# To Stand by Your Side

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

**Summary**

One student, one hero, and a whole lotta pining

Or, the High School Bakugou/Pro Hero Deku slow burn I need in my life
Start Line

Chapter Notes

hope y'all are ready for a wild ass ride cause i'm already shakin in my boots

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“So, I’m sure you all have been thinking about where it is you want to go to high school by now. If not, well... you’ve got a nice zero in the gradebook waiting for you. Though, I'm positive all of you have turned in your papers with your top choices at this point.”

_Ugh, could you talk any slower, teach? Wastin’ my damn time._

Katsuki’s head lolled back over the end of his chair, feet up on the desk. Hell, he didn’t need to be here. He knew what he wanted to do. Didn’t need some high school dropout with a pathetic quirk ordering him around.

“Looks like we have a few overachievers here though- oh, Bakugou!” His teacher pulled his form out of the stack, eyebrows scrunched up in a way that somehow made him even uglier than before. “You were supposed to write down your top three choices, yet you… you only put one on here.”

His teacher seemed a little nervous about continuing. “You- you know U.A. only has about a two percent acceptance rate, right? As amazing as it would be for you to get in, you better be planning on applying to other schools as well…!”

_I’ve had enough of this shit for one day._

Katsuki groaned, heaved himself up into a(slightly) more regular sitting position, and stared his teacher dead in the eye. “Oi. Shut the hell up. Who are the hell are you to be telling me what the fuck I can and can’t do, hah? I’m going to U.A., and that’s a goddamn fact.”

If it wouldn’t have been a mark on his perfect attendance record, he’d have walked out right then and there.

The rest of the so-called “lecture” was a bitch to listen to, and by the end of the day, he was dying to do anything more productive. With a loud, exhausted groan, he stepped out of the school, debating on whether to head to his house before going to the gym or not- just before being stopped by a couple more of the resident class shitheads. He sighed, rolled his eyes, and kept walking.

_Not in the mood today, fuckers._

“Katsuki, you really went off today.” The finger-fuck kid jogged over to him. “Dude, the look on his face when you said that…! Shit, that was good, man.”

He clenched his teeth, and kept walking. “S’nothing. Shut up.”

“Aw, but he was kinda right, you know?” Weird-face said as he came up beside him. “You’re amazing as hell, Katsuki, but you should probably apply somewhere other than U.A.- hell, you know that those entrance exams are practically impossible!”

_Shut up, shut up, shut up!_
“Don’t you know who you’re talking to?” Bitterness, cold and scathing seared through his words. “I’m gonna be the best damn hero there is, and U.A. is the only start line I’ll accept. S’not that hard to fuckin’ comprehend, is it?”

The two nervously laughed beside him, falling a few paces behind. “You… you sure are something, Katsuki.” They paused for just a minute, an awkward silence filling the air as an even more awkward question came up. “Uh… wanna hit up the arcade this afternoon? The prey’ll be good right now, y’know…” Finger-fuck trailed off, long past having overstayed his welcome.

“You think I would want that to wind up on my record if I was caught? Hell no.” Palms sparked at his hips. “Leave me alone, idiots. I have more important shit to do.”

*How many times do I have to say-*

“How training for U.A. entrance exams then, huh?” The other said, a bit of a mocking edge to his words. “You’re not- Katsuki, you’re not *that* much better than us. Why don’t you ever just do what we do, the same shit that everyone else does? It’s weird, man. Why can’t you just be norma-”

“And why don’t *you* learn to fucking leave when someone tells you!” He spat, rage bringing his veins to a boiling point. “You really think I’d want to spend any time with you bastards!? Get- get the hell outta my life!”

Explosions rocketed out through rigid fingers, blood pounding in his ears. “Got nothing to say to that, hah? Get lost already!”

“Uh, K-Katsuki-”

“If you’re gonna say something, don’t make it so damn worthless!” He growled, stepping closer. “Leave me the hell alone. I’ve been asking you for-”

“Katsuki, behind-!”

“Oh, finally gettin’ the fucking point and leaving, *hah*?!”

*Why are you shits only getting it-*

“Ha… ha.”

He froze.

*Wha- what- no, no, this isn’t- not now, it can’t-*

“That’s a powerful quirk you have…” The new voice gargled from behind. “Oh, yes… and the perfect size for a nice little disguise, too.”

His eyes were blown wide, words lodged in his throat as his legs went stiff, unmoving.

*Why can’t I move, wait, no, what-*

Slime pooled around his ankles as every bone in his body turned to brittle ice.

“Get- get the fuck away from me!” He shouted, weaker than he’d expected. “The hell do you think you’re do-!”

And before he could say another word, something awfully, *horribly* disgusting was in his mouth, choking, suffocating, *killing*.
“It’ll only take about forty seconds as long as you stay relaxed- don’t fight it, kid.”

F-Fight… no, I- I have to fight this! I-I can’t just- let this-

He wasn’t even aware that he’d started setting off explosions. One by one, desperation blurring everything together, screaming at the top of his lungs in the hope that somehow, in some way, it would help. There was no choice. This was sudden, too sudden, even for-

I can’t think about that right now! I don’t have a fucking choice, do I? Get- get your fucking ass in gear! You’re not pathetic, are you? ARE YOU!?

Sludge shoved its way down his throat, every crevice of his body screaming at the foreigner to get out, GET OUT! But- no, he couldn’t think about just how- how violated he felt, slime sinking into every corner of his skin, forcing itself everywhere it possibly could.

Get out, get out, LEAVE ME THE HELL ALONE!

Katsuki yanked his head away, gasping for any bit of feeble air he could get before the villain’s protrusion dove back into his throat again, because that’s what this was- a villain.

“Oh, you wanna play hard to get?” The villain laughed, distorted and bone-chilling. “The feisty ones… those are always the most fun to use!”

I- I’m not a fucking plaything!

He wrenched himself away for a split second, lungs burning as he tried to keep himself awake, alive- for a while longer. His hands strained at the edge of green ropes, blasting away as much as he could, begging that the sound of broken glass and kindling around him meant the villain was going down.

Let go, let go! I- I have a goddamn career ahead of me! I have shit I need to do, fucker!

He screamed again, ragged and utterly raw before an even thicker wad of slime tore his mouth to shreds, dragging out desperate tears from the corners of his eyes. Adrenaline was his only lifeline, every limb moving on its own. As much as he wanted to stay calm, wanted to stay composed and controlled, his body was reacting like a wildfire and would burn till there was nothing left to incinerate.

Then, to his horror, he heard what might have been the sound of talking.

No. No. Don’t see me like this, don’t you dare look at me like this! I- I’m stronger than this…! I-I don’t need… don’t need…

But further in it went, clogging up every avenue of oxygen in his body. Whether he wanted to admit it or not, his attacks were growing weaker, and just focusing on getting air into his body was all he could really try and do. No. This- this wasn’t fighting. This wasn’t winning.

This was survival.

“Oh, looks like we have some friends.” The villain cackled. “They’ve all got their eyes on you, don’t they! Oh, I spot some heroes, too… but, they won’t be able to save you. Can’t you see-”

He was shoved to the front of the villain’s body, eyes pulled wide, and every kind of shame and embarrassment flooded down to his toes.

“-can’t you see just how weak these people are?”
Let go, god, let go! At- at least give me an opening, something, anything to just fucking prove myself! I’m not- I won’t be taken down this easily!

“You’re such a fun one, though- yes, keep fighting, and you’ll drain your strength so I don’t have to.” Sludge wound its way around his arms, around his legs. “And who could possibly stop me? You do realize that your explosions are being thrown around the area instead of attacking me, right? You might have a powerful quirk, but-”

Shut up, shut up, SHUT UP!

“-you’re so weak!”

Katsuki faltered, screaming more from the pain in his own arms and shoulders than anything else. Each new blast ripped more and more from him, and he wasn’t sure how much- just how much longer-

I… I-I can’t-

“And who are you to be saying that, villain!”

Before he knew what had happened, a huge gust of wind shot past him, followed by another, and another. Something grabbed his arm, but before he could retaliate, the rest of his body fell from the villain’s grasp and left him dangling in the air as another blast of pure energy nearly sent him flying.

“I’ve got you–!”

And Katsuki couldn’t do a thing but let himself be pulled towards the owner of that voice- so solid, strong and determined.

Who… who is this?

“Here, we’re going to sit down.” The voice spoke again, and Katsuki realized he was being held right against this stranger’s chest. “Easy, easy… it’s gonna be okay now. I’ve got you.”

Katsuki tried to look up, to see the face of his savior, but everything was already blurring around him. He managed to make out green hair, green eyes… but, his hands…

They’re so warm…

He passed out.

Waiting for updates had never been easy. Not that it was for anyone, really, but especially not for brand-new pro hero, Midoriya Izuku, on the debut of his first rescue. He’d escaped the media as fast as he could after he’d gotten the victim out of danger, and the rest of the heroes at the scene had helped to clean up the area, as well as apprehend the villain. But, that wasn’t what had concerned him the most.

“Valiant, he’s awake.”

At the call of his still-new hero name, he shot to his feet, then remembered he had to stay calm. It wasn’t that he was nervous, no- just anxious from anticipation. The hospital nurse raised an eyebrow, as if asking him a pointed really in regards to his slightly jumpy behavior.

“I- can I see him?” He asked, trying to keep the sudden surge of emotion under wraps. He was a hero, and yes- though he might be new, he still had to be professional. Right.
The nurse pursed her lips, but nodded. “Right this way. Keep your voice down in the hallways.”

“A-ah, yes ma’am!” He answered, nodding quickly. He followed her into the main hallway of the hospital, all the way to two doors from the end. He had taken off a few parts of his hero costume since rushing the victim to the hospital, and now could let bare, scarred up hands rest by his sides. Maybe he looked kinda like a mess right now, but that was okay.

“Right in here.” The nurse stopped, and turned back towards him. “By the way, the police just found a school ID in his belongings and contacted his parents. They should be here shortly, so if they arrive, don’t be surprised. Got it?”

“Yes, got it!” Izuku swallowed. “U-Uh… what’s his name?”

“Bakugou Katsuki.” She paused, glancing down at the paperwork in her hands. “He’s a third year in middle school. He probably isn’t going to be doing too well mentally either, so be gentle with him. He just had a very traumatic experience, and if he doesn’t want to talk, don’t make him.”

She said that as if Izuku could have forgotten the look in those red eyes when he’d pulled him out.

But, the new hero simply went quiet, and nodded.

The door was pushed open all-too carefully, and inside lay its single occupant. And yet, the victim, no- Bakugou, didn’t even look his way. A little more worried now, he took few more steps forward and sat down in a chair next to the bed.

“Bakugou?” He started, voice drifting down to a more appropriate level. “You hanging in there?”

Bakugou spared him a glance, hands clenched weakly by his side.

“...m’fine.” He mumbled, barely audible. “You… you the one who…?”

Izuku dipped his head. “Yeah. I pulled you out of there.”

Silence fell over the two for a long moment.

“I…” Bakugou’s voice was so… small. “I should thank you, right?”

“I mean, you don’t need to.” Izuku rubbed the back of his head, unsure of what to do. “I’m just glad you’re safe, really.”

“I-I didn’t need…” Bakugou trailed off, and to his surprise, seemed to start… crying. “I… I-I would’ve… made it out…!”

What…?

“I’m… I’m not weak.” Bakugou rasped, voice ragged. “I’m not. I-”

Oh. Oh god, I see.

Izuku stared down at his hands, fingers running over scarred knuckles. “Bakugou, being saved… it doesn’t make you weak.”

Is… is this sort of dealing with the aftermath a part of being a good hero too?

Bakugou bit his lip, possibly trying to just calm himself down, and Izuku decided to remain silent as long as he needed. It was hard to watch him slowly try to relax, and Izuku couldn’t help but notice
red rashes staining his still-shaking hands. As much as Bakugou seemed to want to hide how much he was hurting, his body couldn't lie.

The room was quiet for some time. Izuku didn’t move.

“...hey. Uh...” Bakugou’s voice was barely a whisper. “You... you’re a hero, right? What... what’s your name?”

It was an honest question.

“My- my hero name is Valiant.” He answered, only for Bakugou to shake his head a little.

“I- I asked for your name, dipshit.” Bakugou looked back over at him, and squinted. “Wait... that your ID over there...?”

Izuku looked down, and realized that it was, in fact, sitting on the counter nearby. The nurse had taken it from him for verification earlier, and must’ve left for him to get when he came back. “Oh, yeah. I forgot to ask her for that back, hah...”

Oddly enough, Bakugou seemed to be looking at his ID with a strange curiosity more than anything else.

“Did your parents really name you... Deku?”

Izuku squinted, more than a little confused. “Huh? No, my name is Midoriya. Uh- Midoriya Izuku.”

Bakugou looked back towards him, then back towards the ID, eyes tired. “Huh. Well, you can read the ‘Izuku’ like ‘Deku’ then, too. Go fuckin’ figure.” He paused. “I like Deku better. Sounds... sounds kinda like, ‘you can do it’. Y’know?”

Izuku rubbed his arm awkwardly. “Uh, yeah, I guess so. But, um, why’d you ask?”

Bakugou paused for just a moment before meeting his eyes with the most steady gaze he’d seen so far. “I- I wanna tell you something. ‘Kay?”

“Yeah, of course.”

Bakugou’s body visibly relaxed, and he stretched a shaky, yet confident arm out to him.

“I- I’m going to get on your level.” His voice was quiet, but firmer now. “I’m going to become a damn good hero, and I-” he swallowed. “I’m going to stand by your side one day, Deku. I will.”

Huh?

“Wait, why m-”

“You’re not looking... you’re not looking down on me.” Bakugou was clearly trying to keep his composure. “I wanna be like that. Like you. You- you’re strong.”

Holy shit.

“Bakugou, that’s- that’s some pretty high praise.” He laughed nervously. “I mean, I’m just a rookie. There’s plenty of other heroes-”

“No. They’re not like you.” Bakugou insisted. “You’re different. And that- what I just said, that’s a goddamn promise.”
Out of everything that could’ve happened, *this* was the last thing he expected.


“God, don’t call me that.” Bakugou groaned, rolling his head into his pillow. “Just- just Katsuki is fine. I-” He stopped, turning a little red. “I don’t want you to remember me as- as Bakugou.”

“Katsuki.” He repeated, the name a little strange on his tongue. “Katsuki. Okay. I’ll remember that.”

Katsuki let out a short laugh. “Better. I’m gonna be your goddamn partner one day, after all.”

Part of him wondered if Katsuki was a little high on pain medication. The other part didn’t care.

He took Katsuki’s outstretched hand, turning it in his own. “I won’t settle for anything less than the best, you know. Think you can make it there?”

Katsuki squeezed his hand, feeling far more stable and solid than it had before. “I don’t make empty promises.”

*He’s… he’s so cute.*

“That’s what I like to hear.” Izuku smiled. “Keep that up, and you’ll become a damn good hero. You’re stronger than you think you are. Got it?”

The other snorted, but looked marginally happier than before. “Yeah. Got it. Better keep your damn eyes on me, then. Just watch me.”

A bit of warmth bubbled up within him. He hadn’t expected this to come out of his day- no, there was no way he could have expected this to come out of his debut as a hero, of all things. But here, with Katsuki’s hand in his own, a reminder, a *promise*-

“I won’t look away, Katsuki.”

Yes. He could remember why he was a hero to begin with.

Katsuki grinned.

“I’ll hold you to it, Deku.”

Chapter End Notes

If y’all were wondering, this will be the only chapter set in middle school, the next chapter will start after a timeskip.

my twitter is @aeronines if u ever wanna come yell at me! and thank u @aetherlite for being fantastic and beta-ing for me, and @baku_bean for enduring all my yelling about this gosh darn AU you are the best

Going to be updating weekly for a while! I already have this written a decent amount in advance and I’m hoping to be able to keep that up for as long as I can, this fic fuels me
From a Distance

Chapter Summary

high school here we go

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes


Katsuki groaned and reached with scary accuracy towards the alarm clock on the nightstand, shutting it off with a bit of a death glare. Two weeks in, and he was still adjusting to his new routine at U.A.

Okay. I've got an hour to work out, then one more to wash up and get to class. It's upper body day.

He rolled out of bed, rubbed his eyes, and steadied himself back on his feet. Yeah, he was beginning to get in a groove. Another week of this and he’d be getting started a bit quicker.

By eight, I’ll be awake and ready to go.

The dorms were always quiet at this hour. Katsuki had taken to getting up at a consistent six A.M., and found it relaxing to be able to go down to the gym next door without so much as the chirp of a bird to accompany him. Despite his admittedly aggressive exterior, even he could enjoy the peace grown under a dim morning sky and the rustle of new leaves.

The gym was empty when he went in. He’d assumed it would fill up a bit more as the weeks went on, but so far, it had been a rare occasion to see anyone else working out before the asscrack of dawn. Ready equipment awaited him instead, clean and welcoming.

So yeah. It was nice.

The television mounted up on the wall was playing quietly as he set his stuff down, and he took only a brief glance at it before stretching out and turning back towards the equipment.

…only to turn back towards the TV after a quick look to be sure the room really was empty. He grabbed the remote, turned up the volume, and grinned when he saw the scheduled re-run of Pro Hero Valiant's- Deku’s- interview that had aired the night before. He’d missed it last night due to studying for an upcoming test, but had found out that it would be showing again this morning. No question as to what was going to be his background music this morning. And, well- maybe he was losing out on some valuable workout time if he were to watch the beginning of the interview for a bit, but just a few minutes wouldn’t hurt. Right?

But listening to Deku’s voice while I’m working out always gets me in a groove. Nothin’ wrong with that.

Still, though, he couldn’t suppress a shiver when he heard his laugh. Deku’s voice always roused some sort of unexplainable feeling within him, though certainly far more pleasant than uncomfortable.
Yeah… I could listen to him talk for hours.

Eyes still trained on the TV, he let Deku’s familiar, comforting voice take hold of him as he leaned into a first round of stretches. Katsuki could almost smile as he let the easy routine envelop him, providing some amount of comfort he couldn’t seem to find anywhere else.

“...so, Valiant, you’ve only been on the job solo for less than a year now. If you could share with me…”

He grabbed a couple of dumbbells, setting his feet in the right position before going into a set of bicep curls while still half-focused on Deku.

“A-ah, it’s not that I’m that amazing!” Deku’s voice fell into a nervous laugh, muffled over the speakers. “I really love what I do, though. Y’know? Even if nothing else, I can give people a chance to see the next day. To- to give them hope. And if I can do that even just a little bit, then I’ve succeeded.”

Something bubbled up in Katsuki’s chest at those words, and he pinned it on a swell of pride. It was easy to grin through the next curl as he reminded himself yet again that yes, that would be his partner. Eventually. Every extra workout session, every minute spent studying and training to be the best damn hero he could would get him there one day. Next to him.

He was still slightly bitter that he’d only seen Deku once more after that initial meeting in the hospital. Even then, though, it was still in the hospital. The hero had come by to talk to his parents a little bit, and they had gotten the chance to talk together briefly afterwards. He couldn’t believe just how badly he wanted Deku to stay longer, even just to exist in the space around him.

Yet, even that had been so many months ago.

Sometimes he feared Deku had forgotten about him. Most of the time, he forced himself not to worry about it. He’d make Deku remember, if nothing else.

After another few minutes, he set the dumbbells down and moved on to bench press, still half-listening to the comforting rhythm of Deku’s voice.

“You’re certainly good at what you do, though. There’s a reason you’ve been climbing so fast in the ranks, after all! Tell me, how do you feel about that?”

Sweat dripped down bare arms, but he was sure to keep his reps in time. Slow, steady, effective. It burned, as usual, but that’s what he was here for.

“Well- it’s certainly something, that’s for sure.” Deku seemed a bit embarrassed. “Getting used to the fame, well… it’s a lot, to be honest. But, if it means that more people are able to have confidence and faith in me, and can feel more secure in their day-to-day lives, then… it makes me happy enough.”

And there he finished his last rep, the bar settling in a slot overhead. So far, so good. He got up, stretched out a little, and moved on to pushups.

“That’s wonderful to hear, Valiant! It’s amazing to see how far you’ve come in such a short time, after all. You’re certainly a good role model for all of us. Now, if you could, what do you attribute this explosion in popularity to since you’ve started?”

Katsuki grit his teeth, arms burning as he focused on keeping his form. Accuracy was better than speed, after all. Better to get it right than rush through and screw it up.
Gotta make it good. Gotta get stronger, better.

It was the mantra that got him through every day.

“Oh, um… I-I mean, there hasn’t been anything that I’ve done for fame, per say… really, I’ve just been trying to do the best I can with my job. I mean, I like to think that my fighting style is fun to watch, at least, but it’s also quite effective! And, um…”

He finished the last few push-ups, catching his breath for a moment while reflecting back on Deku’s words.

Yeah, it’s effective. Your shoot style is such a nice, well-rounded ability, and with the added edition of gloves to project air with the force of your quirk, you have an extremely balanced arsenal of both close-combat and mid-range attacks. You’re fast, lithe, and quick- making you a dangerous foe. Your quirk is fairly subtle too, and when activated at a lower percentage, can stay hidden beneath your hero costume for use in possible stealth missions. And, if necessary, you can raise your quirk to a higher level of power for a literal bone-breaking move that turns you into a goddamn powerhouse.

He shook his head, trying to halt its running commentary. The detailed analysis was all written out on his laptop, and he’d gone over and added to it enough times at this point. He needed to be focusing on himself right now, think about how he could improve, rather than just loop his thoughts on Deku’s skills like a broken record. Not that he wasn’t amazing, but… now wasn’t the right time. He steered himself back over to the dumbells, working in an extra set of shoulder raises to get his mind clear again. As hard as working out was sometimes, it all led to growth- and that growth was what would lead him to real success.

"Do you think your looks have anything to do with it either, Valiant? You’ve certainly been the target of many magazines as of late, and though you haven’t done too many shoots, the few you have done have been met with astonishing amounts of praise. I hear you’re quite popular with the ladies, too."

Yet, that question got under his skin every time Deku was asked it.

“O-Oh, ahah… I… I’m not too sure about that.” His voice wobbled through quiet speakers. “I… I mean, I think it’s my hero work that draws people to me, not… photoshoots.”

