work early.

In the staff room, you saw Thirteen and Ectoplasm had a similar idea -- they were sitting, working at their computers trying to pass time until the meeting.

“Haven’t heard anything since last night,” you told Thirteen after the hero inquired whether you had brought any news.

“Aizawa has been the one in communication with Nedzu,” Ectoplasm said. “He’ll be the one with updates. Or Mic -- he was the one that disseminated the information last night.”

“Talk about an eventful school year,” Thirteen muttered. “First the USJ attack and now Stain? There have been incidents before but nothing like this and so close together.”

“There’s been times in the past where first-years have gone against villains during their first internship,” Ectoplasm explained when he caught sight of your curious look. You took a seat beside him at Mic’s chair. “It’s part of the risk.”

Over the next hour Midnight, Snipe, Cementoss and Vlad King arrived. Only Midnight had a sliver of new information -- it had been professional heroes that brought down Stain and the three students had been injured in the fray. They hadn’t been specifically sought out by Stain.

So the students hadn’t been his targets? Relief cascaded around the room, all collectively releasing the breath they had been holding. The air was lighter. Their kids were fine.

They had just been caught in the crossfire.

“Why so down in the dumps, everybody!?” Mic declared before even walking into the room. “Everybody is A-OK!”

“No one is down in the dumps,” Midnight called, her eyes not leaving her computer screen.

Mic frowned, caught by surprise at the sight he walked into -- instead of being huddled together and worrying, the teachers were settled and doing work like it was any other Monday. Unbeknownst to him, he had missed the earlier discussion the teachers had to sort through their feelings. You relinquished his seat and returned to your station.

“I’m still mad at you, by the way,” you heard Midnight say to Mic. He plopped into his chair, spinning it before settling in the direction of Midnight.

“What? Why?”

“You had me and Aizawa walking around for hours Friday night, Yamada. All because you wanted to walk off like a drunk fool.”

“I was fiiiiiiine,” Mic said. “Just needed some air. Just so happened my hero senses pointed me in the direction of crime. Can’t help it!”

He was looking at her smugly. Though he did not recall any of the events that occurred Friday night after the bar, he awoke Saturday to find out he single-handedly brought down an exotic animal ring after wandering off from his friends. He got enough details from the police to know he had saved the day and that was all he needed.

Midnight glared at him.
The door to the room slid open and Aizawa was there, empty protein pouch in his hand.

“Meeting is starting soon,” he grumbled before disappearing.

The sound of shuffling papers and moving chairs could be heard as the room’s occupants shifted to follow their forever-exhausted co-worker.

Yagi was already in the conference room, you noticed you entered. It appeared he had his own private meeting with Nedzu and was already sitting at the other end of the conference table, scowling, staring at the varnished wood in thought.

You took an empty seat next to Aizawa.

“Good morning everyone!” Nedzu said as sweetly as ever, looking at his colleagues. “Quite a fretful couple of hours it’s been, hasn’t it?”

No one answered him but his voice did stir Yagi. He blinked first at the principal before realizing the room had filled up with other people.

“As all of you have heard by now, there was an incident last night in Hosu involving several students from Class 1-A who were participating in their first internships. The investigation is still ongoing but it looks like these students were involved with a villain known as Hero Killer Stain,” Nedzu began, looking around the room. “Stain was eventually apprehended by heroes -- it looks like credit is being assigned to Endeavor, though there were two agencies and a solo hero on scene. They had been dealing with other villains who had popped up in the vicinity and were able to assist.”

“But the students injured were Midoriya Izuku, Todoroki Shoto and Iida Tenya. Their injuries are not extensive and they are expected to recover in time for class resumption on Wednesday,” Nedzu added.

“Sir,” Midnight rose a quick hand. “Why were all of these students all in Hosu? Were their agencies in communication with each other?”

“Doesn’t appear so!” Nedzu chirped. “I guess you could either look at this as they were at the wrong place at the wrong time or the right place at the right time!”

“But Stain did not specifically seek out UA students, right?” Cementoss said.

“It does not appear so, no. Pro hero Native had been the original target of Stain, according to the authorities. Things are still being sorted out, but early reports suggest Iida had come across the situation during patrol and engaged Stain to save Native. Midoriya arrived and called for backup which led to the arrival of Todoroki and Endeavor.”

“Isn’t Iida’s older brother Ingenium?” Ectoplasm asked.

“He was attacked by Stain during the sports festival,” you added, the news stories and Iida’s abrupt exit from the event springing to mind. You glanced at Nedzu. “It’s quite a… coincidence that Iida was involved.”

“I think it was,” Aizawa said, his low voice surprisingly firm. He was looking at you out of the corner of his eye. “Ingenium worked in that ward a lot. It’s not a stretch that Iida wanted to be placed in an agency there.”

You nodded your head, accepting the answer while Aizawa returned his attention back to the table.
He knew where your implication was headed and Iida was a quality student.

Revenge did not suit him.

“We decided to allow the internships to continue as planned,” Nedzu said. “As this can be considered more of an on-the-job hazard. And the students didn’t want it to end! Amazing, aren’t they?”

“I mean… I see no problem with this,” Snipe said, looking around the table with a shrug. “Can’t keep them locked up forever.”

“I agree,” Yagi piped up.

“Then it’s doubly settled!” Nedzu said, clapping his paws together. “Since there’s nothing else to discuss, it looks like I may have been too eager in canceling this morning’s workshop. Nonetheless, the afternoon’s gathering will continue normally. Please let me know if you have any question!”

You didn’t linger in the room, you trailed behind Snipe and returned to the staff room with him.

“Well now,” he said, sitting with a sigh. “That wasn’t too bad.”

“I’m glad,” you said before wincing. “Not that they got hurt, obviously…”

“Nah, I know what ya’ mean. Reckon we all feel the same.”

“I missed you guys!”

You were ecstatic, throwing your hands out when you walked into the classroom of 1-A Friday morning. It was the first day you had seen your hero and general studies kids since the end of their internships.

“Hey Miss L!” Ojiro said with a wave, his tail mirroring his hand. Several other students in the class also joined in with hellos. You tossed your backpack and folder onto the front desk without aiming, hearing it off slide off the surface and hit the ground. You ignored it, gesturing collectively to your kids.

“So!? How was it?” you asked. “Come on, I’ve been asking everyone about their internships! Tell me about it!”

“Mister Fourth Kind was the best,” Kirishima stressed, the first to speak. He slammed his fists on the desk in a fit of passion, eyes sparkling at recollections of his time with the four-arm hero. “Talk about witnessing a manly hero first-hand. Plus I got to learn everything he had to teach with Tetsutetsu!”

“Oh, I’ll have to ask him about it! Did you guys learn a lot?”

“Yeah! Like…the little things help!”

Ashido was up next, leaning on her desk and waving her hand excitedly in the air.

“I went to the Tatooin agency since I didn’t want to leave the city!” she declared. “I hung out with Mistress Widow and she was insane.”

“Insane good or insane bad?” you ventured to ask.

“Good! She was teaching me how to climb walls when I left.”
“I want to hear how you managed that after, alright?”

“Yep!”

“Excellent, excellent! And I would be remiss not to ask about the three special boys in the back,” you said, mischievous eyes drifting over Iida, Todoroki and Midoriya.

Iida sat straighter, his bottom jaw set. Todoroki blinked and looked up from his desk. Midoriya sat up with a start.

Three pairs of eyes were on you and you grinned, shaking your head as you settled your hands on your hips.

“Talk about a big first time! Stain!? ”

“Yes,” Iida said with a rigid nod. “We had a run-in with the villain Stain.”

“And you walked away with all your limbs and you’re not dead -- so kudos guys! And Bakugou!”

The blond boy’s frowned deepened as you turned your attention up a seat from Midoriya.

“Best Jeanist? Top five? How was it?”

Bakugou snorted and crossed his arms, settling deeper into his chair. He grumbled something that you swore sounded like ‘bitch work.’

“Well, the exposure and the experience was probably worth it,” you said, waving Bakugou’s possible answer away. “So don’t get too hung up on it. Live and learn, right?”

“So you really did miss us, Miss L?” Hagakure asked playfully.

“Of course! This place is boring without you little scuttlebugs scurrying around underfoot. Plus I had to sit in some long lectures. So believe me, I seriously did miss you all. Now, your internships are going to lead to your next assignment -- a personal reflection about what you did and what you learned! In English!”

Ashido and Kaminari shared a look and a sighed as you continued your explanation of the assignment.

Earlier in the week, they had both agreed an English essay was in their immediate future -- it had been a while since their last one and Miss L was nothing if not predictable when it came to schoolwork. They just didn’t know how soon you were going to spring it on them.

Classes B and C were just as enthusiastic at the announcement of their papers. In fact, all of your classes had the same assignment -- a three-page essay on their internships that was met with either scattered groans or silence.

It was back to normal.

Musutafu was a great city. It had all the amenities of Tokyo in an area half the size with considerable fewer crowds.
You adjusted your sunglasses as you waited for the pedestrian light to turn green. You had spent your morning in the Kiyashi Ward Shopping Mall wasting time and spending money. New undergarments, more perfume, a Switch, new pillows and more clothing filled the bags in your hands.

Food ideas for dinner later danced in your head as you waited for the light, like a proper citizen...

You could really go for dim sum. Or noodles.

The whirring and buzzing of a large machine caught your attention as you walked down the crowded street, eyes traveling over the great robot in the lot beside you stacking and welding together metal beams. You had passed the beast earlier on your way to the shopping district but it had been silent, powered down while construction workers gathered and chatted around its tank tread.

Your pace slowed as you continued to eye the robot. It wasn’t a war machine -- it had never been weaponized -- but the basic design was similar. You gripped your bags a little tighter, wishing you had your axe back from Hatsume. If the robot went crazy, you would have no weapon to strike back.

Relax. The robot isn’t going to go crazy.

But that feeling of dread wouldn’t leave your stomach and you picked up your pace, wanting to flee from the vicinity of the skyscraper construction.

The sudden appearance of familiar faces caught your attention, though, and fears melted away as two girls exited a cafe in front of you, still cooing about the cuteness of the cats held within.

“Well if it isn’t two of my best and brightest!” you said with a grin as you approached your students. Kendo and Tokage looked up from their phones, breaking into smiles when they saw who it was that had spoken to them.

“Miss L! So strange to see you out of class!” Tokage said.

“Surprising as it is, teachers do have lives outside of school.” You dropped your bags on the ground and flexed the mild numbness from your fingers. “I mean, it's not like most of the staff moonlights as pro heroes or something.”

“Yeah, but it’s one thing to just run across them on the street!”

“How was the cat cafe?” you asked as you sidestepped around them to peek into the large front window. A calico cat was pressed up against the glass and sleeping soundly, completely shut off from the hustle and bustle of the street just outside.

“Worth it,” Kendo said with a nod of her head. “The cats are so nice and the food and drinks are so cute. And some of the cats are up for adoption! I’m gonna talk with my dad about maybe getting a one-eyed kitten named Carrot.”

“Oh, I love that name!” you cooed back. Kendo was swiping through her phone, bringing up a picture of an orange cat that definitely did have only one eye. She was sitting contentedly in a beaming Kendo’s lap. “I hope you get her!”

“Me too,” Tokage said, looking at her friend. “If our building allowed cats, I’d be trying to adopt one too!”

“This is what, our third time here already?” Kendo said looking to Tokage for confirmation. The girl
nodded -- the number sounded right.

“I’ll have to check it out,” you said as you grabbed your bags once more. “It was nice seeing you girls! I’ve gotta go now and clean my apartment.”

“Oh, Miss L!” Tokage stepped forward, hand out. “Before I forget, my family and I were thinking about going to America this summer, to Seattle, and I--“

A deafening crash cut through the air, loud enough that it seemed to have been captured in an eternal echo that bounced between buildings spanning several city blocks. The sudden noise made all three of you jump -- in addition to most people out on the street. Your heart spasmed as you looked in the direction of that goddamn construction site.

No.

There’s no way.

There was a new sound filling the air melding with the echoing crash -- the wails of distorting metal.

“The robot’s gone crazy!” A man yelled just as the running started. There were dozens of people sprinting toward the trio, the surrounding crowds instinctively joining in as their flight responses activated.