He wasn’t completely sure what it was in particular that irked him about the public’s attitude towards Deku’s little desire for publicity outside of work, but he knew it irritated him that they would continue to harass him about topics like this when he very clearly didn’t care. His grip on the dumbbell tightened, teeth clenched as he tried to ignore the host’s increasingly invasive questions.

“Oh, but it’s undeniable that you’re attractive. And you, being the handsome young man that you are, must have someone special in your life too, right? No one in their right mind would turn you down, after all.”

Katsuki’s palms began to spark around the dumbells. Shut up! Can’t you see how uncomfortable he is? God, you’re such a fucking loser.

Yet, he forced himself to breathe, pouring his focus back into the workout. He loved hearing Deku’s voice, but shit like this always pissed him off to no end. He wasn’t there to talk about drama or any sort of love life. No, he was there to talk about his job. About being a goddamn amazing hero. And above all, that was what mattered.

“I-I, uh, I’m really not interested in pursuing any sort of romantic relationship in the near future.”
Deku was clearly growing increasingly nervous. “I, um, have said that before, too. I can’t possibly foresee myself entering a serious relationship with anyone due to the importance of my job, as I am fully committed to it. That… that is all.”

Katsuki nodded to no one but himself.

Exactly. The only thing you should be married to is your work in this business. Deku’s a real damn hero. He gets all this shit.

At the conclusion of his impromptu set of spite-filled shoulder raises, he grabbed a quick drink just before taking on the last section of his workout. Pull ups. Truthfully, there was something cathartic about doing pull ups for him. They had certainly gotten easier over time, but pushing his limits always gave him a challenge and allowed for new growth.

I’ve gotta get better- no. I’m gonna get better.

From his spot on the bar, he had a nice, clear view of the TV across the room. Perfect.

“Well. Alright, then. Now- to close out this wonderful interview, I have one more question for you, Valiant. If you could… what would you say inspires you to do what you’re doing? Is there a specific event, person, or meaning behind it for you aside from the typical passions of being a hero?”

He pulled himself up, relishing in the familiar strain. It was around now that the endorphins usually kicked in, energy pulsing through his veins and his heart.

“...now that I think about it, there is one thing that comes to mind.” Deku began, growing a bit more confident now. “After… after a mission a while back, I had the chance to talk to someone. I- I really can’t quite put my finger on it, but there was something about him that made me remember why I went through all of this to become a hero in the first place. Sometimes… sometimes I think back to then and get some amount of strength from what he told me.”

Katsuki froze in the middle of a pull up, eyes wide.

It couldn’t be… is he talking about me?

And as he tried to recover from that thought, the host continued.

“Oh, something he said? Care to share with us, if it’s that inspirational?”

He was stuck in an upright position, glued to the screen, not even noticing the wild shaking of his arms on the bar.

“Ah… I’d rather not, really. Maybe… maybe at some other point in time, but… no, not now. They aren’t my words to say.” Deku’s hands folded themselves together in his lap. “But, I will say this. If you’re watching, I… I’m waiting, Katsu- Kacchan.”

Yeah, he nearly fell off the bar right then and there.

“Ka- Kacchan?” He blurted out to no one in particular. “Wha… what the hell is a Kacchan?!?”

Yep. No way he was finishing his workout now.

The interview ended shortly after that, yet Katsuki couldn’t pull his eyes away from the TV despite it. Was that Deku’s way of keeping his privacy? Was it just a nickname? An- an unfairly personal one, at that? It sounded childish, yes, but he was younger than Deku. Either way, Katsuki was going to be
thinking about those words- about that name- for the weeks to come.

*He's still waiting. He thinks about me. He sees me as an inspiration. He- he gave me…*

His heart was thrumming at an unbelievable pace, so much that just trying to remember how to breathe was a struggle.

*I've never had a nickname before, have I?*

He wasn't sure that he'd need coffee after that wake-up call.

It was a few minutes before he regained enough sanity to move again, forcing himself into his normal post-workout stretch routine even though he hadn't quite made it all the way through the last set. God, he'd never been more glad that the gym was empty. If anyone had seen him pull off that stunt, he was pretty sure he'd die of embarrassment right then and there. He wasn't weak, wasn't someone to be brought to his knees by just a few words from a near-stranger.

*I'm waiting, Kacchan.*

Yet, here he was, proving that notion wrong.

He collected his few belongings and made his way back to the dorms, doing his best to regain his usual composure. The last thing he wanted was for his classmates to question him if he looked more off than usual.

If nothing else, it was still nice outside. The sun had finally begun to creep out over the horizon, and as he stepped outside of pale gym walls, found himself bathed in morning pinks and oranges. It was a short walk back to the dormitory, but an enjoyable one, at least. Something to calm his still-racing heart.

*Deku… one day, I'll make it.*

Katsuki took a long, deep breath before he opened the door.

*I'll get better, climb higher, so the next time you see me I can give you something to really be inspired about…!*

And with that thought, he stepped inside.

…just to find himself face-to-face with one Todoroki Shouto. Great.

“Oh.” Todoroki blinked. “You're up early.”

Katsuki scowled and pushed past him. “I'm always up early, idiot. I work out for this body, y'know? Unlike some people, I don't rely on my pretty-boy beauty sleep.”

Todoroki didn't move.

“Is that supposed to be an insult?”

Katsuki rolled his eyes, huffing and moving on.

…just to run into yet another person he didn't want to see at seven in the morning not a few steps later.

*“Bakugou! You are being safe when you go out there so early, aren't you?”*
Iida’s stringent voice was accompanied by a rapid flurry of hands, and Katsuki cursed his luck yet again.

“The gym is right next door. I'm fuckin’ fine, prez.” He drawled, just wanting to escape to the showers.

“You should know by now that it's not completely secure to go by yourself that early, though! I'm just concerned about you, Bakugou. Take a buddy next time!”

He didn't want to bother with this anymore.

“If you need a workout partner, I’d be glad to volunteer, Bakugou.”

Oh god, there's more.

Yaoyorozu Momo looked up at him from the common room couch, only genuine concern in her eyes.

Fuck.

“I'd love to be able to learn from you a bit.” She smiled, albeit nervously. “You've been doing so well in practice, but I also think there's some stuff I could teach-”

It was all he could do to keep his palms calm amidst the frustration.


Thankfully, everyone seemed to know better to say more as he stormed out of the room.

At the very least, the halls of the dormitory were still quiet. He only ran across a couple bleary-eyed students on the way up to his room who seemed too busy rubbing the sleep from their eyes to notice him, and even the beat of tennis shoes on wood floor was dull. It was as if the whole building had been blanketed in a thick quiet, yet the silence was oddly soothing. Even as he turned his door knob and stepped in his room, the feeling remained.

It was a simple task from there to grab his clothes and shower supplies from his closet, but as he left, he stole one glance at the lone Valiant poster on his wall. It wasn't as if he had it up there just because Deku had saved him. No- this, after all, was a special poster- one that he’d won in an online contest a few months back and had signed by the man himself. Something inside him always warmed upon seeing it- it was a little cheesy, he knew, but the image of Deku’s brilliant smile and fist held in a strong position, along with the handwritten message across the bottom- Dreams can become reality!- could hardly not make him happy. It was- it was a prize he’d won, not just a picture of his favorite hero. And it was the only merchandise he owned of Deku, so it wasn't really like he was some huge obsessive fanboy or anything. Just one poster was tasteful, and this one carried a special weight to it.

He's just amazing, really. One day I'll reach him.

But that moment wasn't here nor there. Now was the time for him to take a shower and get ready for the day. And with that, he allowed himself one last smile before stepping out of the room.

Despite the four showers in the communal bathrooms, Katsuki only ever ran into one or two people showering when he did. Supposedly, it was more crowded in the evenings, but he wouldn't know.
This morning was no exception to the rule- the gentle sound of faucet water greeted him as he padded across clean tile flooring, and it was easy enough to step into an open stall and shower. His schedule worked, and he stuck to it, thus never running into much variation in his routine. There were some areas of his life where mixing things up was certainly better, but being able to fall back into the ease of a consistent, relaxing shower time was good for him. And simply enough, as soon as hot water began streaming down his back, his body knew to relax.

I hope Deku gets some time to relax too… even if it’s just a little bit, like this.

It wasn’t a new thought. As much as his school and social activities were devoid of Deku’s influence, his time alone centered almost too much on his favorite hero. Not that he didn’t spend a lot of time out on his own training too, but just remembering and using him as a guiding light had gotten him through too many hard days already.

Something about this day already felt different, though. Whether it was the sudden nickname from Deku’s interview or just the general atmosphere, he knew things were going to get interesting today.

After the shower and a quick blow-dry of his hair, he shucked his uniform back on and exchanged his self-care supplies for school ones, finished homework tucked neatly into an organized folder that he slipped in his bag as well. The last thing he’d be seen as was a bad student.

“Morning, Bakugou!” The all-too-cheery voice was the warning as not a second later, a pale pink arm was thrown around his shoulder, nearly putting him in a chokehold. He gagged and tried to shove off his so-called friend, but she persisted. “It’s gonna be a great day, isn’t it? I even got all my homework done for once! Ooh, I hope Aizawa put some hand-to-hand combat into today’s hero training because I’m just dying to have a good fight right now, gah!”

He rolled his eyes, grudgingly accepting that she wasn’t going to move. “Mornin’, asshole.”

“Ashido. Not asshole! We’ve been over this, you.”

“Hmph. Coulda’ fooled me.”

He grumbled and kept walking, now with the addition of a bright pink deadweight. Ashido Mina, with her bubbly nature and strange amount of stubbornness, had forced her way into his life and under his skin in a matter of days after the start of the semester. Maybe hanging out with her and the others wasn’t so bad, but he wouldn’t know what it was like without them. They’d never given him the chance.

And, speaking of they-

“Damn, Ashido got you first today.” His other unwelcome companion strolled forward, her soft brown hair framing wide eyes. “Someone’s perky, huh? What’s got your mood up this morning, blondie?”

“One of these days I’ll get to class without running into you fuckers.” He groaned, hands shoved in his pockets as Camie came up and plastered herself across his empty side.

“Aww, but we know you love the attention, babe.” Camie winked at him, Ashido giggling all the same.

“It’s been two weeks and you two have done this every goddamn morning.” He sighed, not fighting them any longer. “I’d have thought you would’ve found someone else to harass at this point.”

“Oh, but you’re just too fun to mess with!” Ashido squeezed him a bit tighter, strong arms nearly too
much for him to handle.

“Keep your legs moving, boss.” Camie grinned. “Don’t wanna be late for class, now do we?”

“I woulda’ been there already if I didn’t have you fucks hanging off me!” He complained, but kept walking, letting his friends be basically dragged along. Maybe one day, they’d leave him be. But, if he was being truthful, he wasn’t sure if he wanted that day to come.

They got to class a couple minutes before the bell rang, surprisingly, and Katsuki managed to wrestle himself out of his friend’s grip to set his stuff down and sit on his desk before getting dragged back into conversation. At this point it had turned into some inane discussion about shoes or some shit, arguing the pros and cons of heels in hero costumes. Camie was set on that it was necessary to make a statement with her outfit while Ashido remained consistent that they would just get in the way of movement. Katsuki didn’t care much, but-

“If you can stab someone with your heels, it’s worth it.” He grumbled, looking away. “If they’re gonna be there, kill with ‘em.”

“Glad to know you have good taste, blondie.” Camie smirked at Ashido, who crossed her arms and pouted, sticking her tongue out in Katsuki’s direction.

“Well-!” Ashido started, only to be interrupted by Aizawa walking in, tiredly glaring at the entire class. His friends took the hint and scooted back to their own desks, though Camie’s was right behind his own, and sat down. He sighed and at least went back down to sit in the chair, legs up on the desk until Aizawa gave him a stare in particular, to which he relented and reluctantly obeyed.

Ashido, from a couple desks over, looked back at him and mouthed a you’re still wrong towards him and Camie before going back to being semi-attentive towards Aizawa.

Their teacher sighed, glancing around the room, and stuck his hands in his pockets. “Everyone’s here, good. Go ahead and pass your homework to the front, then we’ll deal with the rest of today’s activity. We’ve got the schedule structured a bit differently today.”

There was a shuffle of papers around the classroom and a couple cries of dismay from the few students who had forgotten to turn it in, but before long it had all been handed up. Usually, they waited till mid-class or so to turn homework in, so something clearly different was happening today.

I hope it’s combat training, and not just some special lecture…!

One quick glance down at their homework, and Aizawa cleared his throat. “All right, class. So, you may have been wondering why I had you research past battles in which the victor was fighting alone against a group of people who ultimately lost. Today’s lesson is going to be about successfully working in groups that you may not be as comfortable fighting with, and finding ways to succeed with your combined strengths against a higher-level opponent than you. In order to do so, I’ve split you up into random groups of four in advance. And…” He paused, looking towards the door. “I’ve recruited some help for this lesson. You may know of them, you may not. Doesn’t matter. They’re all considerably above your skill level, as pro heroes and U.A. alumni themselves. So before we head out to the field, I’m gonna have them come in here for a minute.”

“Damn, he’s bringing out the big guns.” Camie whispered behind him. Katsuki was sitting at the edge of his seat, wondering who Aizawa could have possibly brought in to help them out.

Aizawa opened the door, and Katsuki’s eyes went wide.

A chorus of excited murmurs went up as Pro Hero Uravity walked in, waving and smiling a bit,
followed by Pro Hero Gale’s massive form. Katsuki grinned, anticipation for this exercise flooding through his veins.

But just as Gale took his place near Uravity near the front of the room, a third, lean figure walked in, and every muscle in Katsuki’s body froze.

_No way. No fucking way. You’ve gotta-

“Today, we’ll have Pro Heroes Gale, Uravity, and Valiant helping us out.” Aizawa delivered with a bored tone. “They aren’t about to take it easy on any of you, either.”

That green hair-

His green eyes-

Those strong, gentle, gloved hands-

_It can’t- he can’t-

“I hope you’re ready to show me what you’re made of.” Deku grinned, a soft, yet serious lilt to his voice. “Don’t expect any delicate treatment from me or the others. This- I know this will be fun, yeah?”

Katsuki nearly passed out right then and there, because-

_Deku is staring straight at me.

“After all, I’ve been waiting for this.”

Chapter End Notes

in case u were confused, Gale is Inasa mah windy boy

My twitter is @aeronines if u ever wanna yell about these idiots with me!

And thank you so much to my amazing beta @aetherlites for always bein a bro, and @baku_bean for entertaining my exercise questions u are the best

currently updates weekly
Round One

Chapter Summary

put em up kacchan

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Camie nearly whistled.

“Shit, Baku, it’s ya boy.”

Katsuki was currently trying not to curse the world and everything in it because shit, he was nowhere near ready for Deku to see him again. Not like this, only two weeks into school. Not as inexperienced and ill-trained as he was so far. This was- he couldn’t-

Yet, Deku was still staring right at him. And Katsuki was sure he’d nearly forgotten how to breathe.

I’m going to give it my best shot, even though I’m nowhere near ready to face you, but... I missed you. And you’re…

He swallowed, trying to steady himself again, but it was so hard under the force of that firm green gaze which might as well have been trying to stare into his soul.

You’re so much more amazing in person, Deku.

“Alright, I’ll go over some of the specifics of today’s practice.” Aizawa started again, the three pros shuffling behind him. Katsuki’s heart was still racing, threatening to beat out of his chest the longer Deku stared at him, and he forced himself to look away in the hope that the horrible pressure would leave him be. It was only a squeeze on the shoulder from Camie that grounded him, and he wished he wasn’t so grateful for it.

God, I… I feel so weak in front of him right now. This isn’t what I wanted…!

He bit his lip and just tried to focus on Aizawa’s words.

“You all will be split up into teams of four, as I mentioned before. From there, each group will participate in two matches, fighting against a different hero in each one. The objective of this training will be to capture or immobilize the villain, who will be played by one of the heroes present. However- if you let anyone on your team be put in a position where they would be captured or killed in a real fight, you fail. There will be a fifteen minute time limit in place per round, and the environment will be different for each fight. Understand?”

A murmur of yes, sir rose amongst the crowd as Aizawa nodded and continued. “I’ll tell you your groups now, so pay attention. After I tell you who’s on your team, head out to change into your hero costumes and regroup in front of the entrances to the training grounds. We’ll split up from there.” He turned towards the guests, and dipped his head. “You three go ahead and head out there. I’ll meet you when I finish up.”
The heroes all gave their agreement through an ever-so dignified thumbs up and left the room again, leaving the students alone with Aizawa once more. Katsuki tried to not think about Deku’s lingering eyes on him as he left the room, doing his best to focus on the task at hand. That was what was important right now.

“Alright, I’m going to give you your groups now. The first three groups will go ahead and head out first, as you’ll be in the first matches. Because we have twenty students, not every group will be going at once, so the people not fighting will be observing the other matches until it’s their turn. Now, to start off with…” Aizawa cleared his throat. “First against Uravity will be Team A with Todoroki, Shinsou, Shouji, and Hagakure. Then, first against Valiant will be…”

_Not me, not me, not yet…_

“...Ashido, Iida, Tokoyami, and Aoyama.”

He nearly breathed a sigh of relief as he leaned back in his chair.

“Next, first against Gale will be Team C with Camie, Kaminari, Yaoyorozu, and Bakugou.”

“Oh, guess we get to be together?” Camie seemed a little excited now. “And against Gale, too… Baku, I’d pay for him to crush me with those arms.”

“Gale, huh?” Katsuki crossed his own arms, glancing back to see an enamoured smile over Camie’s face. “Yeah, they are pretty nice.”

“I know you’re an ass man, blondie.” Camie teased. “Valiant’s pretty cute, isn’t he? Cute face, nice ass. He’s perfect for you.”

Katsuki rolled his eyes and snorted. “He’s not bad, but I wouldn’t say perfect. You go around assuming everyone with a decent ass is gonna be the fuckin’ love of my life. That ain’t how this works, y’know.”

“Well, I mean, he’s really nice looking and all, but he’s just... my hero. Plus, he ain’t interested in that shit.

“Fine, fine, don’t admit it.” Camie patted him reassuringly on the shoulder. “It’s okay, babe. I know it’s hard to admit that you’re head over heels for him. You’ll come around one day.”

He made a fake choking noise in return, but let himself laugh a little. If nothing else had come out of him being at U.A., he’d finally seemed to make a half-decent friend or two.

“Alright, better get going.” Katsuki stood from his chair, stretching out. “I know you wanna be first in line to see Gale, after all.”

“Ooh, you know it!” Camie followed suit, a finger coming up to her lip. “Then, we’ll be the first ones to smash that pretty face in too. Isn’t that what we do now, Baku?”

“Oh, hell yes.” Katsuki grinned, cracking his knuckles. “Let’s go.”

It was a short trip from the classroom to get changed and head down to the entrance to the training grounds, and along the way, Katsuki and Camie ran into their other two teammates. Kaminari was a bit glad to have been found by the group, supposedly having lost his way already, while Yaoyorozu seemed a little uncertain and a bit unhappy with the group she had been assigned to. It probably hadn’t helped that he had walked up to her in the middle of Camie rambling about a few not-so-safe-for-work fantasies involving her and Gale that Katsuki couldn’t help but entertain.
Yaoyorozu took one look over the lot of them and sighed. “Let’s just… get going, I suppose.”

In no time they rejoined the big group of students and heroes, though their guests were stationed a bit further away from the class, talking amongst themselves. It was the first time Deku’s eyes hadn’t been fixated on him since he arrived, and Katsuki found it a bit strange to see him so far away like this, despite only ever seeing him on TV or in magazines for months. But, now…

_I might get to fight Deku. I might get to spar with Deku._

More than anything else, he was excited. Despite knowing just how strong Deku was from personal experience, this was the kind of training he needed. If nothing else, there was no way he’d go down without a good fight. Already the fire was pumping through his veins, revving him up with excitement. This first round was just that- a first round. And though in no way was it something to be taken lightly, it also wasn’t the main event. Hopefully.

But, for now, his attention had to be on Gale. Even if it wasn’t Deku, he knew from occasional news reports and internet headlines that he had also been making some serious impact among the new wave of heroes, and was quickly rising to the higher ranks alongside Deku and others like Uravity. She too had shown some incredible tactics and moves in recent times, relying more on strategy involving the surrounding environment to secure victory in a fight. It was fun to watch her perform at times, and she did often work alongside Deku, so it wasn’t as if he was unfamiliar with her.

But, anyway. Gale.

“Team A.” Aizawa’s voice came from behind them, along with the remainder of the students. “You’ll be starting in the south end of Ground Alpha. After you’re done with round one, Team D will replace…”

Katsuki tapped his foot, trying to think about strategy as Aizawa got them situated. His usual simple explosive power likely wouldn’t cut it here due to the literal _blowback_ of Gale’s quirk, and getting anywhere close to him would definitely be a challenge. As much as he hated to admit it, this might be one fight he couldn’t take the lead on. Well. _Physical_ lead, anyway. Though, the challenge then would be getting Yaoyorozu to work with him effectively…

“…and Team C, you'll be starting at Ground Delta, west side.”

_Delta…?_

“So, we’ll be in a more arboreal environment…” Yaoyorozu murmured, more to herself than anyone else. “There's a decent amount of cover, at least. I'll be able to use my quirk with a relative amount of stealth…”

They started heading towards Ground Delta as Yaoyorozu seemed to continue thinking to herself, wrapped up in her own thoughts and plans. Camie wound up walking on one side of him, Kaminari on the other.

But, the lack of transparency was kinda annoying.

“Oi.” He started, furrowing his brow. “You gonna share with the class, Ponytail?”

Yaoyorozu broke out of her trance briefly. “Huh? I mean, we need a plan, don’t we?”

“Yeah. Exactly.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Are you gonna share or not? If there’s gonna be a goddamn plan, don’t we need to, y’know, be aware of it?”
Yaoyorozu frowned a bit, a little annoyed. “Yes, but- I don’t have all the details worked out yet.”

“We’re not all stupid!” Kaminari groaned. “Look, I’m not a total dumbass!”

“That’s right.” Camie nodded. “He’s dumbass number one, and I’m number two.”

Katsuki sighed, ignoring his teammates. “Tell me. We don’t have all day, right?”

And as soon as the words left his mouth, the group found themselves in front of Ground Delta’s tall gates.

Yaoyorozu pursed her lips. “No, we do not.”

“Team C, go ahead and enter.” Came Aizawa’s voice over a nearby speaker. “Your time starts now.”

Katsuki tilted his head up. “Well, no time to be hanging around here. Let’s go.”

He stepped through the gate, and as soon as the rest of the group was in, the gate shut behind them and they were closed into an arena of leafy trees, thriving bushes, and the occasional run-down shack.

And, of course-

“ALRIGHT!” Came the booming voice from who-the-hell-knew-where. “Give me your best shot, kids!”

“What- wait, where is he?” Kaminari craned his neck to look around the area, only for a sudden blast of wind to rocket through the trees and tear the group apart, and it was all Katsuki could do to blast himself back up to his feet and search to make sure they hadn’t gotten too separated.

“Here’s a new damn plan!” Katsuki yelled as his teammates got back up to their feet, only about ten or so feet away from each other. “Find where he is first, got it? And oi, Piss Hair, don’t use all your goddamn electricity in one go!”

If no one else will take charge, I will!

Okay, then where should we go?” Camie, despite her occasional ditzyness, was doing a fairly good job at keeping an eye on the surrounding area. “Should I bring out an illusion, or-?”

“I don’t think that would help right now.” Katsuki grit his teeth, every nerve on end as he tried to pinpoint the wind’s origin. “Gale ain’t small, so I don’t think he’ll be too hard to find, but-!”

“If that’s what you’re thinking, then try again!” Another round of roaring laughter swept through the air, wind whistling through the trees. “This wind is at my will! I can bend it to my liking, you know!”

Think, think! How do you fight someone you can’t see?!

A strong gust knocked him to his knees before he could figure out the answer.

“Baku, we’re gonna be too separated at this rate!” Camie called after him. “We gotta regroup!”

“Think I don’t know that?!” Katsuki bit back, frustrated as hell. “Shit, Ponytail, can you get us a shield?”
“A shield would just blow away!” Yaoyorozu snapped. “And I can’t exactly make a wall!”

“Then what was that plan you had earlier?”

“Well, I was going to—!”

The wind came again. *Again.*

Katsuki coughed, dizzy as he got back to his feet and searched for his companions. Camie was gone. Kaminari was gone. The only one he saw was-

“Bakugou, come here!”

*Yaoyorozu.*

A few explosions landed him in front of her, eyes wide when he realized what was in her palm.

“Here. Take it.” Her voice was strung out with tension. “If nothing else, we can-”

“Contact each other. Yeah.”

Katsuki hooked the small device over his ear, relieved when it crackled to life. “Okay. That’s something.”

“And *I would* have gotten this done earlier if you had let me think for a moment.” Yaoyorozu pursed her lips. “Bakugou, you’re strong, but you didn’t let me speak…!”

“Yeah, cause we didn’t have ten years to get this shit going.” He shot back. “We need to find the others, don’t we? Come on, we can’t be sitting on our asses all day. We need to-”

“Listen to me, okay? Even- even just a little.” Yaoyorozu’s voice had grown a bit sharper. “I’m sorry. I should have gotten this taken care of earlier. But, at least-” She reached a hand out towards him, two more small headsets in it. “If you find them first, give them this. And, just-” she swallowed. “Talk to me. Please. I want to be a part of what you’re doing.”

“Fine, fine.” Katsuki got back to his feet, scanning the area. “I’ll take left, you go right. If you find them, put them in contact with us. That’s step one.”

Yaoyorozu nodded. “Right. Let’s go.”

He dashed off, twitching at just the sound of leaves rustling beside him. He had to find his teammates, and quick.

Oddly enough, though, the wind hadn’t come as soon as he thought it would.

*Unnerving as hell.*

“*Bakugou, do you read me?*” Yaoyorozu’s voice buzzed in his ear. “*I haven’t found them. No sign of Gale, either. I’m a little worried.*”

He couldn’t quell the anxiety building within him either, but did his best to quash it down.

“I haven’t seen any of ‘em.” He clenched his fists. “We don’t have that fuckin’ long, where did-”

“Baku!”
A streak of black spandex and light brown hair sped towards him, frantic. “Gale, he-”

“What happened?” Anticipation wound tight in his throat.

Camie paused, stopping to catch her breath. “Gale nabbed Kaminari. He’s being tossed around up in those air currents, and I highkey have no clue how to get him down, fam.”

Wait. One team member has been caught, sorta, so does that mean we already-

“The alarm hasn’t gone off, so I guess we’re still okay?” Camie fiddled with her hair. “Kami was letting off a lot of electricity, so he’s still trying, anyway. Props to him. Boy’s doing his best.”

He’s still struggling, so that means we have a chance!

Katsuki dialed into the headset again as he reached for a spare. “Dumbass number one got caught by Gale. He’s still fighting. I’m with Camie, and we’re going to head towards him.”

There was a small gasp of alarm from the other end. “Yes, got it!” Yaoyorozu replied. “Should I head towards Gale himself, or meet up with you two first? We only have about six minutes left. Oh, and please put Camie into the comms system as well!”

“Got it.” He handed Camie the earpiece, and quickly instructed her on how to put it in. “We should be ready to go. How far away is Gale?”

Camie scratched her chin, then pointed a bit to the right. “Over that way, boss. I kinda just made an illusion and ran off, y’know? Wanted to find you before we went after Gale again. I’m good with distractions, but you’ve got the big guns.”

“Right, got it.” He quickly informed Yaoyorozu of Gale’s position, trying to formulate a plan. “Meet up with us first, Ponytail. Don’t wanna get any more separated than we already are.”

“Oh, right! Yes, I’ll head back over towards you. There aren’t a whole lot of landmarks along the way, though, so I hope we can make it up to Gale safely and get Kaminari down.”

“We’ll figure that out when you get here.” Katsuki’s nails dug into thick gloves, tough enough to bruise. “Won’t be long now.”

A stifled laugh came from the other end. “Yes, Bakugou.”

What was that laugh about…? Eh. Doesn’t matter.

Thankfully, Yaoyorozu managed to meet up with them in only a minute’s time. “Okay. Lead the way, Camie.”

And with that, they were off.

“I still have no idea how you guys wanna go about getting him down, or even just getting close.” Camie reiterated as they pushed through yet another mound of scratchy weeds. “These winds are all over the place.”

“Gale is, essentially, a walking tornado.” Yaoyorozu paused. “He can sense movement with his winds too, correct? So we need to be careful about approaching.”

Right, right… wait, maybe we could…

“Oi. Can you make another illusion of yourself?” Katsuki quipped. “Might serve as a decent
distraction so I- we- can get close and wrestle that dumbass down.”

“Ooh, right on it, sir!” Camie winked. “I can get all three of us if you want, actually. Might be fun, you know?”

“Yes, that would work wonderfully.” Yaoyorozu answered. “Alright, and once that’s out, we can… ah…”

Katsuki stood up a little straighter, stretching out. “We’ll need a frontal attack at some point. I’ll go up there myself and face him.”

“Hm, you gonna be okay like that?” Camie frowned. “That boy’s a hunk. No offense, babe, but he’s got way more muscle than you.”

“Do you have a better idea?” Katsuki grit his teeth. “Come on, we only have three minutes or so, we need to…”

“Yes. Do that, Bakugou.” Yaoyorozu interrupted. “Do that, and get Kaminari down. Maybe your explosions won’t be enough to stun him, but that electricity will! Oh- wait!” A sudden flash of realization crossed over her face. “I’ve got something.”

She pulled an object from her arm, thin and shiny. “Here. Copper wire. Conducts electricity well. If you can get a loop or two of it wrapped around Gale, then with Kaminari’s electricity, it should stun him enough for us to go in and call it a victory…!”

Now, that- that was excitement in his veins.

“You got it. After Camie’s distraction, I’ll go in for a physical blow.” Katsuki reiterated. “We make sure Piss Hair isn’t in idiot mode, then get him to shock Gale. If we need backup, you two can come in.”

“Mm, now you’re talking!” Camie giggled. “Let’s show him, boss.”

Perfect replicas of the team wandered out through the bushes in the most natural fashion Camie could manage, some unintelligible conversation happening between them. Admittedly, he still didn’t know all that much about Camie’s quirk, but it was clear there was more than a little strain on her for producing that much movement all at once.

She’s giving it her all, I can’t be falling behind that!

“Mm, alright.” Camie’s voice was a little shakier than before. “They’re close… Baku, you gonna go?”

“Hell yes.” He grinned, and charged through the brush.

“Bakugou, remember! Gale’s strong. You’re just trying to get Kaminari down and wrap the wire around Gale. Don’t take any unnecessary risks!” Yaoyorozu reminded him, her voice a little calmer now.

“Yeah, yeah.”

He burst into the clearing that Gale had taken up residence in, immediately catching sight of Kaminari whizzing through the air. Lightning tore through the sky as Gale’s booming laughter thundered down.
Make sure he’s distracted, make sure he’s distracted!

“Oi!” He shouted, met with a mirrored yell from close by. “Hey, lookie here!”

Katsuki blasted himself up from the ground, speeding through the air and praying that Kaminari’s lightning wouldn’t hit him. That Camie’s illusions would cause enough confusion for him to get a hit or two in.

But if I get caught in that wind, it’s all over!

Katsuki barreled towards Gale in a streak of white rage, tossing his worries out with the trash.

He’s close, he’s close!

The radio crackled.

“Baku, he’s looking at you!”

“Bakugou, look out!”

There was a split second as Gale turned towards him, all smiles and brimming with passion.

“That’s some fire you’ve got!” The hero’s grin ran from ear-to-ear. “I like it!”

Gotta turn, gotta-!

No time to think strategy now.

Forty-five degrees left. Thirty degrees down. Medium-strength blast through a half-curled palm.

He smirked. “Like it, huh?”

The incoming fist would have grazed his gauntlet, but-

“Then, how do you like this?!”

Katsuki swiveled to his right and let loose a point blank, ear-splitting explosion. Gale’s massive form staggered back just enough for the winds to wobble around him, and soon enough, a panicked scream erupted in the background.

C’mon, Sparky. Shut up.

“Someone get him!” He demanded, trying to refocus himself. “I’ve got the wire, someone get-”

“I’ve got him!”

He didn’t have to look to know that Yaoyorozu had rushed up behind him and readied herself to catch Kaminari- what he did know, however, was that the quickly-recovered pro hero in front of him was a very near and very real threat.

“You’re smart! I like that too!” Gale praised, stepping forward. “But don’t go fooling yourselves, okay? It’ll take more than-”

He cackled, maniacal grin rising up onto his face. “Oh, I’ve got more than that!”

One. Two. Three. Each blast slung him further around Gale, the thin strip of wire curling free from his fingers to form a small, yet tight grip around his opponent. Nothing that would ever keep him
down, but enough to do its actual job.

“Eh?” Gale released another whirlwind, blowing the group back fifteen feet or so. Katsuki’s boots dug into coarse soil as grass fluttered down through the air. “You aren’t just messing around, are you? Keep in mind that you’re done for if you let up!”

“Look, look.” Kaminari rolled his shoulders back, head cocked up. “Maybe I’m not the sharpest one here, but I don’t need accuracy to hit this target!”

“Bakugou, get back! I filled him in. Camie’s going to send out an illusion of you, and I’ve got a shock-proof blanket on hand!” Yaoyorozu commanded, leaving no room for argument. And as much as he wanted to charge in and use his fists to finish this off, he relented.

“On it.”

Katsuki dove back into the bushes, running back through the foliage to meet up with his slightly-hidden teammates. “Quick, under here!” Yaoyorozu motioned, and Katsuki threw himself to the ground and under the thick blanket she’d lifted up, rolling into a spot right alongside the already present Camie. It wasn’t but a few seconds later that Yaoyorozu got herself under the blanket as well, letting it drop on top of them. Then, in her next breath-

“Kaminari, go!”

There wasn’t a verbal response, but the resulting electrical blast was more than enough to let them know it had happened. A still silence spread as the aftereffects of the shock wore off, yet the three of them were still holding their breath.

“That probably shorted his comms unit… we should head out there and make sure everything’s okay.” Yaoyorozu murmured, and absentmindedly, Katsuki couldn’t help but be surprised at how assertive she had been throughout the latter portion of the match.

“Right. Yeah.”

They threw off the heavy blanket and dashed towards the scene of the crime, and Katsuki couldn’t help but feel a wave of relief when he saw Kaminari’s slightly-stupid looking face smiling back at them.

But just as they came up to their teammate, the sound of bulky, shifting gear yanked their attention away.

“You… you kids really think that’s going to be enough to get me down?” Gale huffed, sparks still dancing around his gloved fist. “Heh… well, it was a good attempt, but not quite! After all, I’m still-”

The ring of an activated speaker rung out through the ruined playing field, and even Gale looked up.

“Attention, everyone. Time’s up.”

Katsuki and everyone else in the area stopped dead in their tracks.

“Huh?” Camie sounded as confused as the rest of them felt. “Wait up, boss, who won?”

“I mean, I think I got him pretty damn good there at the end, wouldn’t ya say?” Kaminari grinned, giving them a slightly-stable thumbs up.

“Yeah, after we had to fetch your dumb ass from the air.” Katsuki snorted, yet couldn’t help but fear
that it hadn’t been enough. That they-

“And, though it’s mostly on a technicality, Team C wins.” Aizawa droned over the loudspeaker as cheers erupted from the group.

Yes…!

“Pft, and you all doubted my skills? C’mon, you couldn’t have done this without me. Just look at that win!” Kaminari grinned, and threw up what Katsuki hoped wasn’t a pair of finger guns.

“Ah, I’m glad it worked out…! Somehow…” A small, hesitant laugh fell from Yaoyorozu’s lips, though she looked far more relieved than anything else.

“I can’t- I can’t believe you shrimps got me!” Gale erupted. “But, I’m glad! I think! That means you’re on the right track, yeah?”

“Hell yeah!” Camie threw back, and went up to him for an awkward high-five. Katsuki prayed she hadn’t gone in that close just to check out his muscles. Yet, it wasn’t but a moment later that the loudspeaker came back on.

“We’ll discuss the match later. For now, meet back outside the school entrance. We’ve set up a temporary recovery station in case anyone has wounds that need to be tended to. Hurry up. Your next match will be starting in twenty minutes.”

“Oh… that’s right, there’s one more match…” Yaoyorozu’s brow creased, contemplative. “I wonder who it is we’ll be up against. Hm… both Uravity and Valiant pose very different threats, yet still very dangerous ones.”

Katsuki had to bite his tongue to keep from saying anything too much about Deku right then and there. “Yeah…” He paused, trying to calm his nerves. “Yeah, Valiant’s strong.”

“You’d know it, babe!” Camie giggled. “What’s his muscle mass again? Or, um, the ratio of his arm to leg strength?”

“Well, it’s—!” No. Stop. Don’t you dare finish that sentence. Dammit, Camie.

“Oh, fuck you!” He yelled instead, an odd mix of embarrassment and the too-strong temptation to blurt out the answer melding together in his head. He turned away, trying to shake back the strange bit of anxiety that had come over him.

But… if I do face him…

“We should get going. I think Kaminari needs a visit to the recovery station before the next match.” Yaoyorozu said, and he snapped to attention. “The exit is this way.”

“Yeah, yeah. Let’s go.” Katsuki mumbled, not wanting to face any of his other teammates right now. Trying to take control of his ever-building anticipation and excitement was just about all he could do, yet, there was still a chance he wouldn’t even be going up again Deku.

*It could be Uravity, still could be Uravity… but, do I really want it to be her?*

He pushed the thoughts out of his mind for now and trudged towards the exit. It was a relatively short walk to the recovery station, and with Gale out of the picture now, the whole team had to shift their focus to the next opponent.
“Man, I hope it’s Uravity.” Kaminari murmured with a long, dreamy sigh. “Hey, do you think if we win she’d go on a date with me? Hm?”

“Psh, sorry, she’s way outta your league.” Camie said, elbowing him. “If anything, I’m the one she’d go out with. You’re just kinda…” She trailed off, glancing over at Kaminari’s janky grin. “...you.”

“And what’s that supposed to mean!”?

As the round of squabbling broke out behind them, they arrived at their destination. Thankfully, though, it wasn’t too hard to pry Kaminari away from Camie’s incessant teasing and get him over to treatment quickly. Katsuki found an empty spot along the side of the tent and pulled off his gauntlets before sitting down, glad that he hadn’t sustained much injury in the fight. Now, if he had to, he could save his strength for-

“Good, you all managed to make it over here.” Aizawa interrupted as he entered the tent, looking across at the group. “You all barely managed to scrape by with that victory. Had the timer not gone off, or no one had been there to catch Kaminari, you would have all failed miserably.”

Katsuki clenched his fists, but remained silent. I know it could’ve been better. That was a shitty performance. I should have done better.

“...but, you all did do a considerably better job than both Groups A and B.” Aizawa muttered. “At least you all came up with a functioning plan. Group B failed in the first five minutes, and Group A lost, though it was close.”

“The first five minutes?” Yaoyorozu’s pitched-up voice was barely held steady. “Even though their team was a very capable group…”

“They were fighting De- Valiant.” Katsuki’s nails dug into his palms. “Of course they went down fast. It’s- it’s him.”

His heart was racing, pounding, and it was getting harder and harder to breathe.

Yaoyorozu seemed more than a little nervous now. “So, are we fighting Uravity or him?”

“Hm? Oh, you talking about me?”

Deku had a too-bright smile across his face when he walked in, and it didn’t look as if he’d even been scratched. “If so, I’d love to go up against the team that gave Gale a hard time. Let’s see…”

He’s... he’s...

Deku’s gaze scanned the room with clear intent, and came to an immediate halt on Katsuki.

“Ah, I see...” Deku chuckled. “Yes, this will definitely be fun.”

Katsuki couldn’t look away, not even as those green eyes bored holes in his skull. But- the corners of Deku’s lips had twitched up, and there was a hint of fond warmth in that stare.

“Well then.” Deku dipped his head. “I’ll meet you at Ground Beta, okay?”

Katsuki’s throat went dry, yet somewhere within him, his flame was burning a bit brighter than before.

“Yeah- yeah.” He swallowed. “I’ll meet you there.”
And as Deku left, he couldn’t help but feel like- as if-

_That smile… he smiled at me._

Chapter End Notes

ive been told that this chapter felt like a tease. dw tho, next week’s is thirsty af. also. please consider camiemomo.

My twitter is [@aeronines](https://twitter.com/aeronines) if u ever wanna talk about these boys! Also, I’m now the mod of a discord server called Wonder Creators, a server dedicated to Bakudeku content creators and those interested in learning more about content creation. If you’re interested in joining, shoot me a message and I’ll send you an invite!

Thank you as per usual to my beta @aetherlite for enduring going over this chapter for me, fight scenes are a bitch and ur my hero for helping me out. Next chapter’ll be up next tuesday
Chapter Summary

fighting is just porn with a little more injury

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Hey, Baku… look at me. You here? Need some water?”

Water…?

Too much genuine concern wavered in Camie’s voice.

Yeah, I definitely need something to quench this thirst.

“I- Yeah, I’ll get some.” He swallowed, throat dry. It had been Camie’s words that brought him back to the moment, again, and he was beginning to realize that this was somewhat of a problem. Getting so flustered from this little of an interaction wasn’t a good sign, not if he was going to have to channel his focus into a fight.

“I can grab some for you, honey. Just try and relax, okay?” She reached out to him, only to have her worried touch shrugged away.

“I’m fine.” Katsuki ran a hand through his hair, not meeting her eyes. “I’ll just grab a drink and step outside for a minute. Be back in five.”

I need to focus. I can’t let him see me be weak. I’m going to be his partner someday, and I can’t fail him now.

Camie reached out again, this time grabbing his wrist. “You can talk to me if you need to, okay? I don’t wanna see you all over the place like this, babe.”

God, shut up. Not in the mood for this right now.

“I said, it’s fine.” Katsuki grit his teeth. “I’m fine. Just give me a few minutes.”

Katsuki got to his feet, stomach churning. He’d do something about this before it was too late. It was a few steps to the water cooler, a few more seconds to fill up a paper cup, and ten more feet to the exit. Easy. Simple. His legs folded beneath him almost automatically, right into an casual cross-legged position on the budding grass.

Breathe. Just breathe.

Water came up to meet dry lips, and he turned his focus towards the feeling of it trickling down his throat. Easy. Simple.

It’s gonna be okay. I’m just anxious about this fight, but it’s gonna be okay.

Another sip.
I'll show him my strength. My power.

One more, and he drained the cup.

I'll show him just how worthy I am.

The cup was set on the ground as he felt himself finally, finally move to a better mental place.

“He’s fast… he’s strong.” He mumbled, just barely more than a whisper. “I know how he fights, so… I gotta watch out for anything up close. Can’t afford close combat, no… the air pressure travels a distance, but no more than twenty feet or so. It’s still mid-range. Maybe if Camie brings out an illusion or two we can stall, at least. If we throw the dumbass out there, he might get hit… It would use up the one big discharge he has, but if I can get in while Deku’s paralyzed we might be able to work it out. Hm…”

So wrapped up in his thoughts, Katsuki didn’t notice someone else come up until she was sitting right by his side.

“Hey, Bakugou…” Yaoyorozu started, and he couldn’t help but roll his eyes.

“If Camie sent you here, get out.” He hissed. “I told her I’d be back in a couple-”

“Actually, if you bothered to hear me out, you may be inclined to give me an answer.” She sighed. “I’ll just get to the point. You keep acting odd around Valiant. Could… well, would it be too much trouble to ask what exactly Valiant is to you?” She paused, pulling her knees to her chest. “If it’s too much, it’s fine, but—”

“Why the hell d’you care?” He scowled.

Yaoyorozu wasn’t nearly as fazed as she likely would have been the day before. “I care because I want to know how it’s going to affect this fight. You… you’ve been acting a more than a little strange since he walked in, and I… I want to win, Bakugou. I want to be sure you’re not going to hold back the team.” She paused, and met his gaze. “So, what is he to you?”