Was this a joke?

Was the universe having a laugh at you?

Talk about odds.

The robot from earlier was no longer acting like its calm, complicit self. It was trying to wrench free of the building it had been connected to, its tread kicking up dirt as it strained against its leash. The husk of the building was groaning -- the power the robot had was considerable.

You weren’t the only one to have run against the crowds towards the scene -- Kendo and Tokage had followed along beside you.

Running toward danger.

Your gaze flickered between the robot, the still-fleeing construction workers and your two students. The debate in your mind ended quickly. Although they had just gotten over a villain attack against some of their students, it looked like you’d be involving two more in a possibly dangerous situation.

You doubted they would have even listened if you commanded them to leave.

“Civilian duty,” you snapped to Kendo and Tokage, who were hunched over, ready to enter the fray. “Make sure no one gets crushed. And if that robot comes at you--” the metal screamed and splintered as the robot’s tether snapped the beams it was connected to. It was free. “-- run. You’re not to engage.”

“We can handle a robot!” a frustrated Tokage called out as you dropped your bags by the chain link fence surrounding the yard and scaled it. Kendo grabbed her classmate by the hand, running down to where construction workers were spilling out of a hole in the fence and onto the street.

So, there was a 7-story tall robot losing its shit.

You dropped from the fence onto the ground, gazing up at the behemoth. There were sparks
cascading from its head - a steel beam was embedded in it. Science fiction movie tropes told you the injury jostled its robot brain and made it go Godzilla.

You summoned energy to your hand, focusing on twisting and shaping it into an axe. Though, without the refinement of your support weapon husk, it looked more like an oversized hammer. You gave it a few cursory swings as you started to strategize -- it was not smooth to wield.

You lacked vertical ascension. Sure, you could pump some energy to your feet and, but it was really only useful when it came to softening landings, not rocketing you upward. You could get as high as maybe one story, which would only have put you on top of the tread of the robot’s wheels. Your target was the head -- give it a few good smashes (or knock it off completely) and it would reveal the ‘heart’ of circuitry contained within the chest.

Destroy that and the robot was as good as dead.

The wheels were enough of a target to start and you could potentially immobilize or topple the fiend by crippling them.

You bit down the yell that bubbled in your chest as you lunged forward, hammer at your side, a sudden wave of comfort cascading over you at the familiarity of the situation. The first strike detented the first wheel contained within the tread, the second split it.

The front of the tank tread collapsed and you rolled when you felt your gut twinge and the air vibrate, missing a clawed hand that struck where you had been standing. You growled as you swung at it, hoping to knock the hand clean off. Your hammer dented one of the fingers but it was pulled back before you could land a second hit.

You focused your attacks on the second and third wheels within the tread, hammering and busting them while dodging the robot’s swings. The hull of the robot groaned as it dropped sharply to the left when the last wheel on that side was destroyed. It wasn’t enough of a dip to cause it to tilt and fall, but it had been at least partly rendered immobile.

Your hammer disappeared and you flexed your arm, your crude energy weapon had been sending uncomfortable vibrations up your limb at each strike, a similar feeling to striking your funny bone repeatedly.

Within its sparking compute system, the robot labeled you as something more than an annoyance -- you were an actual threat and needed to be dealt with.

Your minor distraction almost led to ruin -- you rolled just in time to dodge a clawed fist that punctured the ground. When you ceased your rolling, you launch yourself at the hand, attaching to the ‘finger’ you had busted earlier, holding on as the arm pulled back. You were rising high off the ground, as you hoped.

All you needed the robot to do was move its arm a little closer to its head. Then you could bring the artificial life down.

The robot’s arm thrust out and into the building as it attempted to pin you one of the exposed steel beams of the structure. But it had wound back before doing so, giving you a general idea of what it planned on doing.

This was why humans with quirks were still used in wars. Robots were all logic ruled by algorithms and mathematics. Humans were emotional and reactive -- they were harder to read. Harder to predict. You were already scrambling up its arm, not bothering summoning your weapon, using both hands
to climb.

“Help! Help us!”

Over the whirring and crashing of the robot’s movements, you heard cries for assistance. Back on earth, pinned beneath a series of metal beams and chunks of concrete, were two men. You blinked down at them -- they had obviously caught sight of you, an assumed hero, and were crying out to you for help.

You looked back up at the robot you had been putting so much effort into scaling.

The lives of the workers took priority over bringing down the mechanical asshole.

Your brows furrowed when the great red eye of the robot landed on you, its lens constricting and contracting as it examined the threat. You braced yourself, prepared to release your grip to avoid another blow, but it didn’t attack -- instead, the head turned, it’s red pupil zeroing in on the injured men that had been making a racket.

What was it with robots being so bloodthirsty?

You started your descent when the robot attempted to turn with a busted tread, crying out as your shoulder yanked painfully when you managed to grab a handhold on its body. Feeling a time constraint now that your enemy had changed its focus, you had settled on just dropping in stages back to the ground.

It didn’t help that the titain you had been scaling was swaying dangerously, rendered unbalanced thanks to your earlier work.

You released your hold again, forcing energy to your feet as you fell a couple more stories, ankles and knees throbbing and complaining when you landed even with a ‘buffer.’

You really did rely on your support items, jeez.

There was no time to pay the pain zig-zagging up your legs any mind -- the robot had changed strategies and was digging into the ground with its arms, forcing itself to turn.

The two men were crying out to you when you arrived.

“You’re okay,” you said, unfurling a disarming smile as you reached out to yank at the metal beams pinning them down.

You internally groaned -- they were heavy. You would not be able to pick them up on your own.

Shit, maybe you should have stayed focused on the robot after all.

You called forth your crude hammer-axe again, glancing over your shoulder to check on the status of the robot, before wedging it between the beams of the topmost man.

“I can’t feel my lower body!” he sobbed to you and, for a second, your expression faltered. But you quickly returned to stoic calmness, adjusting so that you could pry with one hand and reach for the man with the other.

The robot had finally finished turning and was pulling itself toward you. At seeing that, you added a bit more urgency to your movements. Grabbing the man by the collar, you started to yank.

“You gotta help me out, bud,” you urged, forcing the panic from your voice. “Use your hands, try to
pull yourself free.”

“I-I can’t,” he wailed, struggling. But fear had sapped his strength. You reached out and, disregarding the chance of causing additional spinal damage, you started pulling in earnest. Ignoring the dull ache of your hammer arm at the positioning and increase of pressure, you wrapped your free arm around his upper body and pulled.

The other trapped man was quietly groaning, trying to wiggle free. But a separate beam had caught him -- he wasn’t going anywhere without help.

Coming to grips with his situation, he kept watch over the robot, crying out a warning when it was a few yards away.

You were already picturing what the robot planned on doing. They all followed a similar pattern when it came to attacking something significantly smaller on the ground. In seconds it would reach striking distance.

With one great inhale, and summoning some adrenaline-induced energy, your hammer flared larger and further wedged the metal beam upward. The last bit of resistance was gone, the man was flailing as you pulled him from underneath his prison.

His legs were moving, you noted with surprise.

One of his steel-toed boots connected with your face.

"They were just numb!” The man was crying in relief as you dropped him, pain radiating throughout your body. He rolled down the small pile, landing with a grunt on the ground.

Without so much as glance backward, he was scrambling away -- escaping to leave you to help the other trapped man alone.

There was no time to watch the fleeing man or acknowledge your injury -- you had thrown yourself in front of the last construction man. The robot’s arm was raised and the worker closed his eyes, preparing himself for the inevitable.

He thought of his wife and daughter and his heart shattered with the knowledge that he would be leaving them so soon.

He thought of all the important life events he was going to miss -- birthdays, graduation, weddings.

But mostly, he prayed that death wouldn’t hurt. That it would be over in an instant and he wouldn’t languish in pain, waiting for the end.

A dull thud rang out. Followed by another.

Slowly he opened an eye -- had the robot missed?

A great barrier was raised in front of him.

The robot reared back and he tensed up as its fist was brought down -- but he kept his eyes opened that time, watching as the fist bounced off the shield.

It was coming from the woman who had come to their aid.

She was protecting him.
"You okay back there?" you called, looking over your shoulder. Blood was oozing from your face, but you didn’t seem to be in distress.

"Y-yeah," he called out, his voice cracking as hope flared up in his chest.

"Can you move?"

"No," he said back. His right arm and most of his lower body were trapped. He wiggled despite the pain but nothing shifted.

Another thud from another strike.

"Are we going to die?" he found himself asking in a calm sort of way. You looked back at him, brow raised before you smiled warmly, eyes softening.

Your teeth looked very white compared to the blood oozing down and around your mouth. Then they were quickly turning red at having been exposed to the torrent.

But you didn’t look frightening.

"No," you said, voice low and comforting. "I won’t let you die today. We’re just going to hang out a bit until another hero comes along and distracts this bot. I don’t want to risk giving him an opening to get at you."

"Will you be okay until then?"

"I could keep this up for hours!" you said with wet laugh, smile shifting toward a humorous one before returning to comforting. "But how you doing back there? Can you feel your arms and legs?"

"Yes," the man said, inhaling sharply as he tried wriggling again. "Though I wish I didn’t."

"What’s your name?"

"Shimada."

"Have any family, Shimada?"

"A wife and a daughter."

You nodded, shifting the position of your shield as the robot changed the angle of its swipes. Since you were wearing your shield apparatus, you had no fear of your barrier failing. Thankfully. Considering everything, your stamina levels were still relatively high. Unless another hero took hours to get to you, there was no risk of death today.

It was just a waiting game.

Like being trapped on an elevator.

With a rabid lion trapped behind a panel of glass, trying to get at you.

But still, Shimada could be scared, which was why you continued to politely ask about his life to keep his nerves down.

And to keep him awake and alert.

"Outnumbered by women, huh?" you teased. "How old is your daughter?"
“Seven.”

“Aw, that’s so sweet.”

Despite their situation, Shimada let out a barking laugh.

“She’s far from sweet though. She told me when she grows up she wants to be a foreman. I got her a pink hardhat for her birthday last year. She’s worn it ever since.”

Maybe it was nerves or the longing that made him want to overshare about his daughter, despite the gravity of what was going on.

“Please tell me you have a picture. When this guy gets taken care of, I’ll want to see a picture.”

“I’ve got pictures,” Shimada said, a groan following afterward. You kept your head facing forward but bit your lip. He was responsive and talking now, but if he had internal trauma he could be running on borrowed time.

*Where the fuck were the heroes?*

“What’s your name?”

It was his turn to ask questions and you shifted, the shield making a light ‘woo’ sound as moved in the air.

“Well…” you trailed off. “My hero name is Lionheart.”

“Lionheart,” the man said. “I haven’t heard of you before. Are you an American hero?”

“Yeah, you could say that.”

“I’m glad you were here, Lionheart.”

The corners of your mouth twitched upward once more, catching the relief in his voice. How different would things have been if you had chosen not to go shopping?

“I AM HERE!”

A bellow call was heard seconds before a massive force plunged from the sky, slicing the towering robot right down the middle.

There was a half-second delay then--

Sparks, wires and mechanical parts rained down on the construction site at the implosive force, though your shield acted like an umbrella and protected you and Shimada from the downpour.

“All Might!” you heard Shimada whisper in awe as a lone figure rose from where the destroyed menace laid in scattered pieces, its once red iris now dull and black.

The number one hero glanced around before making his way over to where his two victims were, his face not betraying the slight surprise at seeing a familiar, albeit bloodied, face watching him.

Your barrier dissolved with the threat eliminated.

“Is everyone all right?” the hero asked. You turned and beckoned him over to help free Shimada. With ease All Might lifted the tangle of beams, allowing you to pull the man to freedom.
Police and other emergency services, who had been waiting around the perimeter for a chance to intervene, descended upon you all. Shimada was taken away by EMTs, leaving you standing beside All Might and the police.

That was until an older EMT who appeared at your side, wordlessly forcing you to look in different directions as she examined your face.

“Excuse me, miss—” a police officer said, stepping beside you but the EMT raised her hand.

“Well,” the EMT said to you. “It’s broken.”

“What’s broken?” you asked, steeling yourself to hear ‘your face’.