And as much as he really didn’t want to give an answer, he wasn’t unreasonable. “Fine.” He muttered, running a gloved finger through thin soil. “Valiant… I mean, hell.”

What is to me…? He’s…

“He’s my hero.”

“I see…” Yaoyorozu paused, a strange silence falling between them. “...um. Would… would you have happened to have been the one he rescued at his debut? With that, ah, sludge villain and all.”

Even just the mention of the incident caused bile to rise up in his throat. Poison stiffened in cold veins, and every opening on his body felt a bit more vulnerable than before.

“...yeah.”

The answer was tinged with more of a croak than he would have liked.

The only good thing that came out of that was Deku. Only ever Deku.

“I… I’m sorry you had to go through that.” Yaoyorozu murmured, seeming to realize how he was feeling a bit more. “To be honest, I’d been wondering if that was you for a while. So… Valiant saved your life, didn’t he?”
His body clenched, tense.

*I didn’t really want it at first, but-

“He did.”

*He saved me.*

Heavy silence fell between them till Yaoyorozu’s quiet voice returned.

“And now you have to fight him… I… I’m sorry, Bakugou.”

“Don’t apologize for me.” He muttered. “It’s just training. ‘Sides, I’m gonna get as good as him someday, yeah? I gotta get good, then I gotta get better. Fighting people as amazing as him is necessary.”

Yaoyorozu nodded, but didn’t quite seem convinced. “I understand what you’re saying, but… will you really be able to raise a hand against him?”

*You… Excuse me? What- what the fuck did you just say to me!??*

“Why are you acting like I have a choice!?” His voice cracked, breaking just a little more. “I’m not going to let some fucking *sentiment*, of all things, come between me and a win. I’ll do what I need to do. God, just- just stop worrying about me! You and Camie both!” Katsuki spat, getting up and walking away as fast as he could.

*Even… even as much as I don’t really want to hurt him… if it’s to win, then I will, dammit…!*

He hadn’t wanted to get all worked up before this fight and yet, here he was. *Kinda-just-a-little* pissed. Whatever. He’d channel that irritation into power and use it to secure the win. At this point, there was no question. He’d win. He’d prove he could stand up to Deku and fight him again, prove that he was more than fucking worthy.

“Baku, are you-?” Camie stopped mid-sentence when she saw his face. “Hey, really now, you should probably rest. There’s a spare cot if you wanna lay down for a couple minutes-”

“I’m fucking *fine.*” He growled, even the most well-intentioned words grating his nerves right now. “We’ve got ten minutes before the fight. Has the idiot gotten his shit together yet?”

“I mean, almost, but-”

“Once he hurries up and gets his ass outta bed we need to go. I don’t wanna waste time with this crap.” He snapped, and stalked away.

*I’ll lay more than a hand on him, fucker. I’ll win. I have to win, dammit!*

At the very least, his teammates didn’t dawdle *too* much getting out of the recovery station. Three minutes later found them regrouped, though he could practically feel Yaoyorozu’s irritated stare burning into his skin alongside Camie’s wary concern.

He pushed it aside. Whatever. If nothing else, his focus was going to be on winning.

*No matter what anyone else thinks, I can fight him! I’ll be able to ‘lay a hand’ on him and more!*

“Let’s go.” He commanded, leaving no room for argument. “Don’t go holding the group back.”
He ignored the huffed comments behind him, ignored the whining and kept going, just waiting for the tall gates to open.

*Ground Beta. Buildings, streets, cityscape. I can work with this area.*

Stiff boots rapped against paved sidewalk impatiently, every muscle screaming to move, to go. But he’d behave and wait for the doors to open, at least.

*Fuck that first plan. I’m gonna go up, find somewhere to lookout from and locate him. Then I’ll sneak up and engage in surprise combat with close explosions. If I can catch him by surprise, this will go great. He won’t notice me if I’m careful, and I’m careful as fuck.*

He didn’t notice his teammates talking behind him.

“*Team C, go ahead and enter.*” Aizawa’s tired voice eventually rang out. “*Your time starts now.*”

Once more, they were inside. And once more did the drive for victory seem to consume him whole.

“I’m going to scout out.” Katsuki stated, not giving anyone a chance to convince him otherwise. “Don’t get attacked or captured, got it?”

Camie grabbed onto him one final time, unusually desperate. “Baku, just stop! Boy, you need to listen to us- to *me*- for once!”

“Get off me!” Katsuki snapped, and yanked his arm away. Maybe he’d regret it later. Right now, there was no time to.

“Baku, please—!”

He was already off. Blood pumping through his veins, a goal greater than himself possessing him. They’d thank him later.

*C’mon, c’mon, I know you’re around here somewhere, Deku…!*

He landed on the top of a grainy two-story building and dashed across the roof, then blasted up to the next one, climbing higher. *Higher.*

“Come out, come out, wherever you are…” He whispered, low and dangerous. “I know you’re around here somewhere, Deku…”

His teammates would handle themselves. They’d be fine. Just like he’d be fine, too.

*I’ll win. I’m going to win, dammit!*

Sparks showered down around him in an almost ghastly shroud over stone walls and broken glass, his explosions the only source of sound for miles. He shook away the nerves creeping up on him, and kept climbing. Kept watching. Kept running battle plans over in his head again and again and again.

Yet, Katsuki couldn’t get rid of the creeping anticipation in his chest. Three or four minutes had already passed, and it had been far, far too quiet.

*What if he’s watching me, waiting for me to come closer…? Dammit, maybe I should’ve stuck to the ground!*

“Shit…!” He cursed, stopping in his tracks in an almost dizzying halt. “Fuck, Deku can climb up...
high too! He’s got Full Cowl, for fuck’s sake!”

The anger running through his blood had turned to ice, paranoia slipping into his veins. It was getting harder and harder to focus now that he had gotten himself so far out already. Now that he was so alone.

_God, shit- I didn’t fuck up, did I!? I can’t, not now! Not already!_

He steeled himself, leapt to the next building, and was slammed with the dull force of a two-ton freight train.

Falling, crashing through the window, broken glass sheared bare skin and tore at Katsuki’s thin costume just before he was thrown to the floor, grenadiers cracking and breaking under the impact. Katsuki’s heart was in his throat as panic laced the edge of a strangled scream. He tried to get up, back to his feet, but the sheer impact of the crash was making his head spin and motions sluggish.

_No, no, I gotta, I gotta get up, what the fuck’s going on!? Where- what-

“Listen to me.”

The familiar voice had never been more chilling.

“Get- get the fuck away from me!” He screamed, standing up with the damp, dirty wall as his only support. “Shut the fuck up!”

The room was dim, and the glint in those green eyes had never seemed so cold.

“I told you to listen, didn’t I?” Deku- who hardly seemed like Deku- stepped forward. “On your knees. Let’s keep this simple.”

“Like hell if I’m going to do that!” He screeched, charging at Deku while half broken gauntlets still dangled from bleeding arms. “I’m not about to go down just like-!”

In half a second, Deku’s hand was on his wrist, and he yanked him forward and punched him in the stomach. Katsuki crumpled to the ground, wheezing, trying to catch his breath again. No use. Deku grabbed and threw him back against the wall like a ragdoll, and as much as he wanted to focus again, Deku was there- right in front of him.

_I can’t breathe, please, god, no…!

His whole body shuddered, gasping, and the only thing swimming through dull vision was grossly visceral sludge, choking him again, again, again.

Get away, go away, leave me the fuck alone!

“I told you to listen.” Deku’s voice echoed in his ear, far more ominous than it should have been. Far more warm than it should have been. Deku’s heated body settled on top of his own, and it was all he could do to let off a few pathetic explosions and meet Deku’s eyes, still begging for breath.

_God, even now, he’s so…_

“I didn’t want to have to do this, but…” Deku sighed, yet even when those gloved hands met his shoulder, his body found a way to relax a little.

_Deku won’t hurt me. No, he won’t hurt me, can’t hurt me, I’m-
He screamed.

Pain rocketed through his shoulder, through his body, and it was only then that he realized he couldn’t move his arm. Couldn’t set off his quirk without an explosion of hurt inside his body. Katsuki nearly bit through his lip, tasting metallic blood and real fear for the first time in so long.

*What did… w-wha… I…*

“It was twice you disobeysed me, wasn’t it?”

A strangled shriek tore through his throat as soul-splitting agony shot out from his other shoulder, and yet, the throbbing hurt from all the injuries was turning him more numb than anything. Right now, all he could do was try not to cry.

“D-Deku…” His voice broke, trying to be strong even if the rest of him couldn’t. “Wh… Deku, w-what did you…”

Deku’s body pressed closer against his own, and he wished it didn’t feel just so right. There was a gloved hand cupping his cheek, sliding under his chin moments later to tilt his head up just a bit. As much as he wished he could fight it, he couldn’t.

“Both your shoulders have been dislocated.” Deku murmured all too softly. “Don’t even try to move them. It’ll be easier to treat the easier you take it, okay?” A thumb ran over his lips, blood smearing across snow-white gloves. And as much as it hurt, it was… he was…

*Breathtaking.*

“I…” His mouth went dry, yet in that moment, Deku’s comforting smile was all his heart could handle. “I… I missed you.”

“I know.” Deku’s voice held no ounce of uncertainty. “I can see it in everything you’ve done today. From the moment I walked in that door, your eyes were fixed on me. And that’s what led you here, isn’t it?” Deku’s hand pushed his head up just a little more, and it was all Katsuki could do to hold in a whimper. “It’s why you’re in this position. I could crush your skull at any time, you know. And you know what that makes you?”

Katsuki’s coherency was running on empty. “It m-makes… makes me a hostage.”

“Good, good. I knew you were a smart one from the moment I saw you.” Deku praised. “You’re a hostage. And do you know what else that means?”

His head was swimming, dizzy, and he couldn’t think straight. “It… it means…”

“Here, I’ll help you. It means…” Deku’s words caressed him, just as his hand came up to cup his cheek, lips barely an inch away from his own.

“I win, Kacchan.”

Katsuki’s heart stopped.

*That name. Holy shit, that name.*

It’s silent, unmoving—nothing but held breath and disbelief between them until the telltale sound of distant speakers announce the end of the match. Deku’s by his side the whole time Aizawa spoke, almost as if he were a watchdog. Yet as soon as the announcement ended, Katsuki felt warm arms
around his battered body picking him up as gently as possible, and realized that for the second time in his life, Deku was carrying him to safety.

“I’m going to get you to the recovery station. It’ll only be a few minutes. Hang in there for me, okay?” Deku’s voice was so much more gentle and caring now that the scene was over. “I didn’t hurt you to the point where you should be passing out on me. Keep your eyes open, Katsuki.”

“...m’kay.”

He might’ve heard a mumbled shit under Deku’s breath, and could’ve sworn he started moving a little faster, more urgent. Katsuki had long since fallen limp in his hero’s arms, numb to the pain, and waited.

Then out of nowhere-

“Hey, um, Katsuki.” Deku started. “What’s your favorite food?”

That’s... random.

Yet it got him thinking, if only a little. “Anything spicy... s’good. Dad makes it good.”

“Oh, that’s good.” Deku replied, yet what little warmth he could make out was marred by relief. “Ah, okay... hm, what’s your favorite class?”

“Hero training.” He answered again, a little quicker on the uptake. “Course it is... it’s what I wanna do.”

Deku seemed to laugh a little at that, more real this time. “Ah, me too... god, it’s hard to believe I was in your shoes less than four years ago.”

Just a little further, and Deku stopped. “Ah, haha, I’m sorry...”

Katsuki thought the comment was directed at him till he heard another voice and found himself being moved once again, out of Deku’s arms and onto what he assumed was a cot.

“Oh, dear... now that’s you’re not breaking your own bones as much, you’re breaking someone else’s. Midoriya, will you ever learn?”

“I only dislocated it!” Deku's nervous laughter bubbled from his throat. “It’s- it’s not that hard to heal!”

“Even so, you really need to exercise more caution. They’re only first years, you know.”

“...I know, but...”

There was a long, drawn-out sigh to his side that he could only read as exasperation.

“Just stand aside, and go report to Aizawa about what you’ve done. I’m sure he’ll have some words for you about this. I’ll fix him up as best I can, but it’s going to take a bit of natural recovery time as well.”

“Are- are you going to be able to pop his shoulder back into place, though? I mean, I can do it if you need-” Deku stammered, only to be cut off immediately.

“Midoriya, you are the last person I want near him right now. Report to Aizawa, go take a shower, and get some civilian clothes on. I might let you see him later if you get that done. Got it?”
Katsuki recognized Deku’s resigned exhale, and couldn’t help but feel for him. “...yes, ma’am.”

There was a small shuffle, and out of the corner of his eye he saw Deku leave the recovery station. Next to him, someone he quickly identified as Recovery Girl gave a tired shake of her head.

“He never changes.” She muttered, her hands meeting his partly-numb shoulder, rubbing it gently. “How do you feel, Bakugou? I’m sorry that Midoriya- excuse me, Valiant- went all out on you like that. He’s... he’s not very good at reeling himself in.”

His head was still swimming, but at the very least, he wasn’t lying on cold hard ground anymore. “Can you just- get my shoulders back in. Hurts like fuck to use my quirk right now.”

“What do you mean, get your shoulders back in?”

Ah, fuck.

“Excuse me, miss, but he needs some serious aid right now-”

“Oh, urgent enough that he can’t wait for us again?”

He’d never felt Yaoyorozu’s words sting that hard, not even in that first match. Really, Katsuki had nothing to say to that. There was no way he could defend himself in a way that wasn’t such bullshit. If nothing else, he was honest.

“I’m sorry.” He mumbled. “I... I fucked up.”

“God, just look at you.” Yaoyorozu’s voice turned intensely sour. “Bakugou, you’re a mess. You go off on your own, and this happens...?”

“I had it coming.”

No lies. This fight had been one of brutal, cold hard truth.

She stood above him, her face sick, uneasy. “I mean... you did, but...”

“But what?” Katsuki bit his lip. “Don’t but me. Anything... anything less than this would’ve been sympathy.”

Yaoyorozu paused, as if whatever she had been planning to say was no longer appropriate. “...Bakugou, I don’t want to see you hurt. None of us do. I just- I just wanted to achieve that same success from the first round! Instead you run off, get badly injured, worry me and Kaminari and Camie-”

Camie. Oh, fuck.

If possible, he somehow felt even sicker to his stomach.

“Where... where is she?” He croaked, guilt flooding through him.

“She’s not coming.” Yaoyorozu stated. “Why would she, after how you treated her?”

Katsuki nearly threw up.

“I... I-I...”

And Yaoyorozu could probably see the guilt in his face, in his whole body. “Just- you better give her
a huge apology the next time you see her. Take her out to eat or something. Got it?”

Katsuki swallowed, fractionally more at ease. “Got it. Yeah.”

Yaoyorozu seemed a bit more content with his response, acknowledging it with a small dip of her head. “Good. Okay… I’ll leave you be. Get yourself fixed up, alright? We need you.”

We need you.

He still couldn’t quite get his head around that fact, but…

“I will.”

Yaoyorozu smiled, if only a little, and left.

Recovery Girl pursed her lips. “Well, I see why she came to talk, but you need treatment as quickly as possible. So, continuing on with that…”

Yeah, yeah, just get this over with.

He wasn’t completely sure what happened after that. Katsuki felt his arm lifted up to a certain degree, and before he really knew what was going on, was jolted back to consciousness by the sudden snap of bone sliding back into place. And though his one arm felt considerably better now, his hand was shaking like mad, sweat soaking into the thin cotton sheet beneath him.

“You poor thing…” Bitterness hung at the edge of Recovery Girl’s words. “I don’t know why Aizawa invited him out here… unlike some heroes, Midoriya is so awful at seeing these limits. He knows you all are barely into your first semester, and look at what he does… he shouldn’t have taken it so hard on you. The first team he fought was toeing the line of too far, but you… this is too much.”

No, it wasn’t too much… I should have been better, is all. Deku ain’t at fault here.

“I should’ve done better.” He clenched his teeth, head pressed hard into the pillow. “Should’ve… shoulda done way better.”

“Certainly, but don’t you beat yourself up over this. You shouldn’t have been put in that fight to begin with.” She reminded him gently.

He was about to open his mouth to object, only to suddenly have his other shoulder popped back into place before he knew it. Quick, and nearly painless compared to the first.

“Alright, that’s the first step.” Recovery Girl took a seat next to the bed, and looked him over. “I’m going to go ahead and give you a bit of quick healing, but I don’t want to wear you down too much.”

Guess we’re getting somewhere, then…

Sure enough, one quick kiss followed, and Katsuki began feeling a bit more like himself again, body still numb, still bruised, but aching a bit less, anyway.

But as soon as he could think a little easier again, it all came crashing down with a single horrid realization.

Deku… Deku saw me like that.

Deku saw me lose. He saw me destroy my chances at victory from the very start, saw me ditch my teammates. I- wait, fuck, you’ve gotta be kidding-

I…

I didn’t land a single blow on him.

Something inside him broke.

“Fuck.”

It’s broken, weak, strained- he’s afraid. So damn afraid.

I’ve done nothing but show him how weak I am. How fucking pathetic I am. If I can’t even land a single hit, how am I ever supposed to become his partner? How am I ever going to become that strong and then stronger?

“F-fuck…”

For the third or fourth time that day, it took every bit of his willpower not to cry.

He’s… I can’t be losing so bad, I have to be stronger than this! I just- I let myself give in! We- we won the first match because I worked with my team, but…!

“Fuck!”

It’s my damn fault. I- I fucked up. I should have gone with the original plan, why the hell did I even wind up going off on my own!? What kind of moron am I?

And just to pour salt on the wound, Yaoyorozu’s words came back to him.

Will you really be able to raise a hand against him?

I didn’t, not even one fucking blow…!

“F-Fuck, I- I’m-”

He cried.

He wasn’t sure how long he cried. Just that the room was blurring again in tear-shaped streaks, bright light dotting his view as if it were some cruel joke.

“Ah, Recovery Girl, Aizawa said I could come back, so-”

Katsuki hadn’t realized just how much dread Deku’s voice would be able to make him feel until now.

“Wait, Katsuki…? Oh, shit…”

Deku’s hand came up, pressed gently over his forehead as if checking for a fever. Yet his body retaliated this time, jerking back just a bit.

He hated how he flinched away from those hands that saved. Hated that he wanted nothing more than to be held by them again.

“I… I really did go too far, didn’t I…” Deku’s voice trailed off, ending with a sharp swear. “God,
I… I’m so sorry. I just got too into the role, and I…”

He’d been dying to see Deku again, even just once, and yet the opportunity he gets is in a hospital bed. Again.

_Fuck my life._

Really, he isn’t sure how long he’s there. He doesn’t speak, doesn’t want to say anything to embarrass himself even further. He’s done too much, said too much already.

The strange part, though, is that Deku doesn’t leave.

Katsuki doesn’t want to lose again. He breaks the silence first.

“Why… why are you still here?”

Deku gives him an almost incredulous look, and Katsuki’s very glad he’s more conscious now. He swallows, and continues. “Are- are you mocking me? Trying to make me look even worse than I’ve already managed to fucking do!?”

But to his surprise, Deku looked shocked by those words. “What are you talking about? Mocking you…? God, no. Why would I do that?”

Katsuki’s breath hitched in his throat. Deku’s words, no- his whole _self_ seemed completely taken aback by the accusation. He’s not quite sure how to respond, to be honest, and nothing but broken excuses flutter at the forefront of his thoughts.

“I should’ve been better.” He says, guilt heavy in his words. “I… I ditched my teammates, and cause of that, we lost. I should’ve—”

“You’re still new at this.” Deku reminded him. “It’s not like I came out of the gate knowing exactly what to do either. I mean… I won’t excuse the fact that you left your team like that, but I think I can understand why you did it. And, I…”

Deku sucked in a breath, staring at his lap. “I’m sorry. I went way, way too hard back there. You’re not a pro, and you’re certainly not a villain.”

“I don’t want you to take it easy on me, though.” Katsuki scowled. “If- if you do that, then how am I ever supposed to prove myself? How am I ever gonna get fuckin’ stronger?”

“Oh, Katsuki…” Deku smiled, though he could’ve sworn there was a bit of sadness in those bright eyes. “I know you’ll get there. It’s just one step at a time, you know?” Deku paused, glanced around the empty space- Recovery Girl must’ve left at some point, Katsuki noticed- and leaned in. “Besides, if it’s that you’re worried about, don’t worry. Aizawa asked me and a few others to come help out with training a few times this semester. I’ll be back, and we can spar again. Is that cool?”

Wait… wait, really?

“I promised Aizawa I’d take it easier on you all just a bit, and he seemed to agree. So it’s all good!” Deku laughed. “And, hey. Next time I see you, you can show me just how much stronger you’ve gotten. Right?”

He’s… even after I fucked up so bad, he’s not looking down on me…? Even after that shit I let myself say back there?
Katsuki could hardly believe it, really. Maybe that thought showed on his face, because Deku reached over again, a too-gentle hand going to rest lightly on his freshly healed shoulder.

"Is… is that okay, Katsuki?" Deku asked, a little softer, more hesitant this time. "Even if it was short, fighting you was… really fun."

You made me feel ways I’d never thought I could feel, though. Even when you were pinning me down like that… taunting me, I… you looked so…

...Deku, what’s wrong with me? Why couldn’t I focus when you got so close back there?

It was only then that he realized this was the first time he’d seen Deku out of his hero costume in person. A tight black tee hugged his body, loose gray sweatpants hooked on sturdy hips. Scars decorated his arms up and down, and Katsuki vaguely remembered seeing some during that first trip to the hospital, too. But what he couldn’t seem to get over was the corded muscle of his arms, the strength in that calming gaze, the fire in those rich, verdant eyes.

I- I can’t be thinking about that. All I want is to win… that’s all I want. I just want to get stronger, stronger, and rise to the top. I want to get strong enough to be his partner, and then get stronger than even that. Just because he’s- well, really fucking hot, doesn’t mean I have an excuse to get this distracted every time he gets near me!

"I’ll win next time." Is what he finally says, and before he can think twice, Katsuki forces himself into a sitting position, needing to be at least a little more on level with him. He’s still sore as fuck, but it was far better than it was just an hour ago. "I’ll win next time, you hear? Don’t let yourself think I’ll let myself do that again, Deku."

And just like that, Deku’s face lit up like a christmas tree. A half-giddy smile perked up freckled cheeks, and god, he looked like he’d just won the lottery.

"I’d never think that." Deku grinned, green curls framing round eyes. "I know you’ll give it your all, yeah? And learn from this first time?"

"Just who do you take me for, huh?" Katsuki smirked, able to meet Deku’s gaze as equals- fire for fire- for the first time. Daring to take it a little further, he leaned in, unintimidated. "I don’t make empty promises, you know. I will make it to you. I’ll make it there, and I’ll make it further. You hear me?"

"I’ve been listening since day one." Deku whispered, and there was something more about his words, something so raw, so primal. “I’ve never doubted you, you know. There was always, just-this something in your eyes. I know you want more. I want to see you succeed.” His head tilted a bit, and one of those warm hands came to rest on top of his own.

"I want to see you stand by my side, Kacchan."

That name again.

"Why… why did you call me that in the interview?" He asked.

Deku grinned. “Wanted to see if you recognized it. If you’d watched it.”

“I did.” Katsuki nodded. “But… why that name, of anything you could’ve chosen? Like, c’mon. It’s childish.”

“Well, I mean, it’s similar enough to your name.” Deku shrugged, looking perfectly innocent. “I
think it suits you. *Kacchan.*”

Yet, the small, wonder-filled smile on the hero’s lips revealed so much playfulness, and Katsuki could hardly believe this was the same person who’d beaten him so badly only a short time ago. And instead of finding himself pissed about that sort of nickname, Katsuki couldn’t help but be strangely attached.

“Hmph.” He crossed his arms, wincing. “Well, *Deku*… I guess it’s only fair. I’ll let this one slide, for now.”

“So you like it, huh, Kacchan?” Deku teased. “Good, cause you’re stuck with it now. Until…” He paused, thinking for a moment. “You’re stuck with it until you get on my level. Got it?”

And despite all that had happened, Katsuki couldn’t remember the last time he felt so completely and utterly happy.

“And like fuck I’ll let either one of us down.”

Chapter End Notes

i had to stop and just breathe while writing that fight scene. o lord

my twitter is @aeronines if u wanna yell at me abt these thorsty boys

And thank you as always to my amazing beta @aetherlite, ur a bro. Next chapter will b up next tuesday and the rating is finally gonna be bumped up to that great and holy E
I dreamt about your ass last night

Chapter Summary

depression and dikku

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Ah… you really do look good like this, don’t you? Oh, Kacchan… you’re not going to try and run away now, are you?”

Slim wrists squirm beneath his gloved hands for only a minute before relenting, finding that the struggle was without any hope for success. “I… how would you expect me to run away?” Pale cheeks flushed with a gorgeous red only served to accent crimson eyes as they dipped down. “Why would I want to, Deku…? It’s you… it’s you that I want to be with.” Ash-blonde hair shifted just a bit, framing that handsome face in the low light of the abandoned room.

“Mm, really…?” Izuku leaned in, a gloved thumb tracing that sturdy jawline. “I’ll need you to convince me of just how eager you are to learn, then. What would you do for me, Kacchan…? I want you to show me. Prove to me that you’re good enough to be by my side.”

Izuku’s knees had trapped him in on either side as strong hands kept Katsuki’s in place above his head. Could he leave if he wanted to? Maybe. Would he?

Oh, hell no.

“Prove to you…?” Katsuki turned an even deeper red, fidgeting just a little. “How… how do you want me to prove it to you? Is it a mock battle? A race? Ah…” Katsuki swallowed, eyes low to the ground. “Is it… do… do you want to, um, use me…?”

“Use isn’t the right word, Kacchan.” Deku frowned. “I’d never just use you like that. I want to teach you, Kacchan. I want you to learn how to make me feel good.”

Katsuki looked up, eyes wide, awe and a strange wonder flooding through them. Those pale pink lips trembled if only just a little, but it was easy to tell it was due to anticipation and not anxiety.

“I- I want to be good for you.” Katsuki whispered, and despite the mild bit of hesitation in his voice, no uncertainty remained. He paused, and that small pink tongue poked out from between lush lips. “Deku… what can I do to make you feel good…?”

God, Kacchan, how are you so perfect?

“It’s simple, I promise.” Izuku dipped his head, giving him what might have been too warm of a smile. “You’re already being so good for me… just follow my lead, okay?”

Katsuki nodded, a little braver this time. “Okay. Yeah, got it.”

That was all the permission he needed.
Izuku leaned down towards him, lips parted as he met Katsuki’s own, joining them in what could have been described as one of the gentlest connections he’d felt in years. Katsuki was trying, but that beginner’s clumsiness was obvious in his movements. Teeth fell in awkward places, tongues going where they shouldn’t, and yet it was in every way the perfect sort of start Izuku had wanted. He pulled back after a slow moment, seeing Katsuki’s wanton, dizzied gaze for the first time.

“Why’d you stop…?” Katsuki whined, pushing back against Izuku’s restraint. “Can’t I do more? I- I want to make you feel good, Deku…!”

“Relax. You’re doing just fine.” Izuku promised, and kissed his forehead. “Try and tilt your head a bit more so we fit better, alright? It’s okay if you’re not an expert at this.” He paused, and a wave of heat ran flush through his chest. “Though, we can learn together if you’d like?”

“Yes.” The word was out in a rushed haze. “God, yes. Keep going. I want- I want to do more for you, Deku.”

He couldn’t help but smile and laugh just a little at that. “Okay. Don’t worry, you will. We’ll make this great. Together.”

And before Katsuki had a chance to respond, Izuku’s mouth was back on his, and this time, they slotted together just a bit easier than before. God, it was ridiculous how open and ready Katsuki’s mouth was, just how willingly pushed back against his own. And if just this was already getting him so aroused, then…

“Kacchan.” He breathed, free hand trailing down Katsuki’s chest, all the way to that plastic green belt buckle. “Kacchan, what can I do to you?”

Katsuki squirmed against his hand, pressing up into his gloved palms. “I-I… Deku, please, can you touch me? Would- would that make you feel good?”

It’s breathless, stuttered. Perfect.

“Of course, Kacchan.” Deku murmured, melting at just how good Katsuki was being for him. “I’d love to touch you. Where would you like me to?”


“Hm?” Izuku raised an eyebrow. “Kacchan, I need you to talk to me. Tell me what you’d like, okay? I want to learn more about you, too.”

When Katsuki didn’t say anything, so blissed out already, he tried again.

“Tell me, and you can touch me too.”

Katsuki’s wrists twitched, and those red eyes came back to attention. “I… you, too?”

“Yes, of course.” Izuku nodded. “You can touch me too, if you want. As long as you say it, okay?”

And this time, Katsuki seemed to get it.

“Okay. R-Right…” He stammered, stared down at himself, and let out a deep breath. “Please… touch my ass. And my- my dick. Please. Use me.”

Excitement sped through his chest, through his heart, and Deku could barely contain himself.
“Beautiful answer, Kacchan. That wasn’t too hard, now, was it?”

“No.” He swallowed, a hint of a smile forming on those weary lips. “It- it feels good. I want to feel more of that… good.”

*God, I just wanna tear you apart…!*

“Has anyone ever told you just how beautiful you are?” Izuku murmured, a tinge of disbelief resting on the edge of his words. “Oh, Kacchan… you’re incredible, and you can go so much further, too. We’re just getting started, and you’re already like this. My god…”

Slowly, slowly, he released Katsuki’s wrists, yet they hung in place for a few moments before Katsuki seemed to realize he could bring them down. Those hands were curious- opening and closing, experimenting, just getting used to them again.

“I’m not beautiful.” He mumbled. “You are.”

And just as Izuku was about to object-

“Can I show you just how beautiful you are?”

Izuku’s eyes widened, glazed over with lust as he realized just what Katsuki was wanting to do.

“Will you let me learn how to make you feel good? So- so I can feel good, too?”

*You’re going to be the death of me, Kacchan.*

Nothing was needed except a quick nod, and before he knew it, Katsuki was pulling off thick green gloves, tossing them to the side along with the silver-gray collar around his neck. His boots and belt came off, too, and only seconds later was Katsuki pressed up against him, sitting on top of Izuku’s legs and half-rutting against them. So needy, so hot and hungry that Izuku wouldn’t dare deny his request. New hands fumbled against Izuku’s own zipper, and it took near his last shred of sanity to help Katsuki get it down. Katsuki’s hands were on his chest, running over Izuku’s nipples, squeezing pecs and abs and every part of exposed skin he could get his hands on. He was so cute, and so goddamn curious that Izuku couldn’t help but relish in the attention.

“Am I doing it right?” Katsuki asked, so hesitant yet so confident all the same. “What else can I do to make you feel good, Deku?”

“You’re beautiful. Doing wonderful.” Izuku sighed, a soft, breathy moan escaping his lips as Katsuki wrapped his own around a nipple. “Mm, Kacchan… god, you feel so good. So… just so *perfect.*”

*How did I ever go so long without you?*

He relented a bit, and let his hands find Katsuki’s ass, gripping it tight. And fuck, if that little bit of attention didn’t make Katsuki moan and shiver like he’d never done before. Katsuki pushed back against his grip, basking in the touch Izuku allowed him despite it being so little.

“You like that, Kacchan?” Izuku squeezed a little harder, and could practically *feel* Katsuki’s breathy little moans on him. “Oh… you don’t have to say it, I know you do. Fuck, how are you so unfairly cute…?”

Katsuki’s head bounced against Izuku’s chest and stayed there for a moment, so breathless from just *that.*
“Do… do you like how I look, Deku?” He whimpered. “W-What can I do… I wanna be the best, Deku… I wanna be with you. What should I do?”

Izuku kissed his head this time, ash-blond hair brushing against his own freckled cheeks. It was so damn ridiculous just how gorgeous Katsuki looked like this, shivering and moaning against him. It was so hard not to take him right then and there, to fuck him ‘till he’d never be able to think of Izuku the same way again. Even just from simple petting, strong hands against the thin fabric of that damned hero costume, Katsuki was falling to pieces.

“You’re doing so, so good already.” Izuku promised him, kissing him on the cheek. “What do you think would make me feel good, Kacchan? I know you’re smart- use that pretty little brain of yours and try to think.”

Katsuki managed to pull his head away from Izuku once again, his mouth open just enough for Izuku to imagine pressing against it again. Lust filled those too-red eyes, and Izuku couldn’t help but wonder what he’d say next.

“I… I wanna kiss you.” Katsuki breathed, but withdrew just a little more. “Wanna kiss you everywhere. Wanna…”

Katsuki’s hands gripped the edge of Izuku’s belt, a little more confident than it would’ve been before. “Deku, I wanna suck your dick.”

A rush of heat hit him square on, and Izuku nearly choked. Katsuki’s tongue swept lasciviously over ready lips, and Izuku had never realized just how bad he wanted to see them wrapped fully around his cock.

“Then do it.” He barely managed to get out. “Blow me, Kacchan. Make me cum.”

And Katsuki’s eyes took on a new determination, filled with some strange combination of wonder and excitement and a wild anticipation. Those steady, sweaty hands managed to undo his belt and get the zipper of Izuku’s outfit down just enough for his boxers to be visible, the outline of his half-hard dick already showing through the fabric. Katsuki’s mouth was practically watering at the sight, and it wasn’t much longer before he freed him from the thin constraint, impatience spurring on his every move. Those eyes met his just once more before turning back to the new contender at play, and in a split second that mouth crested over the head, his dreadfully wicked tongue daring to touch even more, so much more.

“Beautiful…” He groaned, a scarred hand going up to tangle through Katsuki’s wild hair. “God, yes. That’s good, keep- keep going.”

Katsuki crept up a little further, cheeks puffed out and flushed with such a rich, utterly sinful red that Izuku felt the need to whisper a small prayer for this blessing. His mouth wobbled, on and off and on and off, but that desperate panting and choked-up whimpers were all he needed to know Katsuki was enjoying this just as much as he was.

“You like my dick?” Izuku purred, though just the sight of Katsuki below him was almost enough to make him come. “You’re taking it so well… god, I just wanna see you choke on me. Further, Kacchan. Make me proud.” He paused, and ever so slightly pushed Katsuki’s head up a little more. “You wanna prove yourself, don’t you? Come on now, you can do it.”

There wasn’t any verbal confirmation, no nod of affirmation from him to show that Katsuki had heard him. But as soon as he dove back on, hands shaking as they struggled to stay steady on the dusty ground, the determination with which he went at his business was no joke. Izuku could hardly
keep himself sitting steady with that warmth around his cock, taking him so firmly, so strong, so heated and just so perfect.

“Ugh, fuck. Good, good...” He sighed, smiling a bit as Katsuki went down further, further. “You’re so, so beautiful, Kacchan... yes, you’re doing so well. So good for me.” He paused, gasping as Katsuki did something with his tongue, and god, if he wasn’t about to explode on the spot. “F-Fuck... yes, right there. Look at you, Kacchan.”

Katsuki came off his dick with a small pop, and those glazed, glassy eyes of his seemed to be seeing everything and nothing all at once.

“Feels good, huh?” Katsuki grinned, spit shining silver on glassy, tender lips. “You taste damn good, Deku. I want- I want more of you.”

Still dazed, Izuku smirked. “Then take it, won’t you?”

It was almost hard to watch while Katsuki was on him, working him so well, too well, treating him like the hero he was and then more. Well, it might not have been the most heroic thing he’d done, but fuck- this was so, so much better than the alternative.

“Give it to me.” He ordered, pushing Katsuki’s head further onto his cock. “Mm, yes... take it like the good boy you are. God... perfect. Just like that, Kacchan.”

Katsuki whimpered this time, some of that confidence leaving him as he literally gagged around his dick. But Izuku didn’t want to relent any more- Katsuki was going to be by his side, right by the best, and he’d have to prove just how well he could take on every challenge- big or small.

Maybe it was more to Katsuki’s relief, but Izuku felt himself growing closer by the second- just a little at a time, yes, but even he was reaching his limit. It had been so long since his last decent blowjob, yet this one alone was enough to make him forget the dreary drought between his last partner and Katsuki. Fuck, he hoped this wouldn’t be the last time. He hoped that Katsuki had fallen just as much for him- or if nothing else, for his body- so that this could last even just a little longer.

“Hng... fuck, Kacchan.” He sputtered, unable to hold back much longer. “I- I’m close.”

But with his last shred of sanity, he managed to come back a little bit, even if just to give Katsuki one final order.

“I- Kacchan, you better...” He stopped, a hoarse cry of heady pleasure forcing its way out of his throat. “You better- you better swallow. T-Take all of me, Kacchan. Take it.”

Katsuki didn’t seem to be faring much better on his end, but pulled off for a second, grinned, and nodded. That pure, utterly ravenous hunger present in every crease of his lips was enough to let Izuku know his answer. Just as he slid back on, Izuku’s whole body shuddering under the contact, something within him burst. White-hot flames flooded through his veins, and he absolutely, positively screamed as he came.

And through trembling, dazed vision and whimpered cries of relief, the last thing he saw was Katsuki’s pleased little smile before everything went dark.

...dark, and quickly fading to dim light as Izuku began to come back to his reality.

“Fuck.”

Izuku groaned, curled up tighter on his bed, and hugged his pillow like it was his escape from cruel,
miserable reality.

“Dammit…” He mumbled, voice gross and groggy, wrinkled sheets caught between curled toes. “Shoot… s’already seven. You’ve gotta be kidding me…”

*This is the fourth time this week, for fuck’s sake. God, get your act together.*

Izuku forced himself out of bed, pretending that there wasn’t anything unusual about the too-dark stain on the front of his boxers as he trudged bleary-eyed to the shower. It took all his willpower to force the memories of that dream away, all of his strength to just continue on like nothing had happened.

*Push it away, push it away. You’re a hero, aren’t you? You shouldn’t be fantasizing about this almost every goddamn night. It’s absurd. Pathetic.*

He could hardly stand to look at himself as he undressed and stepped into shower, hoping that the rush of boiling water would burn that clinging, festering guilt away. It had been over a month since that fateful training session, yet that goddamn image of Katsuki beneath him with those wide, awed, scared eyes staring up at him still haunted his every resting moment. It was easy enough to push those thoughts to the back of his mind during the day when the sun was shining down on him, illuminating him in all the glory he’d gained on the battlefield- but the deep shadow cast behind him spoke the truth of all the feelings he’d locked away tight, never to be revealed to the waking world.

Maybe he couldn’t force himself to completely hate those nights. Though, there was no halting the dread from his blaring alarm in the early gray of the mornings, or the lurking fear that somehow, some way, someone would find out. It wasn’t that he really wanted Katsuki like that- no, he didn’t, and yet his hormones couldn’t seem to make peace with that sentiment. It had already been one month, after all. Over a month of falling asleep every other night to see *that.*

Izuku cursed and banged his head against the shower wall.

*This isn’t sustainable. Not one bit.*

“You’re an adult.” He grumbled to himself, washing his hair with stubborn intent. “You’re nineteen, Izuku. You’re a hero. Start acting like one.”

*But fuck, maybe I do need to get laid.*

The rest of his morning shower was nothing but miserable, as had been so many other mornings this week. His empty apartment never helped his mood, either, but it was at least a relief to not have anyone else witness his ritual morning walk of shame. At this point, he was just going through the motions. One step at a time. Dry off, go back to his bedroom, grab fresh boxers and a maybe-clean shirt and pants, then head to the kitchen for a sad breakfast of hard-boiled eggs and cold bacon. Maybe fruit if he’d remembered to go to the store. Dim lights flicked quietly above him, a constant reminder than at some point, he needed to get them fixed. *Eventually,* he told himself.

Eventually never came.

He turned on the TV as he ate, yesterday’s dirty mug home to today’s stale coffee. Izuku couldn’t help but be glad that his friends, or more specifically *Ochako,* didn’t come over that often. She’d smack him stupid for how dirty he’d let it get in recent times. He’d stopped keeping up with regular house maintenance months ago, and as guilty as he felt leaving everything in disarray, it was easier to brush those feelings aside than actually *do* anything about it. The only thing in perfect, pristine condition was a shrine dedicated to his long-deceased childhood hero, All Might, tucked away in the
spare closet he’d never had another use for.

*Funny how two people with such similar quirks wound up so different...* growing up, *I remember seeing him smile and win on TV all the time. And then...*

He swallowed.

*Then there’s me.*

Everyday, he came back to the same lonely home and sad, cold food he couldn’t be bothered to cook himself. It had been easier some time ago- after he’d moved in, he’d at least clean every so often and cook three to four times a week, even if it was simple. Now, though…

Izuku sighed, stared down at the mug in his hand, and wondered what his life had come to. A social life? Forget it. With his utilitarian super-strength quirk at his beck and call, heroing kept him busy day-in and day-out; the only driving force during his waking hours. If nothing else, he could focus on getting to the top at all times. Push towards the best, rise in the ranks, win and rescue and smile just like he’d envisioned doing since the day he’d understood what heroes were. That part was so easy to do, honestly, that everything outside of his job became the challenge. Sometimes he wondered if he’d lost his fire already. A steady diet of protein drinks and fast food was certainly evidence towards that, and his slowly decreasing sleep quality didn’t help his case, either. He could admit he felt more than a little off most days, but at this rate, it was becoming the norm.

It was always after those sorts of thoughts that he found himself remembering part of the reason he liked Katsuki so much- if nothing else, he had that fire, and brimmed to bursting with the passion Izuku wished he could remember. Privately, he could confess that that was part of the reason he couldn’t quite bring himself to hate the wet dreams, either.

Izuku slumped down into his filthy couch, wondering when the best part of his day had become dreaming about having sex with a sixteen year-old.

Out of habit, his attention flitted back towards the TV, having nothing better to do. The news played quietly, but just as he was about to change the channel to the weather or something, an all-too familiar symbol appeared.

“*Today, we will be filming everyone’s favorite yearly event- U.A.’s annual Sports Festival! If you weren’t lucky enough to grab seats, don’t worry! We’ll be streaming the entirety of the first-year’s events on our channel! If you’d rather tune in to the second or third years, switch over to...*”

“Oh, *shit*!”

Izuku bolted to his feet in a flurry of panic, sprinting back towards his room and almost tripping over last night’s takeout in the process as he tried to grab his phone. Notifications, alarms, and texts had flooded his notifications, and he nearly slapped himself for practically forgetting the *one thing* he’d been looking forward to for the past month.

“That’s right, I took today off, and Ochako invited me along with her and Kirishima…!” He groaned, still in disbelief over his incompetence. “Fuck…!”

He scrambled to find Ochako’s number, still saved under his favorites, and dug through his dresser drawers for a clean undershirt and socks while it rang.

*God, how did I manage to forget this?*

It was to some small relief that she picked up only a few moments later, just as he was tugging an
appropriate undershirt up and over his head.

“Hi, Izuku!” The cheer in her voice stood a stark contrast to the anxiety riddling his own thoughts. “You ready to go? Kirishima’s with me already, and we’re on the way to your place now!”

He cursed under his breath, but tried his best to remain calm. “Yeah- yeah. Just about ready. How much longer till you’re here…?!”

“Oh, probably just a few minutes or so. I wanna get good seats, so you better be ready. I’m dragging you out here myself if you’re not.” She teased, though Izuku had no doubts about her following through on that promise.

“Ah, I will be!” He swallowed, at least trying to fake a slightly better mood. “Hero costumes, right?”

“Duh! Okay, Izuku, I’ll be there soon. Oh- Kirishima says hi, by the way! He’s excited to see you off duty.”

He could let himself smile a little at that, if nothing else. “Tell him I’m excited to see him, too. I’ll meet you two downstairs.”

Izuku hung up before she could ask why downstairs, rather than up.

Next, he found his hero suit lying in a messy pile off to the side of his bed, and threw it on as quickly as possible, gloves, mask, and all. It was only a quick glance in the mirror he allowed himself, just to make sure he looked a little less stressed than he felt.

Despite the bit of panic, though, he wouldn’t deny that he was thrilled to see the festival, especially the first years. Though it was no secret that they generally tended to be his favorite group, he could admit that he was excited to see Katsuki again, despite how guilty he felt towards certain aspects of it.