“Nose.”

It was sad how relieved you felt and you resisted the urge to wrinkle your nose to test the pain.

“Do you want to go to the hospital? There’s not much they can do for a broken nose. I can patch you up in the back of the ambulance. I’ll be able to set it with my quirk so it won’t heal crooked.”

“Ambulance is fine,” you said with a sigh.

A chill ran up your back as a formidable presence walked up behind.

“How’s this hero doing?”

“She’ll be fine, All Might,” the EMT said as she took you by the hand. “She just needs to get her nose taken care of.”

“From a robot swipe?” he asked sympathetically.

“No, I got kicked in the face by a worker,” you said, turning and purposefully giving All Might a dazzling blood-soaked smile.

His smile didn’t change or waver but he did end up trailing behind you to the ambulance, claiming that the police would want to interview you both as you were the heroes who assisted on-scene.

There was already a mob of reporters waiting, circling where the police cars, fire trucks and ambulances had all parked. Officers were doing a good job holding the press at bay as you were led to an ambulance. All Might gave a quick wave to the roaring crowd, acknowledging them and letting them know he’d be over to make a statement in a few minutes.

“Miss— ugh!” Tokage winced when she got sight of your face. “Are you okay?”

“Just a little nose bop,” you said as you took a seat on the bumper of the ambulance.

“The police said they need to talk to you,” Kendo appeared beside Tokage. “We used our quirks and said you gave us the approval. They need confirmation. Oh! Hello All Might.”

“Was this a school outing?” All Might said, surprised to see two UA students now involved in the mix. Kendo shook her head.

“No. Miss L bumped into us on the street. When the robot went crazy, we helped the people escaping.”

“Look straight at me,” the EMT commanded -- you were listening in on the conversation. You
followed the direction, eyes twitching when wet wipes were used to remove some of the blood masking your cheeks and chin. A police officer appeared by the ambulance but shuffled away when the EMT glared at him in warning.

“Vultures,” she said to you, stemming the bleeding while she worked.

Ouch.

“They can never wait patiently for reports. They always want to grab people away from getting medical attention.”

“I mean, it’s just a broken nose,” you said, voice a little off with her nose plugged. “Nothing too major.”

“Doesn’t matter. Treatment before questioning.”

You didn’t ask the EMT the specifics behind her quirk, but you did grit your teeth when you felt your nose shift slightly, but painfully, to what you assumed was the proper alignment. Bandages, a weak splint and tape were applied. When the EMT was done she stepped back, peeling off her gloves.

“That’s about all that can be done for it,” she declared. “Keep the bandages on for at least a day or two. If there’s any pain, you can take over-the-counter pain relievers.”

“Thanks,” you said, taking out your phone and peeking at your reflection in the unlit black screen.

The blood was mostly gone -- white bandages and tape covered the entirety of your nose, cutting slightly across your cheeks.

You were going to have two black eyes, you could tell already.

“They done?” came a gruff voice and the EMT gave an obnoxious nod to the new officer, motioning that you and your crew could leave.

“Right then. Ma’am, All Might, ladies, could you all follow me? There are details I need to sort out and statements I need to collect.”

The group of UA’s finest graciously agreed and you gave a quick thanks to the unimpressed EMT who was already walking away from the ambulance.

Your group walked in silence, following single file after the officer.

“Wait! Lionheart!”

Shimada had called out as you breezed by, attention focused on the scales that decorated the back officer’s neck and how they overlapped each other.

He was propped on a gurney, two medics working to properly secure his arm and legs. Upon seeing it was Shimada, you waved and walked over.

“See, told you it everything would be perfectly fine!” you said.

“Thank you,” Shimada stressed, reaching out with his good hand to take yours. It was a man who thought he was going to die -- a little physicality didn’t bother you so you grasped it, gingerly clasping it between your hands. He looked to be on the brink of tears. “You don’t know… I really… I’m just glad I get to see my family again.”
“You were never going to die, Shimada,” you said, acting as if the idea was ludicrous and that it hadn’t been in the back of your mind the entire time. You squeezed his hand. “I wouldn’t have let it happen.”

“Do you still want to see a picture of my daughter…?”

“Of course!” you declared, holding up a hand when the lizard officer stepped forward to intervene. With some struggle, the worker dug his phone out of his back pocket, flipping to a picture that he showed you.

Shimada sitting on a beach beside a black-haired woman, both grinning at the camera. In front of them, dressed in a blue swimsuit with a shovel in her hand, was a little girl. She seemed uninterested in the picture, more focused on the mound she had created.

You aww’d at Shimada’s daughter, handing his phone back to him while showering her with compliments. “Thank you,” he stressed again, you rolled your eyes at his gratitude as it was unnecessary. “Is there an agency or something you’re connected with?”

“She’s an instructor at UA!” All Might said, his loud voice cutting through the tender moment and making you and Shimada jump.

In fact, everyone you had been walking with had stopped to watch your moment.

The saved worker’s mouth went dry as he continued to stare with wide-eyes at All Might.

“Can I get a picture?” he stammered and it was All Might’s turn to laugh, nodding as he positioned himself behind the gurney, acting as if he’d done it a thousand times before. He probably had, you mused while you watched the two men take a selfie together.

“Want one with your rescuer as well?” All Might asked gently, nodding toward you.

The injured man was nodding and waving you in but you were declining the offer, pointing to your busted nose.

All Might’s large hand reached out, however, guiding you to the other side of Shimada. You forced a smile that came across as a wince in the photo.

“We really need to get a report from you all,” the lizard officer said after clearing his throat. Shimada nodded, as he was wheeled closer to the ambulance, the EMTs signaling they were ready to move on too.

“Thank you, Lionheart,” he said and you waved until the doors of the vehicle closed with a smart click.

“Now,” the lizard officer flipped open his notepad, his eyes fixated on you. “You’re new. I haven’t seen you before. Hero name?”

“Lionheart,” you said for what felt like the umpteenth time that day. The officer wrote it down, his eyes flicking down to his notepad before looking up.

“Are you a licensed hero?”

“She’s an instructor at UA,” All Might offered and your hands grasped at the empty air around your waist.
“My ID is in my purse!” you sputtered. “My bags! They’re all by the fence! Can I go grab them?”

The lizard sighed and looked over his shoulder, searching for a nearby officer that could come over and assist.

“Someone will need to escort you,” he explained when he met your confused look. “I need to see your hero license otherwise this will be labeled as a vigilante case and you’ll be subject to discipline for performing work as an unlicensed hero.”

“I can accompany her,” All Might offered. The officer considered the hero -- what if you were a vigilante and this was a ploy to allow you to escape?

Then again, this was All Might.

“Okay, fine,” he said. “But hurry back, okay?”

You both took the long way around across the scene in hopes of avoiding yet another press walk-by, as they were growing more wild with the amount of time that had passed without a hero statement. You sighed, the pain of your nose becoming more apparent as your adrenaline faded.

Be cool, you reminded yourself, looking at him out the side of your eye.

Just... be cool.

“Quite a morning you’ve had,” All Might said nonchalantly and you shrugged. In a rare moment of internal peace, your body and mind were calm, pleased that you had used your quirk to expend a sizable amount of energy.

Your fingers and the muscles of your thighs were wonderfully still.

You missed this feeling.

You missed this feeling.

“Wasn’t too bad. Did some shopping, saw some students, attacked a giant robot, got my nose broken… Typical Saturday.”

“What an exciting life you must live,” he mused, toothy smile growing larger.

You didn’t return the grin, as he expected.

Instead, you shrugged and kept walking.

Why did it feel... off to him?

Were you mad at him?

You missed a step when you saw two figures digging through the bags you had dropped by the fence.

“Hey!” you snapped, anger tickling the back of your neck. If someone had stolen her newly purchased Switch… God help them. “Get away from there, that’s mine!”

The two people turned and you realized one had a large camera propped up on his shoulder. The other stood from his crouched position, microphone in hand.

Your new underwear was in his hands.
“New hero!” the man shouted. “Rinder from Hero-Z. You said these are your bags?”

You groaned, Hero-Z was the definitive hero trash tabloid.

And they just got ahold of your underwear.

*Of course, they would be the ones to root around in someone’s belongings.*

All Might disappeared and reappeared beside you, who was ignoring the blowback of wind from his quick movement. He turned his back to the tabloid reporter, who was stunned that the bags were gone was suddenly, snatched from of his hands. He motioned for you to do the same, to turn and walk away before the Rinder fellow could come to his senses.

“Here you are,” he said pleasantly, handing you the bags one-by-one. He pretended to pay the black lace bra and panty set no mind, gently placing it out of sight in one of the bags.

You didn’t respond.

*So much for being cool. Now you wished the robot had squashed you.*

“You have to be careful about those tabloid reporters! Do you know how many stories they’ve printed about my alleged children? I stopped responding to them years ago. Give them no attention and they’ll get no attention!”

You nodded, thanking him as you focused completely on digging through your purse to find your ID. You wanted to have everything at the ready for the officer when you returned. You didn't want to know the fact your undergarments had been touched on by a bunch of strangers.

*Judging by the day's events -- busted nose and underwear waving -- were anything but cool.*

All Might scratched at the back of his neck, expecting more of a response from you.

You were definitely being cold to him.

You were so warm to everyone else!

*Should he ask you what was wrong?*

*Why... was he so bothered by it?*

“Well that’s a relief,” the lizard officer said, sighing when you returned and promptly handed over your identification and license. “Really thought you were a vigilante. This saves me a ton of paperwork. Can you tell me what happened when you arrived on scene?”

You explained how you had been chatting with Kendo and Tokage a few blocks over when the robot lost its mind. You mentioned the beam you noticed had been lodged in its head and the damage you had done to it before switching your attention to rescue and protection.

You confirmed you had instructed Tokage and Kendo to intervene by helping the crowd but that they were not to engage the robot.

“Technically,” the officer said, adjusting his police cap with his pen and looking at you. “You had no authority to tell your students to use their quirks. Though you’re a registered hero, and their teacher, they weren’t assigned under your care as part of on-the-job training. You also weren’t involved in a
school-sanctioned activity. But they did an excellent job at clearing out the area and caused no problems, so I’m just going to consider this a warning. Don’t get me wrong… “The officer held up his hands when rage flashed across Tokage’s face at the perceived injustice -- that their heroism warranted a scolding. “You were a major help. Rules are rules, though. We can’t pick and choose which ones to follow and which to ignore. Going forward, just be mindful of that.”

“Will do, officer,” All Might said, speaking on their group’s behalf.

The officer dug into his pocket, pulling out business cards that he passed to you and All Might.

“Please forward your reports to my email directly.”

“Thank you for your help, officer,” All Might said, once again being the group’s voice. The officer nodded, tossing his notebook into his squad car before going to join a nearby group of policemen who were standing and chatting. All Might clapped his hands, a small gust of wind shaking the hair of the girls that surrounded him.

“Tokage, Kendo, excellent work!”

“Thank you All Might,” the girls said in unison, casting smiling glances at one another.

“Will you two be able to get home okay?” you asked, speaking up.

“Of course!” Tokage said, stepping to speak in before Kendo could. “Don’t worry about us!”

“Thanks for your help today, guys. Even if I wasn’t supposed to ask for it.”

The two teenagers left to get their Saturday afternoon back on track, chattering about the experience as they blended into the crowd of gawkers. All Might peeked from behind the fire truck that had been blocking them from the press -- the size of which had grown.

“I’ve got to go talk to them,” All Might said, pulling his head back and gesturing to the mob. “You should come along and introduce yourself as a hero!” You went to respond with uncertainty, but he cut you off. “It might be good to get your face out in the public. I’m sure they’ve recorded footage of you already. It’s a chance for you to control the story.”

“Mister PR,” you joked dryly, not catching his hesitation over your tone. “Alright, lead the way.”

You had to admit -- you were in awe of how All Might could work the press. He was friendly, playful, dense but somehow no-nonsense at the same time. He answered questions he deemed acceptable, showered praise on you, who he said truly handled the scene, all before stepping aside to give you a chance to sink your teeth into some screen time.

Not before a signature All Might joke of course -- “I really had to steel myself for this fight.”

You internally groaned as attention turned to you and the questioning began.

Your name was Lionheart.


Yes, you were from America.

You’ve been in Japan for several years.

Yes, you worked at UA. You’re an English teacher.
You ignored questions asking for your exact age.

You attended school at ECA.

You ignored a question asking for your graduation year.

Yes, creating a barrier was part of your quirk.

You politely declined to expand further, forcing a smile and explaining it was best to keep the extent of your abilities under wrap.

No, you were not married and you weren’t going to comment on your personal life.

You were glad both men you had protected were okay, they seemed like nice guys who deserved to return to their families.

Why did you become a hero?

You hesitated, blinking at the cameras that were pointed at your face.

“I wouldn’t consider myself a hero,” you said, forcing lightness and a smile. “For me being a teacher takes precedence. But I can’t just ignore people in need.”

But you went to ECA, one of America’s major hero schools?

Internally you cursed, brain whirling as you tried to drum up a satisfying, if not dodgy, answer.

“Life isn’t linear,” you joked. “Life goals shift. There are many paths you can take outside of school and it just so happens that mine leads to me teaching at UA.”

That was enough for them, right? You were backing away, claiming you had places to go but that it was nice to talk to the press.

Will the public see any more of you?

You looked to the ground, snorting in laughter to yourself before returning your face to the camera.

*Do it,* your brain goaded, *be cheesy.*

You put on your best disarming, matronly smile as your eyes flickered between the lenses in your face.

“I’m Lionheart,” you said, voice firm and warm. “I’ll always be a shield for people who need me.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey, I see you and I love you <3
You managed to swing by Recovery Girl’s infirmary first thing Monday morning, a bag of assorted hard candies in hand and a bashful smile on your face. It was an obvious bribe to get the medical marvel to help speed up the healing of your face despite the injury occurring outside of school.

Although she was always nice, sometimes it felt like a bother to request healing from her. But she seemed more than happy to assist you, giving you a couple of kisses on sore cheeks after peeling off the bandages from the EMT. She accepted the candy (as her stash was running low) and sent you away with a handful of PEZ bricks.

“Good job this weekend,” Recovery Girl said as you repeatedly bowed in thanks.

“You saw?” you said with a wince.

She nodded and waved you away, far too busy to be pulled into an in-depth conversation about what you did during the weekends.

Recovery Girl was not the only one who had seen your busted face splashed across the local news -- it appeared your students had also seen you in action, though their interest wasn’t so much the battle you had fought. The robot, though big, hadn’t gotten too out of control (it didn’t even break free of the construction yard) and the situation was ended before it could branch off into an actual disaster.

It also didn’t impress them that you had even made the news -- come on, all of their teachers were heroes, seeing them being lauded was business as usual. It was expected.

No, it was the fact that it was their unheroic English teacher, wearing her usual unheroic attire, had made rounds on the hero blogosphere as a potential, and entirely unexpected, new hero debut.

That’s what got the students talking.

“Are you going to start wearing a costume now?” Kirishima asked as between-class chatter died away at your arrival.

“Don’t you think it would be weird if I suddenly started wearing a full hero get-up?” you asked. “I mean, it would feel weird to me. But that’s because I see myself mostly as a regular ol’ teacher.”

“It probably would be weird,” Kaminari agreed. “Doesn’t really fit you. You don’t have that hero…. oomph, you know?”

You furrowed your brows at his remark. Jiro glared at her desk neighbor while Sero hid giggles behind a hand.

Smooth.

Midoriya's hand was up, a move that Bakugou had somehow sensed even as he sat staring straight ahead. Although the boy behind him made no sounds and was waiting politely to be called on, Bakugou still hunched over in annoyance.

“So, does this mean you’re entering heroics? Some of the hero sites say you worked special missions for the government, which is why no one has ever seen you before.”

You laughed.
“Whether or not I’m going pro has nothing to do with your English class,” you chastised lightly. “So let’s get some work done, yeah?”

As for Class B, most of their attention was on Kendo and Tokage’s involvement and whether it constituted as facing a villain or not. Sure there had been a robot involved that was destroying things and trying to kill people, but the girls didn’t get involved in combat.

“Is a robot a villain?”

“What kind of question is that? If it’s doing bad -- person or robot -- it’s a villain.”

“Villainy suggests an individual made a conscious decision to break the law for whatever personal reasons in an egregious way. There’s a level of sentience required to make a choice like that. Unless it’s an AI, robots lack free will, they only follow what they’re programmed to do. So they can be ‘bad guys’ but I don’t think they should be considered villains.”

Blank looks rained down upon Shishida.

“Dude,” Rin said, the first to speak up. “You might be reading a little too much into it.”

Despite the hair covering his body, the class could sense the redness of the teenager’s cheeks as he adjusted his glasses and stared down at his desk.

Then, a couple hours of later, you experienced a first--

Fan mail.

Well, that wasn’t entirely true. You had gotten notes of thanks from people you’d protected in the past but never anything from strangers. You were flipping through the small box of envelopes Nedzu himself had delivered to your desk in the staff room. He was borderline vibrating with eagerness on your behalf, chattering about how important it was that you hold yourself to the highest standards now that you were considered a hero of UA, not just a teacher.

“It was just one incident,” you attempted to explain but Nedzu silenced you with a raise of his paw, black eyes twinkling.

“First impressions are important.”

Midnight had a cruder explanation for the public’s sudden interest in you.

“Tits,” she said, gesturing at her own bosom.

Mic, who had also been lounging within earshot, coughed up his coffee. His head bobbed up from behind his computer, curious to see what the two female staff members could be talking about.

Although a flustered Snipe claimed it wasn’t just because of that, the contents of a majority of the letters you had received were proving him wrong. Men had written odes to the power and ‘femininity’ they were able to sense in the couple seconds of footage you had appeared in.

Others were ‘appreciative’ of how attractive you looked beaten up.

“Now I know what idols must go through,” you groaned as you tossed another creepy letter away.

“Wait until you start getting pictures,” Thirteen called which made Mic nod his head enthusiastically.

Thankfully, there were a couple that made you regain your faith in humanity. For some reason, a
young girl going by Pip sent you a drawing of a cow, which you immediately hung behind your computer, unconcerned with Hound Dog’s possible reaction at having to stare at the blue and black spotted blob.

There was also a pair of underwear.

“Your first pair!” Mic squealed, the volume of his voice making the heroes in the room flinch. “You should frame them!”

They weren’t underwear from a female fan, you read with could be described as a twinge of disappointment.

*Wear these for me next time you’re pummeling a robot.*

“No thanks, I think I’m just going to toss them,” you said, pushing the box away from you.

It wasn’t the last time you would see that particular pair of pink flowered panties.

The next morning they were hanging across your computer monitor, alarming Yagi who had ventured into the staff room unaware of your mail call the day before. You didn’t address the underwear -- only sighed and tossed them into the trashcan in your rush to your first class while a red-faced Yagi looked on.

They were back a few hours later, waiting for you under the podium of your third class, absolutely horrifying you.

“This is getting ridiculous,” you snapped the next afternoon, turning in your chair to face Midnight. Folded lovingly on the seat was a pair of pink floral panties.

“I threw them in the cafeteria trash can yesterday,” you said in disbelief. “What creep is following me to dig ‘em out of trash cans?”

“Maybe it’s a quirk,” Midnight muttered, eyes remaining on her computer screen. “Haunted underwear.”

You crumbled the cursed object into a ball, shoving it in your bag to dispose of off campus in order to free yourself from its potential demonic influence.

“Where are you headed?” Midnight asked, glancing at the time. It was an hour before school was set to dismiss and you had already packed up for the day.

“I’ve got a meeting,” you said, gesturing to Ectoplasm who had already turned in his chair, having eavesdropped on your conversation.

“She’s meeting Crust,” he answered for you. Midnight blinked before recognition flashed in her eyes.

“The hero?”

You nodded and leaned against your desk, adjusting your backpack strap.

“He’s an acquaintance of Ecto’s,” you said. “Saw my news piece on and wants to meet me.”

“Agency position?” Midnight asked Ectoplasm.
“Or sidekick. But--”

“I told Ectoplasm to tell him not to hold his breath,” you interjected before anyone could get too excited about your outside employment opportunities. “I don’t have interest or time to go pro now.”

“She was going to turn down the meeting all together but I told her networking is important.”

“He is in the top 10,” Midnight said with a nod of approval. “It’ll be good for you.”

“Thanks, mom,” you said, pushing off the desk. “I better go, otherwise I’ll be late and I’d hate to keep such an important hero waiting.”

“Good luck!” Midnight sang as you clicked the door of the staff room closed behind you.

Yagi was in the hallway, heading toward the room you had just left. He went to wave and you gave a half-hearted shake of your fingers, turning and heading in the opposite direction, missing the slight inclination of his head.

It had been an out-of-the-blue request, the meeting with Crust. Ectoplasm had approached you the day before claiming he had a message for your ears only. After laughing at how ridiculously cloak and dagger he sounded, he said that the number six hero was a friend of his and was interested in meeting you.

With Ectoplasm acting as the intermediary on behalf of the persistent number six hero, you eventually agreed to meet with Crust at a coffee chain that was about a twenty-minute walk away from UA. You were surprised at the location he suggested -- you’d think a popular hero would shy away from somewhere so public if he was meeting someone. Being approached by fans seemed rather…distracting.

Unless he wanted people to see you both together.

_Don’t kid yourself, you’re a nobody hero._

The coffee shop was lively, dotted with the first wave of end-of-workday patrons as well as a few retirees. You looked for Crust’s familiar masked face but didn’t see him sitting and waiting at any of the tables. Figuring you were the first to arrive, you ordered something strong and stood by the counter as it was being made, boredly tapping on your phone.

It was a chain coffee shop that lacked any sort of actual personality or individuality. The baristas were dressed in matching cute uniforms, effortlessly creating corporate mandated coffee-flavored art on the milky foam of their drinks. Every time the bell above the front door tinkled, they would all shout their hellos or goodbyes accordingly.

_Shield hero Crust._

_Shield hero Crust._

You repeated the hero’s name silently to yourself to a beat you had made up, twisting it until the phrase became like a song stuck in your head.

“Lionheart, right?”

You turned to the man standing beside you who was already extending his hand for a handshake. Without much thought you took it, immediately assuming it was Crust in civilian clothing. A second later, your brain was processing his face. Though his mask was off, the man had Crust’s
unmistakable flash of white cutting through his slicked-back dark hair.

“Handshake?” you said with a smile and Crust laughed, bowing his head a few times as well.

“It’s hard not to cater to foreigners, even if they’ve been living here for years.”

“Have you been waiting long?”

“No, only a few minutes. Not being recognized is a treat for me nowadays, so it was nice to sit and be ignored. Thank you for meeting with me,” he added. “Ectoplasm had nothing but glowing things to say about you! From what I understand you’ve really impressed the staff at UA.”

It was flattery but he seemed… genuine. He was very expressive but not in a strange way, not like someone who was forcing themselves to be outwardly emotional. The barista slid your drink to you, bowing. You thanked the woman before turning back to Crust.

“It’s not a problem. Though I didn’t get much about why you wanted to meet with me,” you said, ending your sentence with a laugh of humility.

Crust wasn’t an idiot. He nodded, aware you were calling him out on his vague invitation. He directed you to where he had been waiting -- a little table tucked away in an uncrowded corner.

He didn’t have a drink, just a bag and tablet.

“The weather’s been so nice, hasn’t it?” Crust said, gesturing for you to sit as he moved his belongings out of the way. You were blowing at your drink, eyes flickering out the large window your table was pressed against. The sky was awfully blue.

“This winter was awful,” you murmured -- a sort of agreement.

“Tell me about it. How are you enjoying UA so far? The students treating you nicely? Must be hard working with teenagers. Have you taught before?”

“First year teaching,” you said as Crust whistled under his breath.

“And you end up at UA? Quite the accomplishment.”

What could you say to something like that?

“I like the kids I teach,” you continued, ignoring his remark. “They’re smart. Most of them have some… big personalities. But none of them give me any sort of problems… They’re good kids.”

“I would hope so! They want to be heroes, after all. UA is one of the best schools for it too.”