And yet, just as he was tying his shoes, a loud knock came from the front door.

“No, no…!” He cursed. “Shit…”

I can’t let them in here right now…! Dammit, I’ll just have to be careful, then.

“Izuku! Hurry up already.” Came Ochako’s familiar, yet slightly chilling voice.

“Coming!” He yelped just as he finished. Izuku shot to his feet, but didn’t make it ten steps before tripping and falling face-first onto the dirty carpet after stumbling over who-the-fuck knows what.

“Are… are you okay?” Ochako asked, only a thin wall standing between her and Izuku’s shame.

Just fine, thanks.

“Yeah!” Was what he managed to say instead as he peeled himself off the floor. “Sorry, sorry.”

Izuku sincerely hoped he didn’t look like shit.

With some amount of acceptance, he grabbed the doorknob and twisted it open, just hoping he’d be able to get outside before his friend could look too close.

Sure enough, it was quick, fast- and just as much, Izuku found himself crashing straight into something- no, someone else, for the second time in five minutes. He bounced back against his own door, at the very least thankful that he’d managed to(hopefully) shut it before Ochako could peek
inside.

“S-Sorry!” He stammered, embarrassment flushing through him. “Ah, I didn’t think you were right there, my bad…”

But to his surprise, Ochako just looked at him and laughed.

“You’re all good, Izuku. Aha, I’m just glad to see you again!” She smiled, and Izuku swore the brightness in her face could’ve illuminated a city block. “I know this isn’t downstairs, but I just wanted to be the first to see you. It’s been too long, you know?”

Izuku found himself smiling a little too, though unable to shake that ever-present guilt. “I… yeah. It has been too long. I saw you on patrol last week, but…”

“Oh, that was still on duty, though.” She grabbed his arm. “Come on, we can catch up on the way there. It’s been like, what, a month since we hung out?”

*Almost one and a half, but…* “Yeah, too long.” He mumbled, realizing that the last time they had hung out had been after that fateful day of training with U.A., right after his fight against Katsuki, which then had led to-

*Nope! Nope, we are absolutely not doing this right now, brain!*

If this was already so hard, he was having a hard time imagining how difficult it would be to watch Katsuki perform.

It was a short trip down the stairs from his third-floor apartment, and as soon as he made it to the bottom, found himself greeted with a suffocating hug from his other best friend.

“Midoriya!” Kirishima grinned. “Good to see you, dude! How’ve you been?”

The crushing force of the hug was nearly enough to knock the wind out of him, but did give him some source of familiar comfort he hadn’t felt in too long. “Good, good!” He managed, though the words were a bit choked through his friend’s unyielding grip.

He could admit to himself here that *yeah,* maybe his friends’ presence did help chase off his weighted sadness, if only a little.

“You ready for the Sports Fest?” Kirishima released him, settling to just pat his shoulder instead. “Man, I’m ready to see these first years for myself. You two are so lucky that you got to go help out with training! I mean, Inasa’s great, but… I dunno, man. I think I’d be a *harder* opponent to beat.”

Izuku couldn’t hold back a snort at his friend’s god-awful pun, but… there was no doubt he felt a little more at home now.

“Well, maybe Aizawa will invite you to come the next time we go over to help out.” Izuku reminded him. “It’s in like a month, right?”

“Oh, it’s only a few weeks away!” Ochako butted in herself. “Ooh, and I’m ready! Last time he had me go up against the team with Endeavor’s kid. Man, I wanna help him improve that teamwork of his. If he had been more considerate of the people he was with, I might’ve actually had some trouble dealing with them!” She laughed a little, and god, if it wasn’t the most refreshing thing Izuku had heard in weeks. “You shoulda seen the looks on their faces when he froze the whole field, though. They all got stuck in the ice!”
“That’s right, you told me!” Kirishima cackled, nearly doubling over. “Oh, geez… man, today is gonna be fun. Wasn’t there one kid you did a number to during the training, Midoriya? Broke both his arms or something?”

Izuku flushed. “I didn’t break anything! I- I just dislocated it. It wasn’t that bad.”

*I know I fucked up, don’t worry, everyone’s made me well aware. I know I should have been more mindful, I know. I’m sorry. I swear. Aizawa told me enough as it is.*

“Pfft.” Ochako rolled her eyes. “Yeah, didn’t he nearly black out from the pain, and you had to carry him back? I could’ve sworn you broke a rib or two of his, too! Ooh, I remember how hard Aizawa chewed you out after that. What- uh, what was his name again? Um… Buka, no, Baka~”

“Bakugo.” He supplied, not meeting her eyes for fear she’d see too much hiding in them. “Bakugo Katsuki. He’s strong.”

You’re so strong. I want to see your fire again.

“Ah, so I guess you’re looking forward to watching him compete today, then?” Kirishima asked.

*God, you don’t know the half of it.*

“Yeah.” He mumbled instead. “Yeah, he’ll be… fun to watch.”

*Please, please, just make these dreams go away. I need them to go away. Let me see him in a different light. I can’t live like this much longer, Kacchan.*

“Well, then we should probably get going.” Ochako nudged him. “The next train leaves in five! We need to get to the station, guys.”

Izuku resolved to shove the remainder of those thoughts out of his head, and nodded. “Right. Yeah, let’s go.”

“Alright!” Kirishima fist-pumped. “Hell yeah, I’m ready.”

*I’m ready, too. Izuku thought as he left his apartment complex to dash back down towards the station. I’m ready to fix this problem. And I’m ready to fix myself, too.*

*Kacchan, I swear I’ll change this. I can’t afford to see you like this any longer.*

He boarded the train, smushed in between friends and gasps of exclamation from nearby onlookers.

*For the good of us both, I’ll shut whatever this is away.*

Ochako was smiling, laughing at his side, and Kirishima’s ever-present toothy grin held fast and strong at his other.

He swallowed.

*I promise.*

Chapter End Notes
hope yall are excited for the sports fest cause it gonna b fun i swear

My twitter is @aeronines if u ever wanna scream at me, and as always thank u to my awesome beta @aetherlite for bein the best! Next update next week my dudes
Chapter Summary

yee haw sports fest

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Playing the waiting game was always the hardest part.

It hadn’t taken too long to get to U.A., nor to find their way into carefully stacked stadium seats, but now that it was happening right before his eyes the annual Sports Festival felt just that much more real.

“Ooh, should we get some popcorn?” Ochako’s excitement bubbled up through her words like fizz in a soda. “Or corn dogs! We can get those too. Izuku, you like yours with ketchup, right?”

“Popcorn always gets stuck in my teeth, so...” Kirishima pondered. “I vote corn dogs! I haven’t had one in so long.”

“You know there’s no actual meat in those, right?” Izuku teased, but was only met with a stubborn defense of the corn dog and its supposed soul-lifting properties. Ochako left them alone with a roll of her eyes, yet a glimmer of contentment still shone strong in them.

“Ah, she’s too good to us.” Kirishima chuckled. “Been putting up with our bullshit from day one. Well- your bullshit, really. I was great” His friend let out a long, relaxed sigh, and leaned back in the plastic seat. “It’s still weird to think about the fact that you two were actually dating back in second year. Like, I get you were horny, but-”

“Oh, shut it.” Izuku snorted. “We were all horny. Don’t try and convince me you weren’t jealous! Why do you think third year between us happened then, hm?”

“H-hey!” Izuku sat, feeling as if he’d been deeply wronged. “Look, she liked it, didn’t she? Yeah, it was kinda stupid, but like-”

“Shh, shh. Third year was different than you and her,” Kirishima insisted. “And I mean, at least I was better at hiding how desperate I was than some.” He paused. “Man, I still remember all your shitty pick-up lines. And t-shirts.” He stopped mid-sentence, eyes widening upon an elated realization. “Wait, Midoriya, do you still have that one that says ‘Boyfriend Material’ on it? God, that was the best...!”

“I burned it.” He deadpanned. “It’s dead. Gone. And if you don’t shut up, you’re next.”

His friend gasped, a dramatic hand coming up to his heart. “I’m so sorry! Don’t threaten me, good hero! I mean you no harm!”

Izuku couldn’t help the smile that drifted over his lips, though, and began to realize just how much
he’d missed his company. Something about Kirishima always made him easy to relax and be around, if nothing else. He’d been off working a few cities away, so the time they spent together was few and far between. But this was comfortable. Easy. Kirishima had thrown a lazy arm on his shoulder by the time Ochako came back, and even at just that small bit of contact and familiarity, he felt a bit more secure.

*Should I ask him if maybe… if he’d be willing to do what we did back then…*

Then, recognizable mortification crept back over Izuku when he realized just what it was he was thinking.

*That’s weird, right? I can’t- I can’t ask him to sleep with me again! No, no! We’re not in high school any more, any of… that, between us… is over. No more.*

The guilt was creeping back in, but this time, it was all he could do to just shift his attention to the event at hand and the friends- who were nothing more than *friends*- at his side. Yes, maybe he and Ochako had dated for a while before realizing it wasn’t going to work, and with Kirishima he had had somewhat of a mutual-relief thing going on in third year. But that was it- nothing more. It was friends with benefits back then, and *just friends* now. Kirishima was busy with his life and probably trying to find a partner, too. So, Izuku would shift his desires to the back burner, grin and bear it and push through.

*Not that I even have time for a relationship. I don’t want a real relationship. I don’t have the time to give. Not if- not if I’m going to be number one.*

Sometimes, though, the notion of getting wasted and laid spent too much time lingering at the forefront of his thoughts.

“Oh, looks like they’re starting.” Ochako’s words brought him out of his thoughts, and moments later, a stadium announcement backed her claim. “Ah, look at all the first years! Ooh, I recognize some of the ones we trained with before!”

Sure enough, on the grounds far below Izuku spied a few familiar faces. As the broadcast zoomed in on the new contenders he could even pick out some of those he remembered as Katsuki’s teammates from the crowd. But right now, there was one person in particular he wanted to find.

“Wait a minute… Izuku, isn’t that him?”

Izuku looked around, confused for just a moment, and then found his heart near beating out of his chest when he noticed the single student climbing up the podium to give the pre-festival speech. A bit of warmth flooded through him when he saw the burst of blonde hair sticking up as he made his way through the swarm of people. He held no feelings for Katsuki, but there wasn’t a chance he could take his eyes off him- not after that fateful attack, nor their last confrontation. Katsuki had already cemented a solid place in his in his mind.

“Yeah…” He swallowed. “Yeah, it is. I’m pretty sure he scored near the top in his entrance exam?”

*Kacchan, look at you. Standing out of the crowd already.*

Ochako let out a small *ohh* when she realized that. “So that’s why you were so interested in him during the training, huh? Man, you just wanted to take him on yourself.”

“H-Hey! It was a fun match.” He grumbled, crossing his arms. “Now shush. I wanna listen to him.”

Katsuki looked… determined. *Yes, that more than anything else. The camera panned to his face, and*
those familiar, blazing red eyes sent his spirit soaring sky-high.

And as he leaned into the mic, a small, nearly unnoticeable smirk turned up the corners of those wolfish lips.

*What’s it gonna be? What kind of thing would he say… probably something a little bold, but he might be a little nervous now, overwhelmed by all this pressure. There’s a lot of people here, it’s understandable if he’s-*

“I’ll win.” Katsuki paused, voice distant from the microphone, yet Izuku felt as if he was right in front of him. Those piercing eyes looked up towards the stands, and-

“Just watch me.”

Izuku’s eyes shot wide. Katsuki couldn’t be thinking about him right now, no, it had to be the crowd he was referring to. Nothing else. Nothing more. And yet...

...holy shit.

No. He wouldn’t let himself think of that possibility, not now. Katsuki’s motives didn’t revolve around him. He lived his own life, for his own reasons, and his drive to be Izuku’s partner was only a byproduct of that goal. Nothing more.

*It’ll never be anything more, either.*

“Oh, dude! First event’s a race to the top of the hill.” Kirishima exclaimed, snapping Izuku out of his trance as he scooted to the edge of his seat. “This’ll be fun. Guess they’ll have Cementoss construct a temporary mountain, then.”

“Huh, interesting.” Ochako echoed. “The first forty up to the top move on to the next round. Hm… I wonder if the kid with the ice is going to make it up? Er- Endeavor’s son.”

“Kacc- Bakugou will.” Izuku murmured, fingers clasped beneath his chin. “He’ll use his explosions to propel himself up, but I’m not sure if he’ll attempt to hinder any other’s progress in the process. It’ll be interesting to watch this, though.”

“Man, I really wish I’d gotten to see him, the whole class, really- in person before this.” Kirishima complained. “Dammit… oh well. Just from that little of a speech, though… that kid’s pretty gutsy! I like him.”

Ochako nodded. “Mhm. I agree. He’ll make it far.”

*Of course he will.*

They watched as Cementoss lifted a mountain from concrete pavement into blue skies, teetering near level with the top of the stadium and littered with visible traps. It would certainly be a challenge to ascend a structure of that high to begin with, and the added element of contesting players and legitimate pitfalls- made safe by high-tech nets strung across the base- would make this no easy game.

Izuku took a bite out of his corn dog and waited.

*“Well, here we go! On your marks, get set… GO!”*  
The race started and soon enough, the participants blasted off- in Katsuki’s case, rather literally. The
kid Ochako had mentioned earlier had formed a column of ice beneath his feet as well, launching himself upwards while freezing those around him. There were some others who remained noticeable, too— one had seemingly created a grappling hook, another was using a replica of herself to climb and dodge, and yet another was shattering an entire section of the mountain to raise himself up.

“Wait, who’s that one?” Ochako asked, pointing over to the kid with dark, curly hair and chunks of mangled, terraformed earth at his feet. “I didn’t see him when we came to train, but he’s gotta be a hero course student. I mean, just look at that power!”

“Could be Class 1-B.” Izuku murmured, intently focussed on the match. “Hm… if he keeps up with that, this could potentially be over soon.”

“But there’s only a few students close to the top so far…?” Kirishima hummed, leaning in. “What if he physically knocks out most of the competition? Would they even have enough participants for a second round before finals?”

“I… I dunno.” Ochako pursed her lips. “Oh, look…! A few more are getting up there. Erm, Bakugou’s knocked down a few students in the process! And the ice kid is almost there, too.”

Katsuki reached the top quickly and sure enough, Endeavor’s son- Todoroki, he recalled— followed in his steed. But it wasn’t long before a good chunk of the structure started to really crumble, and the several students that had made it to the top were beginning to evacuate before their own stability was seriously compromised.

“Oh my god… that kid with the, um, earthquakes? Is really doing some damage.” Ochako whispers. “There’s no way more than ten or twenty people are gonna make it to the top before the goal up there is broken.”

The last few determined, clambering students got to the top, and yet a small part of him just couldn’t help but be relieved that Katsuki wasn’t among the losers.

*I won’t show favoritism, I can’t, but realistically? He’s got a shot.*

The mountain falls just as the kid with the earthquakes reaches the goal. And sure enough, only seconds later is the match called.

“Damn.” Kirishima whistled. “Only nineteen got through in time. That’s not even enough for a full second round! God, these first years really are nuts.”

“No joke…” Izuku murmured. “That was nuts. Huh, maybe they will go straight to the bracket, then?”

He didn’t recognize many of the students leftover as they descended from the mountain shrapnel, but if they made it past that first stage there was no doubt they were pretty good.

*You got this, Kacchan. Izuku clasped his hands tightly together, almost in a sort of prayer. Fulfill your goal. Win this. I’m watching, just like you asked.*

“Guess they’re having a brief time out, then? I guess it’s no surprise, after that.” Ochako crossed her arms. “Who was that kid…?”

Their answer came from the loudspeaker not a few seconds later.

*“Alright! First-year Class 1-B student Shindou Yo just knocked out the competition! Now, all the ones who couldn’t maneuver around the quakes are crumbling from the ranks! And while we were*
originally going to have a second round, it may be impossible to hold this year! So, give us just a few minutes to figure out some logistics, okay? OKAY!”

“Well, I guess that’s the detail we needed, huh?” Kirishima said, staring on at the screen. “Geez… with a quirk like that, what are your limits? Like, can he un-destroy stuff at all?”

“I wonder, like… is his quirk just causing earthquakes, or does it have something more to do with the force that he applied to the ground…?” Izuku contemplated, cataloguing the info away for later. “Shindou… Yo Shindou. I’ll have to remember him. These first years are pretty amazing already.”

Shindou’s face was the subject of every screen, and Izuku couldn’t help but feel a little wary about him. Behind those pretty eyes was something indescribable, something… off. For as much as he smiled, there was a clear malice, or just, something. Something not right.

I hope Kacchan’s alright… wait. No. I won’t go doubting him. He’ll take care of this. I know he’ll be able to make it through, past this obstacle and all the rest.

Yeah… hm, I wonder if he’d be worth taking on in an internship?” Kirishima pondered. “I mean, I dunno, he seems at least a bit manly.”

“Ah, watch the rest of them first!” Ochako pressed. “We’re still in the early stages. Heck, we haven’t seen any of the one-on-ones yet.”

“Alright, alright. If you say so.”

It wasn’t but a few more minutes until the speakers came back on, blaring throughout the crowd and beyond. And sure enough-

“Okay, guys! Here we go! Instead of going through the normal second round, this year we’ll be mixing it up a little! With the total number of students down to a surprising count of nineteen, going through a second round to clear up the field would be, well, pointless! So instead, we’ll be transitioning from here to the tournament bracket. The only major difference is that the players who scored higher in the first round- which was conducted by some of our staff back here- will be in one-on-one matches while the bottom nine contenders participate in a three-way fight, with only one student moving on. This year, we have a fairly nice mix of students, but I’m sure that whoever’s up against our friend Shindou is going to have a fairly rocky time!”

An unamused groan came from Ochako’s side.

“So, without further ado, here’s this Sports Festival’s annual tournament bracket! Nineteen contenders, fighting in individual matches to the finish! Just who will be left standing at the end?”

The screens flickered to life with a new, fresh scoreboard, and an undeniable amount of fear flooded through Izuku’s veins.

“Ooh, ice kid’s going up against the, uh, the illusion girl! You fought against her too, right?” Ochako exclaimed. “Inasa was telling me about her. She seems fun!”

“Oh, her quirk has to do with illusions? That seems pretty cool.” Kirishima joined her. “Seems like something that’d be better for stealth missions or as a sort of bait more than close combat, though. Huh… well, I wanna see what she’ll be able to do against him, anyways.”

They talked on a bit about the other matchups, but all Izuku could see was Katsuki’s name. Katsuki’s name, paired up with Shindou’s.
Explosions versus earthquakes. Do you really have a chance here?

He held in his worry and tried to remember Katsuki’s words. He’d make it through this first round. Yes, he’d make it past this and everything else.

“He’ll be up fourth, then…” Izuku mumbled. “Is, uh, Shindou’s quirk actually just generating earthquakes? That might not help him too much in actual heroing, unless he has some way of reducing or controlling the effect more intimately. There’s gotta be something more, now…”

“You thinkin’ about him again?” Kirishima teased. Izuku flushed and shook his head, trying to awkwardly laugh away the accusation.

“No, no, just… it’s the other guy! Cause he was so strong in the first match, I-I don’t really know how Kacchan’s going to fare against him!”

Kirishima’s amused smile only grew a little bigger, pointed white teeth showing now. “Oh. Kacchan, huh? Cute.”

Izuku wanted to curl up and die right then and there.

“Just- I’m just gonna watch the matches.” He mumbled. “Shuddup.”

He ducked his head, eyes trained far, far away from his friends, and further away from Katsuki’s incriminating name on that bracket.

The first few matches went by in a blur. As expected, Todoroki obliterated the illusion girl in the first minute or so. With an unhinged power like that, there was no surprise he’d worked horribly with his teammates while fighting Ochako in their practice session. He vaguely remembered the students in the second match- one of them had been on Katsuki’s team during training too, yet he struggled to remember ever hearing her name back then. However, it was an interesting victory she accrued after pulling several small grenades from her stomach and blasting away the opposite half of the battlefield, her opponent along with it. Izuku wondered how’d she do against Todoroki in the second round, but realized with a grimace that she’d probably go down just as fast as his first victim.

The next round sped by as well, literally- another Class 1-A kid, he presumed, dragged his opponents out of the rink in almost no time at all from just the force of what appeared to be engines in his legs. But it was near the end of that match when Izuku’s stomach began to roll with uneasy nausea again, fingers clenched tight to gloved palms as he watched Katsuki step onto the field.

You’ve got this. Come on, you won’t let him just rip this away from you.

As much as he tried to convince himself of that, though, the only images he could conjure up were those of Katsuki’s body wracked with pain and broken bones, trembling in his arms as blood trickled out of every wound carved into that pale skin. Because for as much as Izuku dreamt about that fight, Katsuki’s literal, physical form haunted his thoughts during the day.

I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Please forgive me, Kacchan. I didn’t mean to hurt you like that. I never wanted to see you like that again. I don’t know what came over me back then.

“Oh, this is gonna be good.” Kirishima’s eyes glinted as he stared out at the field, eagerly biting down on his corn dog. “Buckle up, kids. This fight is gonna shake us to our very core.”

Ochako groaned again. “It’s a wonder I put up with you sometimes.”

“Aw, but I know you love me.” Kirishima shot her a wink, only for Ochako to bury her head in her
hands.

“I mean, it wasn’t that bad.” Izuku mumbled.

“You’re an idiot. Both of you are idiots. Why did I take this upon myself? Ugh, you guys are so weird.” Ochako complained, but the both of them knew that her comments were only ever teasing. If Ochako really hadn’t been able to tolerate him, they would’ve split up as friends after their high school breakup. But, no- their affection for each other ran high, even after realizing any sort of romantic relationship would never really work out. Kirishima, too, in that regard. Izuku’s third year had been replete with late nights spent in his friend’s room, nights where both of them wound up too marked up to deny what it was they had with each other. Friends- no, best friends with benefits. It had worked, for a time. They still cared so much about each other as friends, as fellow heroes and partners on occasion in the field, but anything intimate was over. They’d decided to end it at the end of high school from the very start, but Izuku had never really been able to shake all of his unwanted feelings away. Kirishima was a great friend, great in bed, too- but nothing more. Never anything more.