You nodded again, pressing the hot liquid of your drink to your lips but not sipping yet, just miming the action. Crust folded his arms on the table, leaning in slightly.

“I caught sight of you on the news the other day,” he said brightly. “I was very impressed with the work you were doing before All Might arrived. You have a shield quirk?”

“Barrier projection,” you reworded, the closest you were going to get to explaining your quirk to a stranger.

“It was really something to see in action,” he said. “But when I went to watch more of you, I was surprised that there’s not a lot out there about you. In this day and age, it’s actually frightening that you don’t have some kind of online presence.” He laughed at his own joke. “What were you doing
before UA?"

“Translation services.”

“And before that?”

“Oh you know, this and that,” you said noncommittally.

“Well, I did a little digging…”

“Oh?" you said, releasing a barking laugh at how nonchalantly he shrugged his shoulders despite openly admitting to snooping.

“I didn’t get much about you, I’ll confess to that. But what I did learn was kind of remarkable. I mean, if I want to be completely frank, I would love to have a hero like you at my agency.”

Ah, so it was an agency offer.

It was a hard no, but you were curious about what he had seen about you -- his ‘remarkable’ findings.

“Right to the point, I guess that deserves praise. But I have to ask, what have you heard about me?” you asked with a grin, eyebrow twitching upward as you buried true feelings.

Light and funny was usually a good way to approach things.

“The work you did as a coalition hero is astounding,” he said and your mouth ever-so-slightly pulled to the right. “I spoke with someone who worked directly with you. That business with the robot? Come on, that was just a fraction of what you can do, wasn’t it?”

You didn’t answer.

“More importantly to my interests, your shield skills are said to be top notch. It’s clear you save lives, you save lives well, and you’re just letting your talent go to waste.”

Now that was jarring to hear.

“Go to waste?”

“Not at UA,” Crust said suddenly, throwing his hands up, realizing he misspoke from the harshness of your tone. “The fact that you’re at UA shows you do have an interest in the hero business.”

“I have an interest in teaching kids,” you said. “I have an interest in making sure they enter into this world fine heroes. But I’m not interested in becoming a professional hero, sorry. Think of me as happily retired.”

“I’m going to level with you, Lionheart.”

Crust had scooted his chair forward, leaning slightly over the table with his hands folded beneath him.

“You’re doing a real disservice to society by not engaging in hero work. Frankly, it’s selfish.”

Selfish!?

You laughed, genuinely humored by the man sitting before you and how insulting he was being,
intentional or not. But he continued in earnest, passion flaring to life in his eyes.

“You have a quirk designed to help people. Here I am, the number six hero in all of Japan, telling you that I want you at my agency. You’ll be surrounded by a capable team and all you have to do is focus on saving people.”

You shifted in your chair, folding your arms, shaking your head. He hesitated before looking at you squarely, dark eyes capturing yours.

“Why?” he asked. “Why won’t you consider it?”

“I told you, I’m happily retired.”

“But you’re so young!”

“I’m not open to changing my mind.”

“Are you sporting an injury? We can work with any mobility problems—”

“Listen, I appreciate the offer. Truly, it’s an honor to be recognized—”

“Or is this something else? Fear?”

“Crust—”


Your humor had been cut down suddenly but the smile remained, albeit sharper.

“I’m getting preachy,” he said, recognizing what he had done and pulling back. In the throes of his impassioned appeal, he had pushed a little too far.

You gave him a curt nod.

“Your argument ran a little flat toward the end there, bud.”

“I stayed up for hours last night running through ways to convince you how needed you are,” he said with an apologetic pull of his lips. “How you could help so many people.”

“I’m helping my students.”

“By teaching English? I mean saving people. Saving lives.”

He ran a hand through his hair.

“Two weeks ago twelve people were injured in Chiba during a fight between a villain and a hero,” he said as he jabbed his finger onto the table. You pursued your lips -- it had been all over the news. “Last month, an entire family was sent to the hospital when their van was used as a projectile during another battle in Osaka. Last year, the number of civilians injured by careless clashes, in just Japan, breached two hundred.”

“You look at the rankings and you can see the public favors heroes who value offense,” he stressed. “They want fighters out protecting their streets, protecting their cities. And what are fighters going to do when they come across a villain? They’re going to fight! They’re going to engage! But where are the shields of the people? The heroes who understand and see the larger scope of a situation? The
ones whose primary thoughts are to shield and protect, not fight and defeat?”

He was preaching again, almost shrilly, and you were a little taken aback with how freely he moved through his emotions.

“Listen, Crust,” you said, trying to calm him. “I’m just not the hero type. I would love to help people, believe me. And I’ll always step in when I can. But the whole hero business—”

“You don’t have to be a hero!” His fist was on the table and you looked at him oddly. “I don’t care if you don’t want to do endorsements. I don’t care if you want to shun the press and the rankings. You can even wear a mask and go unnamed. You can bow out of fighting villains -- I just want you to be on our side, helping people. No contracts, no deals, no photo ops. We need a shield like yours. And I am willing to work with any stipulations you may have.”

He was imploring, trying to appeal to the humanitarian in you. Setting aside dreams of fame and glory as a hero, the core of who you were wanted nothing more than to help people. To provide protection.

You were pulled out of your deepening thoughts with a start, shocked by how your heart was squeezing painfully at Crust’s rambling.

Be strong. Just say no and walk away. It’s fine.

“Why so averse to helping others?” he asked, lowering his voice in a conciliatory tone.

And for a second, your daily facade fell.

You looked at him, fear and fatigue flashing across your face, pooling and dulling your eyes. But just as quickly as it dropped, it was back. You were rubbing your forehead in irritation, foot tapping incessantly as an internal battle waged within you, the agitation feeding into your quirk.

“Sorry,” you snapped, reaching for your backpack. “I’m flattered by the offer but no, I can’t accept it.”

“Lionheart--”

You were standing, keeping your body in motion signifying you had broken from the line he had cast. Your drink wasn’t even half finished -- you wished you had gotten it to-go.

“Thank you for all you do to the community and for the offer,” you said with a nod of your head. He said something, trying to call back your retreating form but he didn’t say it loud enough to register in fear of causing a scene.

The hustle and facelessness of the outside was comforting and you set a quick pace home, walking with a single-mindedness of returning to the beautiful obscurity and normality of your life. It was hard though. Billboards and large screens hanging from tall buildings flashed images of popular heroes hawking endorsed products or their own lines of merchandise. On the train, you forced yourself to ignore the suddenly distracting shirts and phone cases with hero-inspired designs.

Hero society was everywhere--

Except in the carefully curated space of your home, where pictures, pastel art and plants were your company.

Hero Lionheart...
Crust had almost had you convinced.

Almost.

And that... frightened you.

Though he was not scheduled to be in school the next day, Yagi strolled into the staff lounge sometime after lunch, when the heroics classes across the campus were in full swing. His arrival surprised you, Snipe and Mic, who had all been standing and chatting as they watched a video of a spectacular apprehension by Hawks on the voice hero’s computer.

“Oi, why you here, All Might?” Mic asked suspiciously, quirking a brow at the junior teacher. Yagi froze before shifting uncomfortably, knobby hands grasping and tugging the thick strap of his messenger bag.

“I heard the teachers were going to work on lessons after school and I--”

“You’re coming !?”

Mic had slammed his hands on the desk, jumping up, positively thrilled. You and Snipe looked at one another -- apparently, he had not gotten the memo about Yagi’s inclusion in that night’s get-together at Midnight’s apartment.

It was something a few of the teachers did infrequently -- they’d congregate at someone’s home and try to come up with lesson ideas. The brainstorming session wasn’t so much for the normal coursework of the traditional classes, it was more for the teachers who had to think up activities for their hero courses. Lesson plans that required a little bit more creative experience while also retaining some real-world overtones.

So far, you had only been to one.

“Well…” Yagi’s neck burned. “If you’ll have me, of course.”

“Listen, Mighty Boy…” Mic was straightening his leathered attire and slicking back his hair. “You are looking at the master of lesson ideas. Ask Eraser. I’m a pro at this.”

Immediately, several pairs of eyes searched along the perimeter of the room, interested to see if a man in a yellow sleeping bag had been overlooked.

The door of the room slipped open.

“If it isn’t all my favorite colleagues,” Ectoplasm announced when he entered the room and registered who was present. Opaque eyes settled on you.

He held up two envelopes.

“More ?” you said with a sigh, approaching to claim them.

“Your footage is being buried on the hero sites,” he said, which was strangely comforting. “You’ll become old news soon enough. Unless you get involved in another incident…” He cleared his throat. “Crust told me the news--”

“You joined his agency,” Midnight said immediately, shooting you an accusing look.

“Opposite,” you grunted, rolling your eyes at the blabbermouth teacher. “You were all right about
“the offer but I turned him down.”

“Join my agency, then,” Mic said, drumming his fingers against the edge of his desk. “You’ve got that buzzing style, baby.”

“You don’t have an agency,” Snipe interjected but Mic was unperturbed as he spun a full rotation in his chair before flashing finger guns at the gun hero.

“True, but I can start one. All the UA teachers can join in. And we’ll have a radio show to connect with our fans. Teacher Action Squad! We’ll basically be idols!”

“Some of us don’t work on teams,” Snipe said under his breath and gestured his head to Yagi, who pretended to be oblivious to the conversation.

“Hm, that looks threatening!”

Eyes turned to Ectoplasm, who had stopped behind you as he traveled to his desk. In passing, he had peeked over your shoulder at your mail, hoping you had been subjected to another humorous letter of creepy affection. You snorted, flipping the worn paper over in your hands to check the back.

It was a single sentence in English that had been written in black marker with big, blocky letters.

*I’ve found you*.

“Your first threat!” Mic cried as you checked the envelope. It had been mailed using American stamps.

There was also a return address -- UA’s address.

“Great,” you said, crumpling up the message in your hands and tossing it into the trash bin under your desk. “I’ve got underwear that won’t stop following me and someone out to get me. All from literally being on TV for five seconds. Can’t imagine what it would be like if I’d been on for an entire minute.”

“Aren’t you scared?” Mic asked, creeping toward you, fingers waving.

“Of the underwear? Yes, absolutely. This? Come on, how many threats have you guys gotten in your careers? Besides, it isn’t even a real *threat*. More like... a broad statement.”

“Oh hundreds,” Snipe said and Mic blinked up at him, surprised.

“Yeah,” he affirmed, crossing his arms and nodding his head. “Yeah, same. Totally. *Boatloads*.”

*That was believable.*

“You should still report it to the police,” Yagi’s voice piped up.

“How many threats does All Might usually get?” you ventured to ask. He looked up toward the ceiling, brows furrowed, mentally tallying the number in his head.

“I think we counted something like 1,800 last year,” he said after a second of reflection. Mic’s jaw dropped and the number one hero nonchalantly shrugged.

“And how many did you report to the police?”

Again, he was thinking.
“I don’t think any...”

“See, I’ll be fine ignoring this one,” you announced, reaching for your second letter.

Yagi’s usual scowl took on a more frown-like appearance at your blase attitude.

“Yeah, but I’m All Might ,” he said.

That night, the gang gathered at Midnight’s apartment as planned. For a solid hour, they tossed ideas to one another about the best way to reach the students when it came to their respective fields, all while drinking beer or tea and eating some of the skewers Snipe had brought.

But most of the attention was centered on the newcomer.

Yagi graciously accepted the suggestion that he introduce more lecture-based lessons on heroics. He also graciously accepted the suggestion of more actual homework for his students, instead of relying on in-class practicals for grades. And the suggestion for personalized feedback for each student to go along with those grades. And the suggestion for benchmark skill tests to see where students were improving or stagnating with their abilities. And the suggestion for--

The graciousness had morphed into panic and he reached for a piece of paper to jot down the recommendations being tossed at him in rapid succession.

“We also need to go back to the USJ,” Aizawa said unenthusiastically, having been dragged to the gathering by a certain blond, and ever-loud, DJ.

“You haven’t gone back yet?” Midnight was caught off guard. “I thought all the other classes finished their rescue simulations before their internships.”

“That’s the reason,” Aizawa muttered, rubbing at irritated eyes. “It’s been booked.”

As the night wore on, professional plans were put on hold as discussions became more off-topic. Soon you were helping Midnight in the kitchen preparing another round of tea, Mic was idly scrolling through his Twitter feed, Aizawa was staring blankly at nothing, Cementoss was trying not to look too comfortable in Midnight’s home and Yagi was watching Snipe as demonstrate the speed of his quick draw.

“End of term is coming up,” you muttered as you doled out teacups and coffee mugs. “Nedzu told me a little bit about the tests when I interviewed, they seem like fun.”

A chorus of snorts rang out that left Yagi concerned and you quaking with muffled laughter.

“It’s a two-parter,” Midnight said, settling on the floor, drink in hand. “Written and practical portions.”

“Every year it’s a shit show,” Snipe grunted.

“That’s not true!” Midnight countered but Aizawa gazed at her unconvinced. “It mirrors the entrance exam.” She was looking at you and Yagi and, assuming that, as new teachers, you weren’t aware of the specifics. “The students go against the exam robots in different scenarios and are graded appropriately.”

“But this year there’s talk of changes to the end of term exam.”

The teachers turned their attention to Present Mic, who had spoken up. He had titled his head
forward slightly, the lights of Midnight’s living room glaring and obscuring his eyes through his sunglasses.

“I may have overheard a discussion between Principal Nedzu and Vlad,” Mic continued, scratching the inside of his ear. “That conversation may have revolved around making the final exam more… realistic.”

“How so?”

“Using teachers instead of bots,” Aizawa said with a drawn-out breath. “I’ve been included in the conversations as well.”

“And you didn’t tell me!?” Mic reeled back, cool-guy demeanor shattering as his heart worked to comprehend the big hunk of gossip Aizawa hadn’t shared with him.

“That seems a bit… unbalanced,” you said. “Professional heroes with years of experience fighting against a bunch of high school students?”

“Unless they put restrictions on us.”

“Don’t go running your mouths,” Aizawa warned. “We’re still in early discussions and we don’t want the students to get an early warning.”

Gazes focused on Present Mic.

“Like I would ruin a surprise,” he scoffed.

“Yes, you would,” Aizawa said sternly before looking at the thin blond man sitting across the room. Blue eyes widened. “And so would you.”

The number one hero sank a bit deeper in his chair.
“... War games.”

Midnight’s declaration wasn’t as enthusiastically embraced as she had envisioned but she let the confused silence hang in the air as her colleagues attempted to understand what she was talking about.

Then, a polite cough.

“The movie?” Yagi bothered to ask. Midnight huffed, hands resting on her hips as she shifted her weight from one foot to the other.

“Movie?”

“Movie? Haven’t heard of it. Is it new?” Present Mic asked under his breath to Snipe who gave him a half-listening shrug. He was still mostly focused on the bondage hero who had excitedly burst into the room seconds prior only to blurt out those two words.

“No, it’s not a movie,” she said exasperated before Yagi could speak up again. “It came to me in class today, an exercise to get the perky minds of our students aroused with heroic excitement! A war game!”

She paused again, expecting then to see some flash of eagerness in the staring faces.

Nothing.

Her frown grew. “Think of it as a battle royale. Small teams vying and fighting to be the last ones standing—”

“Terrible idea,” Aizawa interrupted without looking up from his work.

“-- Just like in those video games they all play. We’ll lump both of the first year hero courses together, slap them into small teams and let them loose in one of the training areas. See who comes out on top.”

The rest of the teachers expected more but when it became clear that Midnight was finished speaking, uncertain faces began to look to one another.

“Wait...” Snipe sat back on his chair, tipping the front of his hat upward. “So what’s the purpose of all that, then? What’s the end goal? The lesson?”

“Beat one another senseless,” Ectoplasm offered.

“Recovery Girl ain’t gonna go for that.”

“No... no...” Mic held up a hand, silencing the dissent of the cowboy seating near him before rubbing at his chin. “... I see what she’s saying.”

Snipe scoffed. “Alright, what’s she saying, then?”
“We bring what gets the kids jumping and thumping into the classroom.”

“Exactly!” Midnight said, eyes flashing as she eagerly gestured for the voice hero to continue.

“The listeners like those beat ‘em up games, right? And the last few rounds of the Sports Fest had them all on the edges of their seats.” A Chesire grin broke across his face as the gears in his brain went into overdrive. “Oh man, this idea is golden, I’ve got all sorts of goosebumps thinking about it.”

The excitement was replaced by a cool smugness as Midnight popped a hip out and winked at her blond friend.

“I have my moments of brilliance.”

“Few and far between.”

He ducked and cackled when a bottle of water soared in his direction. Stumbling away from his computer he took refuge in a far corner of the room, clapping his hands together and rubbing them mischievously.

“A royal rumble. A battle royale. I can see it now in the marquee: Payback! Redemption! A live show to put all others to shame!”

“So you’re suggesting the student's fight again…” Ectoplasm adjusted his mask. “Care to answer Snipe’s earlier questions? The ones that are completely warranted?”

“What’s the point?” Snipe stressed again.

“Point? To put them in a situation where everyone’s trying to win!”

Mic seemed flabbergasted that no one was getting it.

“I… like it!”

The room turned to the man who had spoken up -- Yagi with his lopsided smile, bright eyes burning.

“Of course he likes it, he doesn’t think anything through,” Aizawa muttered under his breath but his complaint was drowned out by an enthusiastic Mic cheer at who they had been able to convince.

“It does make sense…” Snipe shifted in his seat and Aizawa’s mood soured by how quickly All Might’s brainless approval could sway a room. “Throw them in a team? Well, it’s gonna happen as hero greenhorns.”

“Everyone’s going in with the drive to win… is that not the undercurrent of every interaction with a villain?” Ectoplasm posed. “To win against someone who also wants to win, just as badly, if not more?”

“The semester syllabus dictates we’re to focus on medical emergencies and disasters,” Aizawa said, voice monotone but clear and firm -- he had the room’s attention at that point. “And the time constraints we have--”

“We'll make it a whole day affair!” Midnight interrupted and Aizawa’s eyes flashed red at the disrespectful interruption. The woman seemed unbothered. “Have them check in at homeroom, get attendance, and bring them to one of the grounds. Divide up the teams and set them loose.”

“This is school,” Aizawa snapped. “Games like these waste time. There are benchmarks our students
“Eraser,” Mic sang, weaseling up to his friend and placing an unwanted hand on his shoulder. “You gotta stop with all that ‘logic, robot, does not compute, syllabus’ garbage! Live a little! Have some fun with it!”

The erasing hero scoffed and jerked his shoulder away from his friend’s touch, reaching for his bag. His eyes were starting to itch and burn…

He blamed it on the idiocracy that surrounded him.

“Aizawa… “ Midnight sighed and crossed her arms, demeanor momentarily softening. “Rescue and preservation are cornerstones to heroics… but so is self-preservation. I don’t doubt the kids will learn to be strong, good heroes capable of helping when civilians are hurt… but if they want to go out and save people, they have to be able to save themselves against villains that want them to lose.”

Finally, a moment of directness. The heroes in the room stilled, allowing Midnight’s words sink in -- there was a surprising amount of reason behind them. Even Aizawa, who had his head tilted back and was squeezing droplets from a bottle into his dry eyes, hesitated for a brief second. But without missing a beat, he blinked several times and tossed his eyedrops back into his bag, an irritated breath escaping him.

“Get Vlad to sign off on it and I’ll find a day.”

Bingo.

“That’s the spirit, Eraser!” Mic’s cheer went unacknowledged. Aizawa was jabbing at his keyboard to lock his desktop, tossed his tablet back in his bag and was leaving the room. No one bothered to question what he was up to -- instead, they looked to Midnight who was the mastermind of the entire idea.

“Alright…” she looked to Mic. “Let’s get planning, shall we?”

“Where is Vlad, anyway?” Snipe asked, peeking beneath his glove to the watch he had hidden around his wrist. “He leave already?”

“Doing an end of day grounds walk with Lionheart,” Midnight said with a wave. “It’s fine. I promise he’ll agree to it, no problem.”

Uncertain with what she meant by that, Mic made a face at Yagi who quickly coughed and returned to attention to the safety of his computer where, before the interruption, he had been trying silently (and with increasing panic) to remember what he had recently updated his computer password to.

That was until he got the message that his account had been locked due to too many unsuccessful attempts.

His hands froze over his keyboard.

Shit.

“You.”

Ectoplasm blinked, looking up from his laptop. It was early afternoon, his classes were finished, and
he had found a spot in one of the outside eating areas near the empty cafeteria to do some work and enjoy the nice day. The birds were singing, explosions and shouts were in the distance and you were approaching him, wagging your finger toward him.

“Me?” He placed a hand on his chest, catching the look of annoyance on your face. Had he offended you at some point?

“You.” When you reached him, you swung your leg around and sat opposite of him at the picnic table, coolly adjusting your weight placement when the opposite end of the unattached bench lifted into the air, almost sending you to the ground. “You. You need to tell your friend to leave me alone.”

“Friend?” He cocked his head and you could sense his confusion beneath his mask. But it should have been obvious who you were referring to, so you waited until he let out a soft ‘oh.’ “Crust?”

“He won’t stop bothering me,” you stressed, shoulders falling. “It’s been two weeks of a barrage of messages and it’s driving me crazy. He seems like a really sweet guy but this isn’t the way to change someone’s mind, especially when I said I wasn’t going to change my mind.”

You thought you had been clear when you had met with Crust however many days ago -- his offer for you to join his agency was flattering but it wasn't something you were interested in at the moment. You had told him as much -- in fact, looking back in your own recollection, you didn't think your rejection could have been clearer. But he apparently wasn't happy with your choice and had been regularly calling, emailing and even texting you, pleading for you to reconsider and maybe meet with him again so he could better plead his case.

“He’s just passionate,” Ectoplasm attempted but you shook your head.

“This is harassment.”

“He just thinks your being underutilized, that’s all.” The hero pushed his laptop to the side, folding his hands on the table in front of him. “I promise you he has the best intentions.”

You sighed, wondering if maybe you were overacting. A series of panicked, distant shouts reached your ears and you gazed off in the direction they were coming from -- where the battlegrounds sat. It made sense that teachers would want to take advantage of the recent string of nice weather.

But then you caught yourself, eyes narrowing as you looked over your colleague, things clicking in your mind.

“... Wait a minute… has he talked to you about me?”

You entered a staredown with the teacher known for his stoicism -- he appeared awfully aware of your situation with Crust despite being a third party. Beside grumblings to Midnight, you hadn't mentioned your newfound annoyance to anyone else. And it just felt like it was more than him playing down the actions of a friend.

He pulled his hands off the table and settled them in his lap.

“You may have… come up in conversation,” he admitted after several silent seconds.

“This is…” You laughed but the reaction wasn’t born from amusement. “It’s driving me bonkers, Ectoplasm. There’s only so much I can take before I start to lose my nice. I don’t want to go off on the man but…”

“If you think it prudent, I can involve myself in the situation. Speak to him. Try to change his mind.”
“At this point, any help would be appreciated,” you said. “I don’t want to sour a relationship with a
top ten hero.”

“I’ll do what I can,” he said solemnly and you rolled your eyes.

“I’m going to hold you to that,” you said as you stood up from the bench, prepared to return his
solitude to him. Ectoplasm nodded and crossed his heart. “Seriously. I understand that's he's
passionate... There's a right way to do things and there's a wrong way. I think he's clearly picked the
wrong way.”

"I know he doesn't mean any harm but I'll stress how unhappy he's making you."

You gave a great sigh, rubbing beneath your eyes before folding your arms, nodding.

"Thanks, Ecto... Thanks."

"Of course."

The conversation was quick but you didn't see much of a need to hang around and bother the man
(though maybe he would get a better hint about annoyances if you stayed and pestered him with
small talk and questions or tried to change his mind on one of his lesson plans). You gave him a
gentle wave before walking off, heading back indoors.

During a passing glance over your shoulder a few seconds later, you caught him with his phone out
and in his hand. The simple sight was enough to give you some peace of mind. You cracked your
knuckles, trying to still the usual twitching and jittering of your body as you cut through the quiet
cafeteria on your way into the main building. Lunch Rush was still there, cleaning and packing away
from their earlier service and you wiggled your fingers in greeting as you passed.