And that was fine. It was all fine. Kirishima and Ochako were both happy with their current single status, and he could be too.

God, why do I keep thinking about all this? You’re not going to have a relationship. Your job is too important to be sidetracked by something like this. There’s a fight about to happen right down below, and that’s so much more important than whatever this is.

Izuku clenched his hands tighter, and stared down at the field below him. Right at Katsuki, right at Shindou, and yet that almost made his stomach feel worse.

“Win this…” He murmured. “Win.”

Show me. I’m watching.

“Oh, oh! It’s starting.” Ochako’s voice pulled him back. “Here we go. Ugh, I just hope this isn’t such a one-sided match.”

“And three, two, one… START!”

They were off.

*Are you gonna charge in head on, right for a frontal assault? Because if you go straight, then-*

But, Katsuki didn’t go forward.

He went up.

“Whoah, what’s he doing?” Kirishima squinted. “Okay, okay, yeah… he’s got the explosions.”

“If anything, Bakugou has a lot more maneuverability.” Izuku observed, careful to not repeat his name slip-up from earlier. “Look, see- he’s able to change angles so much more efficiently.”

“Hm… his power is a lot more controlled. Doesn’t have a whole lot in the way of range, though.” Ochako hummed. “Shindou’s cracking the surface of the playing field, too… huh. I wonder if that’s gonna affect his landing?” She paused, and turned back to Izuku. “Do you know how long he can stay in the air?”

Izuku rubbed the back of his head. “Ah, no. I doubt he can use his explosions forever, but I don’t
know the consequences of overuse, either. So I guess we’ll see?”

Katsuki had spent the last minute or so darting through the air, avoiding chunks of flying rubble thrown about at random. Shindou himself had secured a clearing around him, almost a fortress of sorts. But from how the situation looked right now, it appeared that Katsuki’s current momentum was leading him-

Above.

“Shindou’s quirk has only been shown to affect the ground so far, right?” Izuku asked, more urgent this time. “Because as long as Bakugou can get in close, Shindou won’t really be able to use his quirk without it affecting the both of them. Yeah, that’s a pretty decent strategy if that’s the case.”

“I mean, we just haven’t really seen any other usage of it.” Ochako pointed out. “But when Shindou uses his quirk, it looks like there’s a radiating form or something around his hands? I- I mean, it could be more than just earthquakes if all he’s doing is-”

Oh, shit.

“Vibrating it.” Izuku’s eyes went wide, a hand coming up over his mouth. “Oh god. If he’s just vibrating the ground, not necessarily causing quakes, then that could mean he might be able to vibrate anything, right? Anything he touches, if we’re going by the contact of his hands to his target.”

“Dude, wait, wouldn’t that mean it applies to people too?” Anxiety rode up in Kirishima’s tone. “So if he were to grab someone or something, he could send vibrations through them too?”

Katsuki was careening closer to the ground, descending and losing steam along the way. The rate he was going, he’d make contact with Shindou’s platform of sorts in just a second or two.

Come on, come on! Figure it out, Kacchan! Please, don’t let him touch you, or-

There was an explosion.

Dust. Rubble flying off in all directions from the epicenter of the blast. Izuku was on the edge of his seat, heart thudding in his chest, biting his lip and praying that Katsuki was okay, that he was standing, just anything.

The dirt cleared, and Katsuki was staring up into his opponent’s eyes, and even as far away as he was, Izuku could feel the grisly scream from just the horribly contorted twist of his face.

Kacchan…!

Right at ground zero, Shindou’s tall form loomed above, pinning Katsuki to the ground with hands curled over Katsuki’s own and knee between his thighs. There was a smile on his face- a smile, yes, filled with nothing but calculated malice. Katsuki was visibly, violently trembling- Shindou was literally shaking him to his core, and yet the first thing Izuku felt wasn’t fear.

Wha… what is this sensation? I… no, please tell me I’m not, I can’t possibly-

Yet, the longer he stared at the scene, the sicker he felt, and this time it was due to his own twisted jealousy rather than any expression of panic for Katsuki.

You don’t have the right to be above him like that, fucker.
“Get him.” Izuku hissed, low and menacing. “He’s not supposed to be there, now is he?”

Katsuki was squirming, and not in defeat.

Get him, won’t you? You’re not going to lie beneath anyone but me. You’re not going to submit to anyone else like that. Get up, Kacchan. You’re stronger than this. Prove me right.

“Is the match over…?” Ochako asked quietly, almost hesitantly. “Uh- Izuku, what’s gotten into you?”

“Midoriya, you’re really pale. Is everything…”

“I’m fine.” He snapped. “Watch.”

That’s what you asked me to do. I won’t let you down with something that simple.

Izuku smirked as he witnessed the next resounding blast from below.

“He’s won.”

Katsuki had done exactly what he’d expected. As his ragged form stood from the ground, arms still shaking wildly at his sides, he stared out at the hollowed-out path he’d created, and Shindou’s body lying at the end of it- right outside the boundaries of the match.

“And with this surprising turn of events, Bakugou Katsuki has turned out to be the victor against round one champion Shindou Yo!”

There was a grin on Katsuki’s handsome, battered face, and he radiated a confidence that Izuku had forgotten.

You followed through. This is step one, Kacchan. You’re doing so good, so good. I know you wouldn’t let anyone stand over you like that but me.

A rush of cold air swept over him upon realizing just what it was he was thinking, and Izuku shrunk back into his seat, trying to push any hint of it away again. If he pretended it wasn’t there, the feelings would go away, right?

Just pay attention to the conversation. That’s what matters.

“Holy shit…” Kirishima sat, utterly agape. “Okay, yeah. That kid’s pretty good. Hell, both of them were.”

“Yeah, I’m impressed.” Ochako remarked. “That was intense. And it wasn’t even the final round…!”

“I’m putting my money on Bakugou to win.” Izuku admitted. “I mean, I’ve been rooting for him since the beginning, but I just feel it now. You know? He’s got this.”

Ochako shifted. “I mean, Todoroki’s probably going to make it to the final round. Do you think Bakugou could really beat him? I mean, with his ice power alone he’s already really strong. If he starts using his other ability it could be bad.”

Huh? “Todoroki has another ability?”

“Oh, yeah.” Ochako nodded. “I forgot, you didn’t fight against him… well, on his right side, he produces ice, and on his left, fire. Like Endeavor’s.”
“Shit, dude, that’s cool.” Kirishima stared down at the field, watching the stage be repaired for the next match. “Wonder why he hasn’t been using it?”

“I dunno. But if it comes out, he’ll be way, way too powerful.” Ochako murmured. “All he used it for in practice was melting what he’d created. I haven’t even seen the full extent of it.”

*It’ll be interesting to see how this plays out, then.*

The next few matches were fairly simple. Win, loss, no major area destruction. Since the end of *Bakugou v. Shindou*, it seemed as if the audience was holding their breath and waiting for the next big thing. Even Katsuki’s second round was nowhere near as dramatic, him having won fairly quickly against a student who had seemed quite strong in the round before. As it turned out, having a quirk that’s weak to light did no good against Katsuki’s well-timed explosions. Todoroki skid through his next matches, too, taking down the girl who had produced the grenades before-*Yaoyorozu*, he recalled- with little to no effort. At this rate, Todoroki was running like a freight train, nobody stopping his track to a sweeping victory. Izuku couldn’t help but think that Shindou may have been a good matchup for him after all, but pushed away the slight concern about Katsuki’s future match against Todoroki. The way they were both going, there would be no stopping either one before they hit the top.

That *top* came sooner than expected. Before Izuku knew it, Katsuki was back on the field, Todoroki on the other side and glaring at him with cold, dead eyes.

“Not gonna lie, I’m a little worried about this one.” Kirishima scratched the back of his head. “These two are both so strong… like, I hope they don’t hurt each other too bad.”

“Yeah, there’s a chance it might be pretty brutal.” Ochako agreed. “Well, nothing we can do except wait and see.”

*Wait and see, wait and see. Come on Kacchan, you’ve got this.*

“And in our highly anticipated final round, we have Pro Hero Endeavor’s heir, Todoroki Shouto, against our explosive up-and-coming contestant, Bakugou Katsuki! Both have proved themselves to be highly skilled up to this point, so this match could be anyone’s, really! Though, that Todoroki is a strong one- I wouldn’t be too surprised to see him come out on top, after all. But! It’s not my job to make predictions. Anyways, we’ll be going in three, two, one… START!”

“Don’t go saying stuff about them like that so loudly before the match.” Izuku grumbled. “Come on, Bakugou. Win. You got this.”

*Win for me, if nothing else.*

But this time, before Katsuki could go anywhere, an indomitable wall of ice crashed around him and sealed him in place. There was no escaping the attack- Todoroki had obviously saved this effort for last.

*His trump card, right? But- no. He still hasn’t used his fire.*

“Damn, he’s stuck.” Kirishima sighed. “Well, that was kinda lame. He didn’t even give Bakugou a chance!”

“Why do you keep assuming he’s been beaten?” Izuku frowned. “Listen. Can’t you hear it?”

Off in the distance, a resonant boom made its way to the stands. No, Katsuki hadn’t lost. Not yet.
And he won’t. I know it.

“What- wait, what is that?” Ochako asked, confused. The sound continued for several seconds- five, ten, fifteen, and...

Twenty.

A new explosion rang out from the field as Katsuki escaped, ice raining around him with an unnatural beauty. Passion and excitement lit up every crease in his face, and pride flooded through Izuku’s heart in a heady wave. This was who he came to see. Who made him excited about the future once again. Who filled his darkest fantasies and brightest moments.

Wonderful, Kacchan. You’re doing so good. Next move, now. What’s it going to be?

For some reason, Todoroki’s right side seemed to be a bit frosted over, and though it was hard to tell from just the cameras, Izuku could’ve sworn he was moving just that much slower.

You gotta take advantage of this now, Kacchan. Get the jump on him, and get him out of the rink before he can retaliate again like that.

Yes, Katsuki jumped forward this time, avoiding small offshoots of ice like nobody’s business. He was close, so close already to Todoroki, a couple blasts away from direct contact. All he needed to do now was grab and toss him out of bounds. It should’ve been easy enough. He would’ve secured the win.

But for some reason, Katsuki seemed to think otherwise.

“Wait, what? Did he just pin Todoroki down!?” Ochako exclaimed, standing from her seat to try and get a better look. “Holy shit, what’s he doing?”

“He’s- it looks like he’s, uh, grabbing Todoroki’s right arm?” Kirishima squinted, confused. “But… he just needs to get him out of bounds…”

“Just throw him out of there.” Izuku grit his teeth. “The hell are you doing…?”

It happened in an instant. A single moment, and Katsuki had yanked Todoroki’s shoulder back with horrifying precision.

Holy shit.

Izuku was frozen, eyes wide and stiff as he watched Katsuki say something to Todoroki, leaning in close, so close, that there was no doubt where exactly he’d gotten that move from.

“What is he doing!?” Ochako said again, more urgent this time. “Did he just break Todoroki’s arm?”

“No, it doesn’t look broken. Oh, wait, maybe it’s just...”

Dislocated.

Numb fingers wrapped around the armrest of his seat, and Izuku hoped he looked less pale than he felt. Katsuki was still talking, talking, and yet the only thing racing through his traitorous mind was just how incredibly hot he looked doing it.

He took what I did to him and used it to his advantage. Kacchan, just who are you?

There was no tearing his eyes away from the screen- no, not now, not when Todoroki’s left side
began to flicker to life with forgotten embers and Katsuki’s near-maniacal grin sent unwanted, unnerving shivers deep into his soul.

Stop. Please, stop, I can’t- I don’t-

Katsuki sped back from his opponent with a swift series of blasts, and if it was even possible, looked even more alive than before. There was no hesitation, no holding back- Todoroki stood at the other end of the field with a limp, useless arm, but his other side was burning brighter, higher- Izuku couldn’t understand why. Why Katsuki had decided to goad his opponent into letting loose the full brunt of his power. Victory had been so, so close- so why had he done this?

Izuku shifted uncomfortably in his seat, hands drawn close in to his waist in a pathetic attempt to hide his severely uncalled for hard-on.

Not the time, not the time! God, what’s wrong with you?

There was an explosion on one side. An inferno on the other. And through it all, two competitors blitzing through the flames to victory.

“This is bad!” Ochako covered her mouth. “They- they’re both too strong! When they collide in the middle there, it’s gonna blow! I- I don’t know how exactly Bakugou is producing his explosions, but if it’s at risk of being ignited by heat in any way, they’re in massive danger!”

Dread and excitement swelled up in his heart through sweaty, anxious palms- but as much as he knew the logical danger and the real risk, all his head could focus on was the thought of Katsuki standing over him like that.

I… no, no, I can’t keep thinking like this! Dammit, I need to get out of here!

“I- I’m going to the bathroom.” He rushed, bolting to his feet and running out. No more. There was no way he could watch much longer without such jealousy and pride and fear stretching his weak veins to bursting. Izuku was breathless by the time he managed to duck into the nearest restroom, and yet even through the intense throbbing of his head he could hear the sound of complete and utter destruction from outside.

He almost didn’t want to know who the winner was.

Izuku felt lucky enough that the bathroom was empty, anyway- in a stadium this size, it was a hard thing to come across. But wasting no time, he shut himself away in the stall to take care of the horribly selfish problem at hand. He forced himself to stop thinking, to just let trembling hands do the work as his eyes shut tight, tears nearly bursting from the seams simply due to the complete and utter denial of the reason he was here.

Stop, don’t think, just feel. That’s all I have to do. Just a minute longer, and I can make sure this doesn’t happen again today.

It was a wonder he managed to get his belt off without much difficulty, and even more so that his jumpsuit zipper came down without getting stuck. He choked back a whimper threatening to jump out of his throat, and having no time for more hesitation, shoved a hand down his pants and pulled his dick out while not even bothering to take his gloves off.

Hurry, please, I just need to cum… I can’t feel like this any longer. I won’t. This- this isn’t because of him, after all!

Izuku had to cram his other hand in his mouth to gag the guilty moans attempting to condemn him,
head falling back onto the concrete wall of the stall and not hurting as much as it should’ve. Fuck, it
did feel good, but this was just-

No. Stop. Just feel.

Izuku might’ve been crying, if he was honest. It was hard to tell anything when everything around
him was spinning and the guilt shoving him to his knees was blurring all he’d thought he’d known.

This is fine at night, but why here? Why now? What the fuck is wrong with me!?

And yet, when he finally managed to reach his tipping point, all he could see was Katsuki’s
devilishly handsome face and feel those tough hands on his shoulders shoving him into a place of
complete and utter submission.

“Hmph. And here I thought a hero as strong as you would be better than this.”

Izuku blinked slowly, took a long, shaky breath, and refused to look down at his palm.

“No more of this…” He rasped, the near-plea shriveling out from his weak, raspy throat. “This… this
is… completely unacceptable.”

He rose on uncertain legs, semi-clean hand zipping his jumpsuit back up and then reaching for his
belt from the floor. Izuku didn’t look as he grabbed a handful of scrappy toilet paper from the
dispenser and wiped his other hand dry without acknowledging what was on it. What he’d become.

But somehow, it was only when he finally managed to get himself slightly more presentable and out
of bathroom that the worst realization hit him.

I didn’t watch you.

He stopped in his tracks, paralyzed.

I… I broke my promise.

And if it was possible to feel any more numb after that, he wasn’t sure.

“Sorry” won’t cut it anymore.

He watched the awards ceremony. He learned that Katsuki and Todoroki’s match had been called a
tie after they were both knocked out of the rink from the force of their climactic explosion, and
noticed that they both appeared more than a little worse for wear, bruised and burned and cut. He
saw what could’ve passed as a bit of frustration in Katsuki’s eyes, and realized that he never really
acknowledged the medal he was awarded.

I’ll get better for us. I have to.

Katsuki was beautiful on that stage. Stunning. The strength and power that earned him that place was
utterly undeniable, and from the last remains of his fucked-up thoughts, all Izuku could hope for was
to one day be worthy enough for him too.

Chapter End Notes
huehuehue back to baku boy next week

Thank you so much to my beta @aetherlite for bein a bro, and if u ever wanna yell at me abt this shit, my twitter is @aeronines yeet
Well, if it feels good...

Chapter Summary

just once won’t hurt, right?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Oh, Bakugou!”

Katsuki looked up from his book to see Yaoyorozu stumble into his room in a hurry, lip upturned and the hint of a frown on her face.

“Did you get the notes from last math class? Camie told me she’d be coming by to give them to you, but… oh, she’s forgetful sometimes.”

Katsuki huffed and rolled his eyes. “Yeah, tell me about it. Yesterday she said she’d be bringing me dinner too, but guess who starved? Me.”

Yaoyorozu sighed and rubbed the back of her neck. “Ah, sorry… well, I was helping her out with something, so you’re free to put the blame on me for that. But- ugh, this was all I asked her to do today!”

“S’okay. I’ll catch up fast enough.” He paused, smirking. “I wouldn’t wanna interrupt you two anyways. You gonna spend a few hours making out again tonight too?”

At that, Yaoyorozu turned beet red, a small scowl cresting over her lips. “We- for the last time, we’re not together! She’s a good friend. Who… needs more than a little help on her homework sometimes. And really, really likes asking for favors.” She paused and crossed her arms. “How much longer are you going to be confined to your bed, though? It’s already been a day and a half. I know you got hit fairly bad- well, you and Todoroki both- during the Sports Festival, but you had treatment administered fairly heavily afterwards, right?”

Katsuki groaned, staring up at his ceiling. “All I did was break a few ribs and get a few burns, but the nurse said I had to let this injury do part of the healing on its own cause it was ‘my own fault’ or some shit. I’m gettin’ the rest of the treatment tonight. Better be out by tomorrow.”

“Huh.” Yaoyorozu frowned. “Todoroki was in class this morning, you know. Did he get accelerated treatment?”

Katsuki’s head fell back against his headboard with an annoyed thump. “Yeah, cause apparently I’m the only reason we got injured. S’not my fault he wasn’t giving it his best effort for most of the round.”

“Well, it is your fault that his right arm was dislocated.” Yaoyorozu reminded him. “And that he started using his fire. And that most of the lower ground of the stadium was destroyed. So, I’d say Recovery Girl has a valid point.”
He dropped his jaw in utter betrayal. “Damn you, you shit. I did my goddamn best. I was barely out of the ring, and fuckin’ Todoroki was twenty feet past it. No reason that fight should’ve ended in a tie and you know it.”

“Well, go and contest the results with Aizawa if you really want to. Not that I can see that going anywhere good for you.” Yaoyorozu shook her head. “By the way, have you talked to Todoroki since that fight? I think he’s been looking for you. I mean, you getting him to use his fire really was a big deal, even if it resulted in that outcome.”

“Haven’t talked to the idiot.” He muttered. “If he really wants to talk, he needs to get his ass over here. Not like I can really stop him from coming in when I can’t leave my goddamn bed.”

That fight had been interesting, if nothing else. He’d watched Todoroki blast through each previous round of the competition with ease using only his ice, but against Katsuki, he’d never have won with that alone. Katsuki had known there was another side he had shoved away and if he’d dared to try and pull that same “I only use my ice” stunt on him, Todoroki would have found himself in the most humiliating loss he’d ever had. It had taken a bit of work to get him using it, but Katsuki wasn’t about to let himself slide into an easy victory. In order to really prove himself, a legitimate, challenging win was the only one he’d accept. And if that took a little coercion, a little- oh, maybe a bit of a dislocated shoulder or so- on his part, who cared? It did the job. Maybe it wasn’t a win in its entirety either, but he’d felt something change in Todoroki during that fight.

Yeah, okay, so not a total loss.

“Well, I didn’t come in here to talk about Todoroki to begin with. Just to see if you had the stuff you needed.” Yaoyorozu sighed. “I’ll let him know you won’t kick him out, at least.” She paused, and gave him one last look over. “You sure you’re doing okay? I mean, even if you just want some company, I don’t mind bringing my homework in here to work on.”

Katsuki rolled his eyes. “I’m fine. S’not like being alone for a day is gonna kill me. It’s you idiots that are convinced I need company.”

“Fine, fine, be like that.” Yaoyorozu huffed. “I’ll go tell Todoroki you’re available, and if you’re lucky, Camie might stop by later.”

She turned and left just as quickly as she’d arrived, and Katsuki couldn’t help but feel that he’d managed to piss her off a bit. And if he was being honest, he still wasn’t really sure what his friends’ relationship was. For whatever reason, Yaoyorozu stuck around him a fair amount and made time to at least talk to him on the regular, but it could also just be because of the fact that he and Camie were fairly close. She and Camie had been spending more and more time with each other lately, and he was almost willing to bet money that they were doing a little more than just “studying” during those nights they both disappeared into one of their rooms.

He didn’t mind Yaoyorozu’s presence too much, though. She put her all into what she did and was one of the only people in the class who could really compete with him in terms of grades. Maybe her confidence in the field could use some work, but she was getting there. Slowly.

No matter their relationship, though, Katsuki could admit he was a little bored left all alone, even if it really hadn’t been much more than a day. Homework was only so entertaining and he was dying to get back out to training.

He opened up his laptop again, lazily scrolling through hero headlines in the hopes that something would pique his interest. Already he’d gone through recaps of missions from yesterday, and just hitting the refresh button on repeat was getting old. He’d been reminded of Deku’s incredible stunts
from the past week, a continuation of his ever-lengthening victory streak, and that had been enough to make him content for a little while.

Now, though, it was back to boredom.

Katsuki never really found himself perusing pop-culture hero content, nor did he drift into territory that wasn’t strictly the news or journalism articles, but desperate times called for desperate measures. On a complete whim, Katsuki clicked on one of the gaudy ads bordering his current reading material and was soon whisked to a flashy, headline-filled page full of wild statements and news that seemed too obnoxious to be real. Nonetheless, it only took Katsuki a few seconds to hone in on a candid picture of Izuku walking down a busy street and click on it, bringing him to yet another page.

This time, though, it was focused on something far more akin to his interests.

“Pro Hero Valiant spotted looking ABSOLUTELY EXHAUSTED on duty! Is his agency not allowing him enough time off? Or, could he be off spending his free time with somebody else?”

Yeah, okay, he was bored as fuck.