With the afternoon classes in full swing, the hallways and most of the classrooms in the upper floors
of the first-year wing were empty. Still, a distinct rumble echoed through the building -- apparently,
the support students were still hard at work and, surely in some quieter corners, the general studies
and business classes were doing much of the same thing.

“Ah, Miss Lionheart!”

You hadn’t expected to, almost literally, walk into Yagi when you rounded the corner, thoughts too
fixated on the gnat named Crust who had been buzzing around your ear and flying up your nose and
into your mouth. You had surprised one another -- you stopped dead in your tracks while Yagi
stepped off to the side, both doing countermeasures to prevent a possible slow-speed hallway
collision.

“Oh, hey All-- Yagi,” you corrected with a tight smile. “Sorry, didn’t see you there.”

“I've gotten quite used to being overlooked!” The hero declared with helping heap of self-
deprecating humor, face shining. “Off to staff room? Or in the middle of another canned coffee run?”

“Oh…” You gestured your thumb over your shoulder, pointing at the direction you had just come
from. “I had to talk to Ecto about something.”

He waited for you to expand on your explanation or, well, if he was being honest, he was hoping
you'd ask why he wasn't in the middle of teaching a class, eager for a conversation with you.

You didn’t do either.
Instead, you gave him another tight smile and shrugged, ending your interaction with a half-hearted, “Well, I’ll see you around!”

It wasn’t that he was… hurt by your apparent lack of interest in him, he was simply caught off guard by your odd demeanor. You weren’t your bright chipper self, eager to stand and chat about anything and everything. In fact, you hadn’t seemed… happy to see him.

He thought back to an earlier interaction in the week, when you had walked into a staff room he had been sitting work in, apologized, and left.

Yagi lingered, watching you disappear down a staircase, leaving him alone in the hallway.

His afternoon was free -- Aizawa had partnered with Hound Dog for the heroics class, leaving the number one hero painfully unneeded (though he had been tempted to just show up). He would have liked to have some company for a tea break -- he wasn’t ready to hunker down and work and the thought of the ungraded papers in his bag that he hadn’t so much as looked at made his chest hot.

Self-consciously, he smoothed his oversized dress shirt.

Were you mad at him?

He tried to think of reasons you would be mad, distractedly staring into empty classrooms as he walked to--

Shit, where was he going?

The bathroom.

Maybe you were in a bad mood? Maybe Ectoplasm was the problem, not him?

The idea that you were annoyed by someone else was strangely placating and that’s what he stuck to.

Regardless, he didn’t like to see you... not happy.

It was a regular occurrence, something undeniably logical that happened every few days when you slacked on stopping at the store on your way home from work--

You ran out of food.

With a groan, you closed your refrigerator that Saturday morning, hoping you had something stashed away in a cabinet somewhere. A Cup o’ Noodles, maybe? Some forgotten ramen packets? Hell, you could make do with some hot sauce and tortilla chips -- make a poor man’s crappy nachos.

A thorough sweep of your kitchen proved otherwise. You were truly out of food.

You stood in your pajamas in the center of the room, staring forlornly at your appliances in hopes they would magical conjure up something to eat. Preferably something savory like a thick-broth stew or fried chicken. But a voice in your head reminded you that you were also running low on toilet paper and needed to buy more trash bags. And laundry detergent. And body soap...

With a deep sigh, you finally surrendered. Your lofty dreams of spending an entire Saturday lounging on your couch were dashed. Responsibility was whispering in your ear, telling you to go to the store and you found you could put it off no longer.
Unless you wanted to run the risk of running out of toilet paper.

So, a prolonged hour later, after dressing and making yourself presentable to society, you were out your front door and regretfully walking down the street. It was a several block journey to the closest grocery corner store --even further if you wanted to go to a chain -- and your fingers were already losing feeling as you imagined what the journey back was going to be like with bags. Perhaps you should have invested in one of those wheely carts? How much extra would it be to get your items delivered?

“That thing is going to melt your brain,” a pleasant voice called. You blinked and looked up, smiling when you saw the hunched figure of Mrs. Fujiwara sitting on her usual bench in front of her house. The woman was a neighborhood legend. You had met her months ago when you first moved into your apartment building after you had accepted the UA job. Originally, you had been a bit hesitant to interact with Mrs. Fujiwara, believing she was just a crazy old lady who wanted to yell at people. But, after several passing interactions that grew progressively longer, you found the grandmother just wanted some company and was rather endearing, even though she had switched to calling you Gaijin-chan instead of your original Gaijin-san.

All because you had gifted her a bar of chocolate with a teddy bear on it.

You knew a lot about her as she was a bit of a talker. Mrs. Fujiwara was 92-years-old and had been a widow for nearly a decade, her husband had a skewer stand that he inherited from his father that he worked at for almost his entire life, shutting it down only when his arthritis got too bad. She had two grown sons that lived in different areas of Southern Japan who visited occasionally but were grandparents themselves.

Not wanting to live with either of them, or be put in an elderly home, Mrs. Fujiwara clung to her independence by living in the home she had owned for more than fifty years.

But her existence was a lonely one, with her empty house and lack of family. So, during nice days, she would sit on a small stone bench at the front of her property and talk to anyone that passed by, including a couple of neighborhood cats and two very smart crows she had befriended by feeding them peanuts.

“It’s a beautiful day Mrs. Fujiwara,” you called, stashing your phone in your pocket and approaching her.

“Where are you headed? Did you open your windows this morning? It’s warm today. You have to clear out the stagnant air of your house.”

You stretched and nodded -- yes, your windows had been opened.

“Just going to the store to do some food shopping,” you said. “Maybe get some makeup if I have the time...”

The woman gave a sharp ‘tch’ and shook her head, eyeing you warily.

“Food? You need to eat less. You’re too fat. Americans are always too fat.”

One thing that you had learned when it came to dealing with eastern cultures was that they were sometimes mean to be nice. So even though Mrs. Fujiwara frequently pointed out the pizza belly you carried, she didn’t mean to be cruel. She was trying to be motivational.

At least, that’s what you told yourself.
“I know, I know,” you said with a huff, patting your stomach. “I’ve been working out, though. You’ll be happy to know I’ve been losing weight. Ever since I started at my new job.”

“Remember not to drink too much water. If anything, drink green tea. Oh, and eat plenty of mushrooms. And go to the sauna, the heat will make the extra weight melt right off you.”

You were going to ignore most of that advice.

“What have you been up to, Mrs. Fujiwara?” you said, changing the subject to avoid any more questionable health tips.

“My son Shin called,” she said after a brief period of silence to watch a small sparrow hop by. “My grandson was sick and was in the hospital. He’s better now and is back at home. I haven’t seen any of my grandchildren or great-grandchildren in quite awhile. Since last year? I miss them. He said they were all planning to visit.”

“That will be good,” you said, leaning slightly on the stone wall next to her to fix the sock that had slipped down your ankle in your shoe. “Spend some time with everyone.”

“Oh, my sons are both stupid, it’s fine if I don’t see them,” she said with a callous wave of her hand that had you laughing under your breath. “But my grandchildren are smart. They’ve got good quirks. My daughter-in-law says my great-granddaughter Suzi has my quirk and I want to see for myself.”

Talk about quirk, you thought with an internal eyebrow raise. Before she retired, Mrs. Fujiwara had been a renowned matchmaker in an era where quirks had started becoming more mainstream.

Her ability?

She could tell what… interested people in the bedroom.

Well, she described it as being about to sense a person’s ‘sexual desires,’ and hearing a 92-year-old woman say any word involving ‘sex’, was cringe-inducing. Especially when she nonchalantly told you she had a neighbor who could satisfy your that ‘desire’ of dominance, if you wanted her to introduce you to him.

Oh man, if blushes could cause skin burns you would have probably required some sort of hospitalization after that conversation.

But, after realizing that Mrs. Fujiwara could see what got everyone’s goat in bed, you slowly found humor in the situation. Your desires had to relatively tame compared to other people’s, right? Especially if they were… particularly unsavory.

It was a quirk you wouldn’t want to have.

“Hopefully you’ll be able to train her up then, get her into the matchmaking business,” you said with a chuckle.

Mrs. Fujiwara smiled and nodded. But she knew the skills of a matchmaker had been pushed aside in favor of phone swiping and computer profiles.

She was old, not dumb.

“Did you go see the blossoms?” she asked. "I went down to the park by the middle school last weekend. They were all blooming. There weren’t as many as last year, though.”
“I did. Still beautiful. Spring is the best time of the year, I think. Aside from Christmastime.”

“Christmas!” Mrs. Fujiwara appeared appalled. “Ah, you need to stop thinking of the cold. It’s bad luck, your pining will bring it back. Besides, it’ll be summer soon and you’ll want to spend your days at the beach.” She sighed, a far off look in her eye as she looked down the shady street. “I haven’t been in the beach in many, many years.”

Recollections of seaside inns, sandy toes and firework-filled skies danced across her mind. Snapshots of days long gone with people who had long since passed.

“Oh, I’ll take you to the beach!” you said brightly, catching the look in the woman’s face. At hearing your offer, it soured and you snorted. “I’m serious, Mrs. Fujiwara. We can go to the beach together if you want. Salt air is good for the body.”

Bright eyes -- you were being serious. Her scrunched-up face loosened and the older woman gave a soft smile, glancing at you.

You were too nice. She could have found you such a nice man if she was still in the love game.

“We’ll see,” Mrs. Fujiwara said. Though she was pleased with the offer, you both knew she would never take you up on it. “Go get your food, Gaijin-chan. Don’t forget mushrooms and cabbage. They’ll help burn fat.”

“You need anything from the store, Mrs. Fujiwara? Some cake? Oh, how about strawberries? Are we in strawberry season yet?”

“No, no, no,” she said dismissively, motioning you to move on with your day. You paused, looking at the elder who had turned her attention to an approaching calico cat. She was already standing to grab some cat food she had stashed away inside, ready to feed the already ridiculously rotund beast.

“I’ll grab you some strawberries,” you said, something urging you to be pushy. “Something sweet to counteract the hot of today. I’ll see you in a bit, Mrs. Fujiwara.”

The women waved you away without looking back as she entered her house. With that last declaration, you took your leave to continue on your Saturday morning adventure.

It was hot, you noted as you rolled up the sleeves on your shirt, debating whether you should— razors!

You pulled out your phone, experiencing a slight thrill at remembering something you had meant to pick up days earlier, adding it to your grocery list.

Razors. You needed razors.

The rest of your walk was mindless, thoughts dancing between inane ideas about whatever your eyes landed on and goals you needed to accomplish before the weekend was over. Just because you wanted a lazy Saturday didn't mean you didn't have any work hanging over you. It just meant that you had to really bunker down the following day, Sunday, and finish school plans before the start of the week.

You did visit a beauty store that you passed, nodding at the polite greetings of the shopgirls on your way to the back shelving where your rose face wash was kept. You’d be good for a few months--

“Do you need help finding anything!?” The shrill voice of a shop assistant sang out suddenly behind you, making your heart squeeze in surprise and head whip around. With a smiling grimace, you took in the sight of the woman who had actual dazzles popping around her.
“No I’m good, thank you!”

“Ok, I’ll be here if you need anything! And just so you know, all UNERI products are on sale today. Twenty-five percent off!”

She was gesturing over to a small nearby section marked up with colorful arrows and discount signs. Standing guard next to the hair products was a cardboard cut-out of the pro hero Uwabami, who was casting a smoldering gaze and brandishing what looked like shampoo in her hands.

“Oh, okay. Thank you!”

“Were you interested in sampling any of our lotions today? I see you have the Rose Miracle Cleanser, we have several rose-based toners and emulsions that I think you might like. Are you concerned about dry skin?”

You continued to smile, shaking your head, hoping the shopgirl would get the hint to move on. “Nope, I was just going to pick this up and some foundation--”

“If you’re looking for foundation, we just got a new device that lets us match your skin tone with pinpoint accuracy…”

Half an hour later--

You were waving goodbye to the woman who had become the bane of your existence, face wash and a new stick of foundation tucked away in your purse.

It wasn't that she had been persistent, it was just that you needed some foundation. That's all.

When you finally entered the grocery store, you had a game plan in mind and a fire under your ass. Your detour had taken longer than you expected and, although it was still very much morning, your brain was starting to label your shopping trip as an entire day affair. It appeared that a good portion of the district's population had a similar idea as you -- to go shopping that Saturday morning. It couldn't have been because you decided to go during prime shopping time.

Deftly you maneuvered through the aisles with your handbasket, throwing in enough ramen and frozen dinners to get you through the week, as well as anything else that caught your eye or was on your list.

In and out, that was your goal.

Grab your food as quickly as you could, get home, pack everything away and relax. Maybe you'll catch up on your shows, clean your kitchen, wash your sheets...

Had it not been for the ridiculously long lines at check-out, you would have finished all your grocery shopping in record time. A personal best!

Your phone was vibrating in your hand and you glanced at the name on the screen, hoping it was someone you wanted to speak to. To your surprise, it wasn't Crust but the number wasn't saved on your phone. The number of robocalls you had been getting had increased recently and you had a feeling that was what it was--

“Soorry,” a man grumbled when he accidentally walked his cart into you, knicking the back of your foot. You hissed, rotating the minor injury as the stinging pain radiated up your leg, but silently acknowledged his apology before turning to face forward.
At the stranger's arrival, the wait in line became a bit more… *uncomfortable.*

You could hear the labored, wheezy breathing of the man as he existed behind you and he *stunk* like stale cigarettes. It was something way more than a smell clinging to clothing -- the odor was *strong,* you could taste it heavy on your tongue. It was worse than passing through a cloud of second-hand in the street or having it blow black into your face while walking.

Your turn at the cashier couldn’t come fast enough and, judging from the look on the man's face as he rung up your purchases with strained politeness, the cigarette customer's appearance was wearing on him too.

As soon as you paid and collected your bags, you were out the door without a glance back.

Your entire trip was approaching what, at most, the two-hour mark? It felt later than it actually was.

Your fingers were dancing, good mood revving up your quirk despite the plastic handles of your bags cutting off circulation.

*You were happy.*

You walked with purpose but it was a bad idea to have bought ice cream, you thought with a sigh, looking down at your bags while trying to gather which one contained your frozen treats. Hopefully, they wouldn’t be too bad of a melted mess by the time you got home.

There was a hacking cough behind you and you frowned, nudging up the sunglasses that had been sliding down your slightly-sweat slickened nose. Was it still cold season? The last thing you wanted was to catch the flu or something...

Truthfully, you weren't sure *how* to even call out sick at work. Were you supposed to call Nedzu's office? Before Mic had sent out text-after-text-after-text to the group chat the one time he got sick but you had a feeling it was mostly to garner sympathy from his peers and, more likely, stave off boredom at being locked away inside his house.

The coughing continued as you turned down the shady avenue leading to your apartment. You glanced over your shoulder, curious that you and the sickly stranger were heading in the same direction.

Your eyes narrowed when you saw the hunched, greasy figure of the man from the grocery store. … *Was he following you?*

No, you thought as you looked back to the road in front of you. No, it was broad daylight. There’s no way a creep would come at you in the middle of the day in such a residential area--

The smoke hit you like a wallop to the head, the stale taste of cigarettes flooding your mouth as the ball of toxicity wrapped itself around your upper body.

It was suffocating, you realized when you went to inhale and felt nothing entering your lungs. Instinctively, panic attempted to rear its head within your gut, the inability to breath shocking your body into a fear response.

*Fuck.*

There was a raspy laugh by your ear and you dropped your bags, ignoring the thudding and rolling sound of your items falling everywhere. You couldn’t breathe, you thought numbly as an arm
wrapped around your torso. His body was pressed up against yours, he was saying something that wasn’t registering in your brain.

*Focus. Focus. Focus.*

The sound of your steadying heartbeat echoed in your ears as an eerie calm flooded your veins. He was saying something else that was inaudible but, considering the situation, you assumed it was something threatening.

*This…*

*This you could handle.*

He wasn’t expecting the sudden flash of light in your right hand.

He had made a critical error. By pushing against you to try and move you off the main street, he had only revealed to his position to you.

Though you couldn’t see, you could *feel* him.

Your elbow jabbed up and back, catching him at the base of his throat. The strike of your nearly formless axe came next, breaking his concentration fully and releasing the hold he had on you with his quirk. The tight ball of smoke around your head popped and you waved your hand in front of your face, clearing the smog so you could try and breathe in clean air. Though you were terribly out of breath and eyes were wet from your hacking, the adrenaline helped steeled your body’s natural reactions.

Your focus was on fighting.

The man was startled, looking up at the enraged *you.*

He had not been expecting you to be combative.

“I’m sorry!” he gasped, holding up his hands as if you were going to suddenly grant him mercy. “I only wanted to rob you!”

*Oh, like that changed anything.*

"What a mistake you made,” you snarled, raising your axe to give him a solid strike to the head, ignoring the voice in your conscience that screamed of the possible grievous injury you could leave him with.

The strike never hit, however. It appeared his quirk was adaptable and he whipped up a second smog bubble that took the impact of your axe. You winced -- you had manifested the weapon without a support item and it was not as durable as you hoped. Though it didn’t break apart, it was weak enough that the strike vibrated uncomfortably up your arm and into your shoulder.

It was an opening, the man realized. With a level of quickness that surprised you, he weaseled his way to his knees--

Not about to let him get away, you went to jab at his head.

He flicked his palms outward and a wall of smoke appeared, obscuring the immediate area around you. Though your axe followed through with the attack, it hit *nothing.*

“Come back here, greaseball,” you growled, irritated that he was giving up so easily. You clenched
your free fist, on edge and fully prepared to throw up a shield if he suddenly came at you from the murkiness.

But no attack came.

"Don't run away from this!" You were furious. He had the balls to attack you but not the balls to stay and fight!?

There was no answer -- not like you expected one. But the smokescreen was still up and you were slowly making your way forward to try and find freedom, guard up in case you weren't as alone as you thought.

“Hello? Is someone hurt?”

A voice that definitely did not belong to the cigarette man.

You waved your weapon, trying to clear the air in front of your face. Luckily for you, the time limit on the man’s quirk was reached and the tension the held his smog together dissolved. The blackened vapors blew up and out, clearing the street and revealing a slightly panicked person walking their dog across the road, gaping at where you stood.

The cigarette man was nowhere to be seen.

You went to curse but your words were silenced by a fit of coughing that cut through your bravado, body recognizing that the immediate danger had passed. The dog walker, taking in your slightly disheveled appearance and the mess of groceries surrounding you, reached for their phone to call the police.

“Are you okay?” they asked while your coughing continued. With a spit-filled groan, you nodded.

“There was a man--” Ugh, it sounded like you had just chain-smoked a pack of cigarettes. “-- did you see him?”

“No, but the police are on their way. Do you need an ambulance?”

“I’m fine,” you said, glancing down the street, praying you’d see the greasy bastard hidden behind a wall or car, stupidly watching. Sure you felt a little wheezy, but you were more than willing to spring into part two of your little rumble and teach him a lesson.

You were going to squash his head like a grape.

He was gone, though, his robbery attempt having failed spectacularly. You reached inside the purse that still hung around across your body, doing a blind check to see if everything was still there, including your newly acquired foundation and facewash. You were relieved to feel the objects you were looking for -- thankfully you wouldn't have to go through the hassle of canceling credit cards and ordering new forms of identification. The mess on the street caught your eye and you moved to pick up your spilled groceries, thanking the dog walker when they crossed the street to assist.

The first police car showed up within minutes, sirens blaring.

A second car was quick to follow.

Then came the questions.

After reiterating that you did not need an ambulance to the authorities, you gave the police as much
information as you could about the attacker and the scuffle that ensued. Unfortunately, you hadn’t
gotten a good look at his face but he possessed some kind of… smoke quirk. He didn’t take
anything, though he did stupidly admit his ultimate goal was to rob you.

But once you had shown you were prepared to fight, he took off.

The dog walker piped up then, saying they turned onto the block just in time to see the wall of smoke
that appeared to hide your attacker’s retreat, but they didn’t see anyone running from the scene. Just a
wall of smokey grey.

The police wrote down your statements and gathered your contact information and, upon seeing your
hero ID resting behind your civilian ID, asked for that too.

Then, they moved to the comforting phase, unnecessarily soothing you by saying the man was gone
and that you didn’t have to worry about him coming after you and that everything was going to be fine and that the odds of something like that happening were so low and going forward to try and
be aware of your surroundings--

You stewed while the officers talked, fists clenching and shaking horribly, praying that the man was
dumb enough to come at you again. You would have to go let off steam later, jog a couple of miles
or go smash some rocks, just to get your quirk to calm down. It had gone into overdrive in
anticipation of a fight and, having been denied, you had excess energy that needed to be burned off
otherwise it would drive you insane. Restless leg syndrome for your entire body.

Although you declared you were perfectly fine multiple times to the officers, you wavered when a
greying attractive mustached cop offered you a ride home.

You glanced down at your bags.

“You know what,” you said as sweetly as could, despite sounding like a chain-smoking
grandmother. “A ride would be very nice, thank you!”

After thanking the dog walker for being concerned enough to stop and get involved into what could
have been a messy situation, and for waiting around after, you and your bags settled in the backseat
of Officer Tanaka’s police cruiser.

He was very nice, engaging in small talk and lightly joking about the state of your voice and general
misfortune, which you found hilarious. He perked up considerably when you answered his question
about what you did for a living and revealed your position as a teacher at UA.

“The hero school!?” he said, his wide eyes capturing yours in his rearview mirror. You smiled back
at him before clapping a hand over your mouth, horrified to catch your reflection -- your teeth had
been stained black.

“They’re not like this normally!” you tried to explain hurriedly, rubbing your finger over them to try
and wipe the gunk away. "I promise!"

Tanaka laughed.

Mrs. Fujiwara had been resting outside when a police car drove down the street, scaring away the
turtle dove that had been preening on her garden wall. To her surprise, the vehicle stopped in front of
her house. She focused on the man driving, preparing for a conversation with a police officer -- what
had she done recently that would warrant a police visit? Had someone called in another wellness
check on her?
He exited the vehicle but did not approach her -- in fact, he didn’t acknowledge her. Instead, he turned to open the back door of the car...

“Gaijin-chan?” Mrs. Fujiwara said, concerned why her American neighbor was sitting in the back of a police cruiser. You were approaching with a closed-mouth smile, holding out a container of strawberries and a slightly dented shrink-wrapped melon cake that you had grabbed out of your bags.

“Hello Mrs. Fujiwara,” you said, nice and sweet despite the frustration and excess energy rolling through your body that made you want to throw a fist through a wall. The older woman’s face contorted in disgust, catching sight of your blackened mouth.

“What have you done?” she asked. You gave an awkward laugh, shifting slightly where you stood.

“A guy tried to rob me,” you explained. “Wasn’t expecting me to put up a fight, though. He got away and my mouth got dyed black by his quirk, as you can see. The policeman was nice enough to drive me home with my bags but I wanted to stop and give you the fruit though. Nothing bad happened to it, as you can see!”

“Oh!” She perked up considerably upon learning you weren’t some kind of delinquent. “Thank you, Gaijin-chan! I’m glad you weren’t killed.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Fujiwara,” you said, ugly grinning but furrowing your brows at the woman’s wording. “I’m glad he didn’t kill me either!”

“If toothpaste doesn’t get the black out of your teeth, try baking soda,” she suggested with a nod of her head, taking her offerings. “Or brush them with aloe vera.”

“I’ll be sure to try those things.”

You gave your goodbyes, returning to the officer who had stood dutifully beside his cruiser. He opened the door for you, pressing your head down gently when you went to sit in the back seat, a habit he apologized for when you looked at him with an offended raised brow and disgusted face.

The officer hesitated before he got back into the car, bowing politely at Mrs. Fujiwara when they made eye contact.

Mrs. Fujiwara gave a small wave, reaching to bite thoughtfully on one of the strawberries, watching the car drive off before stopping not too far down the road.

He seemed like a nice man, she thought. Too old for you, though. But she always had such a soft spot for men who enjoyed pegging so much. They were always such attentive lovers.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, war games is gonna be some fun.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!