That was what he told himself as he casually scrolled down the article, replete with several more shots of Deku and of course, the latest gossip about his current status as an eligible bachelor and all the potential female partners lined up for him. Katsuki could’ve sworn his eyes were burning, but he couldn’t look away, either.

Though, there was one particular picture that caught his eye, and Katsuki didn’t realize exactly what it was he was fixating on until a few moments later when he blinked and found a nice shot of Deku’s ass staring him full in the face. There was no one else in the room, so it wasn’t as if he felt too bad about it, but some strange, uncomfortably warm feeling in his stomach took hold of him the longer he looked. Yeah, maybe he was into guys. And yeah, maybe Deku was hot as fuck. That only meant he was feeling just the same as any other guy his age would. Deku was attractive, both in physical form and personality, so really, it wouldn’t make sense for Katsuki not to be mildly attracted to him.

Quietly, he saved the picture to his computer and decided that gossip sites weren’t nearly as bad as they seemed.

He managed to keep himself busy for another hour or so doing that- clicking through articles, ignoring most of the words, and digging up the few decent shots of Deku they had up on them. There was one in particular that Katsuki just about started drooling over, a photo that had captured Deku right after a rough fight- a little bruised and bloody, but most importantly, showed a real nice image of a few choice tears in the fabric around those tight inner thighs and up near his chest, and the faintly visible, maybe-photoshopped outline of his dick was a very nice sight to see.

Katsuki wound up making a small folder, tucked under a few others just for the stuff he’d discovered. He had no interest in going back to the articles, really, but he wasn’t past taking a few souvenirs for the road. The only thing he was really wondering about a bit was photoshoots- because no matter how much he looked, Deku had only done one right around his debut, and even that material was fairly tame. Unlike some heroes, Deku had done too good of a job at keeping his body from being the forefront of his platform. And as much as Katsuki respected that, he couldn’t get rid of the bit of disappointment he felt. Like, come on. Even just an athletic-wear ad or fuck, some shampoo commercials would’ve done. He’d never dare push his luck for any chance at Deku modeling underwear, but boy would he die on the spot if it happened.

The best part, though, was that as long as this interest stayed safe in the confines of his room he’d
still be able to stay true to his goal of being a hero—single and unbound by those too-close connections. There was no way this interest would ever go anywhere further, so Katsuki would take what he could get and enjoy it to as full of an extent as he could. There was no harm in just appreciating someone else’s beauty, and Katsuki wasn’t blind.

Sadly, however, all good things must come to an end—and this time, that end came in the form of one Todoroki Shouto coming through his unlocked bedroom door. Earlier, he might’ve been slightly more receptive. Now, though—

_I have a hard-on and I sure as fuck don’t wanna look at him for much longer._

“The hell you want?” He snapped, scowling. “You better be quick.”

And even more to his annoyance, Todoroki looked completely healed. A little sleepy, maybe, but that was no surprise.

“Those burns suit you.” Todoroki commented, shutting the door behind him. “Yaoyorozu told me I could come in. Thought you’d at least have been drugged up enough to be less like… this.”

Katsuki grit his teeth, regretting anything he’d ever said. “Get the hell outta here if you’re gonna act like this. I don’t owe you a conversation.”

“Never said I wanted one, either.” Todoroki deadpanned. “I didn’t come up here to just talk, okay? I just wanted to inform you a bit about what all’s going on. Because sadly, it’s you of all people who’s earned somewhat of an explanation.”

“The fuck are you talking about?” Katsuki muttered. “If this is just shit because of the Sports Festival, then—”

“I wanted to thank you, Bakugou.”

_Huh?_

“The hell is this.” Katsuki scowled. “What are you trying to pull?”

“You always jump straight to suspicion.” Todoroki sighed. “More people might like talking to you if you gave them a chance first.”

Katsuki grit his teeth, but didn’t say anything. “You’re lucky I ain’t allowed to leave this bed. Are you just gonna stand there and yap, or will you get on with it?”

Neither of them looked particularly happy with the other being there, but Todoroki did pull Katsuki’s desk chair up to his bed and sat down.

“You… you should’ve been declared the winner back there.” Todoroki admitted. “All things considered, anyway. But, uh…”

.Wrap’ he gettin’ nervous now?

“After you dislocated my shoulder, I still could’ve used my ice. I can send it out with my foot, too. So why did I still wind up using my fire…?”

“Why are you asking me?” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “I mean, it’s your power. I wasn’t the one who ignited half the stadium.”

Todoroki raised an eyebrow. “Debatable. Anyways… yeah. I mean, I could say it was because of
the pain, or because I didn’t wanna lose, but… I don’t think that would be why either.” He paused, stared down at his hands, and sighed. “I think that when you came after me… no, not just that, but throughout the whole match, there was just this sort of aura about you. You looked comfortable in your own skin, I guess. You weren’t questioning your abilities, but just put them to use in the best way you knew how. And just, seeing you break free of that ice wall I threw up then-"

“Your ice was never gonna stop me.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “It was-”

“That’s the point.” Todoroki interrupted. “You weren’t about to be held back by anything less than my all. This whole time you’ve been at school, you’ve always been so focused on being the best. It’s… it’s commendable, Bakugou. You’ve always been a force to be reckoned with, and after seeing your match against Shindou, the guy who took out just about everyone else so easily… I knew that I’d never manage to win against you with half my strength.”

You… you thought that way about me?

The small room fell quiet, and Katsuki wasn’t sure he knew what to say.

Todoroki paused. “When you leaned down next to me and asked me that question, I just… I don’t know. Something snapped, I think.”

What I asked back there… oh, shit. Yeah. The “So are you gonna use your fire or not?”

“I wasn’t sure you’d actually use your fire.” He mumbled after a long, awkward moment of silence. “I didn’t realize how strong it was, either. I just didn’t want a half-assed victory.”

“Does this tie really make you happier, then?” Todoroki asked, though it was far more a statement than a question.

“Like I said, it wasn’t a half-assed victory.” Katsuki narrowed his eyes. “What would’ve been the point if you didn’t go all out? You heard my speech at the start of the festival. You knew my goal. And at this point, I’d sure as hell hope you know that I’m not gonna accept that bullshit of yours.”

“Is that what I look like to everyone else…?” Todoroki swallowed. “That I’m not trying?”

“Who the fuck knows what they think?” Katsuki scowled. “I’m telling you how I feel. And, I’m telling you that that better not be the only time that I see that power from you. Don’t let what you were born with go to waste.”

“It’s not like it was my choice to be born like this.” A hint of aggression rose in Todoroki’s voice as he clenched his fists. “I didn’t want this power, Bakugou. It’s not like I wanted to be like him.”

“Like who?” Bakugou shot back. “What, Endeavor?”

“Who else.” Todoroki wrinkled his nose. “I have the misfortune of having both of my parent’s quirks. Never wanted my old man’s.”

“But you have it, don’t you?” Katsuki pressed. “More power to you. Literally. You want to become a hero, right?”

“I mean, yes, but this power led to-“

“I don’t care what it led to.” Katsuki snapped. “It’s your power. No one else’s. Not Endeavor’s, not your mom’s, not anyone else. It’s yours, and I better see you make the most of what you have if you really want to be a hero.”
Todoroki’s mouth hung open.

He looks so lame.

“You… Bakugou, are you serious?” Todoroki had never sounded so small, before. “Even though the only reason I have this power is because my parents gave it to me… even my poor mother, who tried to save herself from my father’s power trapped in me… you really think it’s mine?”

Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Don’t be stupid. It’s genetics, dumbass. ‘Course it’s your power.”

When Todoroki went speechless, Katsuki paused, and continued.

“There… well, I met this hero once.” He hesitated. “Felt like shit when I met him. Thought I’d made a fool of myself in front of him. Thought I didn’t have what it took to be a hero anymore. But this guy, this hero… he said that my failings didn’t make me less of who I am. That being saved didn’t make me weak. Later, he told me that he knew I’d give it my all even if I was losing. And I think that… that by doing that, you’ll never lose where it counts. Cause even if like, everything around you has got you down… at least you’re not losing ‘cause you were weak.”

Todoroki bit his lip, and nodded. “Yeah… yeah, okay, you’re right. But, um…” He grimaced, and brought his left hand up to the scar over his eye. “The reason I have this scar is because of that power. Even if… even if it’s mine, not everyone really… gets that. My mother certainly didn’t.”

“Your mother burned you?” Katsuki asked, and yeah, okay, maybe he could’ve been a little more sensitive, because Todoroki flinched a little harder that he thought he would. “Taking that as a yes. Sorry for asking.”

“I’m not asking for your pity, Bakugou.” Todoroki frowned. “Just… an understanding, I think. It’s not like I shut away my fire for no reason. My father… he didn’t treat my family well. He’s strong, but… he only married my mother for her ice quirk, and my father wanted a perfect combination of his and that. When he got me from her, my mother… she just saw me as an extension of him after some time. Him, who despite being a powerful hero, hurt me and the rest of my family. Does it really surprise you, hearing that, that I wouldn’t want to be associated with it?”

“Kinda.” Katsuki muttered. “Okay, okay, I get your family stuff, but at the end of the day it’s your quirk. I’m kinda sick of trying to convince you otherwise. You ain’t your old man, and you ain’t your mom, and sadly, you’re in the same class as me. All I want is to be able to treat you like a legit rival, because I think you have the ability to be one. You can’t half-ass your future in this field unless you wanna wind up dead. You can’t be too focused on anything outside of heroing. This is the shit that comes first, and personal stuff later.” He looked up at Todoroki again. “Make sense? I wanna see you give it your all.”

Todoroki shifted in his seat, looking mildly red in the face. “I… yeah, makes sense. This is my power… I managed to use it back there, and I can do it again.”

“Good.” Katsuki sighed, relieved. “At least I wasn’t confined to this goddamn bed for no reason. You better give it your all out there so I don’t look like an idiot for tying with you.”

Finally, Todoroki stood and nodded. “I will. Promise.”

And just as he turned to leave, unwelcome person number three came banging down his door.

“Ey, Baku! Oh, hi Todoroki! You making friends with blondie over here?”

God dammit, Camie.
“Whaddya’ want?” He whined, mildly jealous of Todoroki showing himself out the door when he wanted to do the same. “I’m tired. Make it quick.”

Though it had taken a bit of time to mend his relationship with Camie after the training incident a while ago, a few nights of nice dinners, shopping sprees, and reluctant (yet genuine) apologies had managed to repair most of it, and time had taken care of the rest. He hadn’t realized how much it would hurt to see a friend frustrated and almost scared for him, and just seeing Camie’s face had been enough to guilt him into thinking more about his actions for the future. Now, he felt comfortable at that level of back-and-forth teasing again, and was sure gonna try his damned best to keep it that way in the future.

If nothing else, he wasn’t sure his wallet could handle an extended apology again.

“Psh, someone’s a little pissy today.” Camie strolled in, and Katsuki couldn’t help the small bit of fear inside him when he noticed a small, brightly-colored bag in her hand. “And to think I went out of my way to find you a little get-well gift. It’s a ‘congrats on almost winning the sports fest’ gift, too! So hey, you should never complain about a little two-for-one.”

He groaned, leaned back in his bed, and winced at the bit of pain that came with it. “What, is this more eyeliner? You know I only use that shit like once a month.”

Camie giggled. “But you look so sexy when you do wear it, babe! Really, I’ll buy you more if you keep using it. I don’t want you letting those pretty eyes go to waste. But, no, that’s not it this time.”

Oh boy.

“So, what is it?”

Yeah, that smile of hers was just a little too knowing.

She walked over to his bedside, then changed her mind and set the bag down on the opposite side of the room. “Well, when you get all healed up, you can find out! I know you love surprises, Baku.”

“Y’know, I really don’t-”

“You’ll like this one. Trust me.” Camie winked. “And if it doesn’t make you feel all warm and full inside, you get your money back! Or, maybe not in this case cause it’s free, but… you get the idea, yeah? Ah, but I know you’ll enjoy it!”

Admittedly, he was a little curious. “Yeah, yeah, okay. Better not be something weird, though.”

“It’s not weird at all! Tons of people our age have stuff like this!” She exclaimed, a little too happy, and he only felt more nervous. “Ooh, but I can’t give too much away! I’m not about to ruin the surprise.”

All he could do when she left was stare at that gaudy bag and wonder. Wonder, and be afraid.

Camie, you’re great, but you sure do weird-ass shit sometimes.

The rest of his evening was spent scrolling through the internet again, punctuated only by a half-decent dinner and lecturing by Recovery Girl until he was given his next round of healing. With that, he was able to at least move around again, but was still forbidden from physical training for another two days. And as much as he wanted to find out what Camie had given him, the healing left him to pass out just a few minutes later. So much so, that he had to bust his ass out the door in the morning in order to get to class in time after waking up late. And all throughout the day, doing classwork and watching everyone else practice (they let him do very basic exercise, if nothing else), he couldn’t help but think about just what it was that was sitting in that obnoxious bag in the corner of his room.
Todoroki talked to him briefly about some tactics he was going to work on with his fire, and Yaoyorozu came up to discuss the previous day’s notes for a while, but Camie only looked at him from a distance and never got close enough for him to talk at any reasonable time.

The end of the school day couldn’t come fast enough. Katsuki rushed up to his dorm, closed and locked his door, then stared at his gift in the corner, a little nervous now that he actually had the chance to open it. He swallowed and grabbed the bag before he could think much more on the matter, and went over to his desk to open it up. Not too heavy, but it did have a nice weight to it. Inside sat a simple cardboard box, about ten inches in length, and Katsuki was a little bit confused (and concerned) at this point. Too big to be makeup, and too small to be clothes. Camie usually didn’t stray too far from those categories on the occasions that stuff showed up at his door, and he was silently hoping this somehow was one of those things. Maybe it was just like, a long, strangely heavy eyeshadow palette. Or a set of weird brushes. Okay, maybe it was just more makeup to add to his ‘barely used’ collection. For some reason, Camie kept buying it for him.

So in short, he was acting like a wimp for no reason, and Camie was just being a tease. He ripped the poorly taped box open, stuck his hand inside, and pulled out a small, strange, unlabeled bottle of clear liquid. Strange. But that didn’t seem like it was the only thing inside, either. A little less nervous and a little more confused, he stuck his hand back in the box to find something covered in an absurd amount of bubble wrap. Huh. Weird.

Yet, as he unwrapped it, the horrid, sinking realization of just what it was nearly made him drop it. Scratch that. He did drop it.

_You’ve gotta be shitting me._

The thing staring back at him from the floor was green, black, white, and very clearly phallic shaped. Even worse was when he recognized the damn pattern of those black stripes, the familiar off-white at the base, and the distinct shade of green that was hard to find anywhere else.

He wasn’t quite sure how long he spent staring in shock at it. What he did know was that he was glad he locked the door, and that at some point, he would have to pick it up.

_“Tons of people our age have stuff like this!”_

Katsuki groaned, buried his head in his hands, and tried as hard as he fucking could to pretend there wasn’t a Deku-themed dildo lying on his floor.

_Fuck you, Camie, Fuck you._

He found a small note in the box, Camie’s large handwriting scrawled across it. _“Use lots of lube!”_ It read. _“I have more if you want!”_ It continued. That explained the bottle, anyways. Either way, he’d never felt more embarrassed in his life, and he did not want to know just how red his face was.

It was probably ten minutes before he managed to pick it up off the floor. Maybe more. But out of the bubble wrap, the silicone of the toy didn’t feel awful in his hand, and if he was being realistic, the thing didn’t look like something he wouldn’t be able to take with a little bit of practice. Sure, he’d fingered himself a bit before, but nothing ever like-

_No. Stop there. I am NOT using this._

He shoved the dildo back in the box as fast as possible, shoved the lube into his nightstand(it was
more general purpose, okay) and tried to forget exactly what it was that Camie had gotten him. It wasn’t like he liked Deku like that. Deku was his hero. That was- well, okay, that wasn’t it. Deku was unfairly attractive too, but even so- that was no excuse to ever use something like this.

Katsuki tried to conveniently forget the new folder hidden away on his laptop and simply reminded himself that he needed to focus on his homework right now, and not about how that dildo would feel up his ass.

It took longer than usual to get his work done that night, and before bed, Katsuki brought out a towel and the new bottle of lube and tried to convince himself that he was practicing fingering because he wanted to mix it up a bit. Tried to pretend that it wouldn’t be nice to just feel a little bit fuller.

Camie didn’t say a word about it to him the next day. Or the next. And each passing day found Katsuki practicing a little more at night, just a little further, maybe even adding in a second finger or teasing the edge with a third if he was feeling up to it. And each day, his curiosity grew worse and worse.

Over a week later, he managed to take it out of the box again. His hands still trembled around it, but as he turned it over in his hand, figured that as a tool, it wouldn’t feel… bad. Despite the irritating color scheme, using the toy for its actual purpose would probably feel pretty good. And it wasn’t too long, maybe six inches max, and the width was fairly average too. The base was a nice, stable size, enough to where he figured it wouldn’t be sliding too far in at all(that would be an awkward trip to Recovery Girl), and, well…

Okay, so maybe he wanted to try it. Not cause it had Deku’s colors. Just because it would feel good. It’s not like he would be looking at it while it was up his ass, anyway.

Katsuki got the towel out and everything before deciding that tonight was not the night. Not yet. He wasn’t ready.

Admittedly, his fingers alone were a little boring that night.

That next day at school consisted of him fidgeting while trying to not pop a boner in class thinking about the dildo and an overwhelming anticipation for finally trying out the toy that night. It had been at least nine or ten days at this point, and his curiosity was winning out over his sanity. And when he finally got back to his dorm after a nice day of exercise and some post-workout stretching (he may have spent a little longer doing it than usual), he laid the towel out across his bed and grabbed the dildo before he could change his mind. There was still a decent amount of lube left in the bottle, but after tonight, he figured he may need more.

Well. If he even liked this, after all. Not that he’d usually imagined himself bottoming for Deku in the fantasies he’d never admit to having.

A bit of guilt washed over him as he gave the dildo another look, but just a reminder that this wasn’t because of Deku, that it was just cause he was interested in what a dick would feel like up his ass that managed to ground him again.

Use a lot of lube, huh? He swallowed, and popped the cap open. Well, here goes nothing.

First things first. Katsuki lubed up his fingers and went to fingering himself a bit, just as he’d been practicing earlier. It was hard not to get nervous and tense up upon remembering just what it was he was aiming to do, but once he got started there was no doubt it would get easier.

Once he had one finger comfortably in, Katsuki managed to add a second, and far more effortlessly
than it had been when he started practicing. He wasn’t quite sure what that said about him, that he had been spending enough time masturbating to really improve already. That being said, Katsuki had always prided himself on being a fast learner.

But, the object of his interest was still sitting there, right in front of him. And he wasn’t backing down again. Slowly, Katsuki pulled out, and reached back over for more lube. Yeah, maybe he wouldn’t be able to get the whole thing in on his first go round, but he’d work up to it.

*God, work up to it? I can’t believe I’m even doing this once…!* 

Right. Next step. Lube up the dildo.

Katsuki let his hands heat up a little bit as he smeared the lube across the toy, and got some more on himself, too. It was too weird to think about this being a Deku-colored dildo that was going in his ass, so as soon as he could manage it, Katsuki shut his eyes and maneuvered the tip of it into him, gasping as slicked up silicone touched bare skin.

*Breathe. Breathe. Relax, it’ll feel good. Just get it in.*

It was simple enough to push the tip in past the entrance, but Katsuki had to pause to relax a little bit, letting the muscle contract and relax around the toy. Slowly, slowly, it went in a little further at a time and *fuck*, he’d never felt so full in his life. Already on his back a bit, Katsuki rolled even further into the towel and sheets below him just to find a better angle to fuck himself with. Yeah, he wasn’t completely sure what his limit was, but already this was so much more satisfying than a typical masturbation session. It was hard not to gasp, to groan as he pushed in further, to not reveal his actions to the people- the classmates- around him.

*If they knew, if they knew I was fucking myself like this, then…!* 

And somehow, his fucked-up head somehow got a bit *more* turned on by that idea. Of someone coming in, seeing him like this, ass up and face red as he fucked himself on the most damning proof of his obsession.

*What if Deku saw me like this?*

Katsuki nearly had to shove his whole hand in his mouth to hold back the incriminating noise threatening to escape his throat at that image. He shoved the dildo in just a little more, maybe almost *too* far, but he’d already done so much that a little more couldn’t hurt. And god, it was good, too good.

*Why didn’t I do this earlier?*

He grabbed his dick with a free hand, and just about bit a hole through his lip in an effort to stay quiet, one which was quickly becoming futile at this rate. A little more, just a little more and he knew he’d come all over the damn towel. Katsuki wanted more, needed more, just more, more, *more*…!

Katsuki shuddered, gasped, and nearly screamed as white-hot pleasure shot straight through his core. “*F-fuck…!*”

He wasn’t sure he’d ever come so hard in his life. He didn’t think he’d ever wind up in this position, a shaky, sweaty mess just about everywhere, his ass clenching around the dildo as he rode through the aftershocks of his orgasm.

*Breathe. Breathe.*
Katsuki tried to steady himself, managing to pull the dildo out after a minute, and realized that he’d managed to somehow get most of the way down it. God, it was filthy, covered in warm lube and cum, but damn. There was something stupidly satisfying about seeing Deku’s colors covered in him, and yeah, maybe he didn’t like him or anything, but fuck. If just this much felt so good, then maybe the real deal would-

Stop, stop. Don’t be ridiculous. This is just a toy. Enjoy what you can.

He swallowed, and nodded.

Well. Thanks, Camie.

Through his post-orgasm haze, he wondered where exactly she’d gotten it from.

A question for another day. I gotta get this shit cleaned up first.

Yeah, he was relieved he’d put out a towel. Katsuki’s legs shook as he slid off his bed, and already he felt a tiny bit sore. Okay, maybe he’d gone a little further than he should’ve for a first try, but it sure did feel good in the moment. Though, even now, there was something so stupidly erotic about the lube running down his quaking thighs, about the fact that he could hardly stand or walk straight from a combination of both the lingering emptiness and just the thought that he had shoved Deku’s colors up his ass.

Katsuki cleaned himself and his room up, washed the toy, and carefully put it back in its box along with the the near-empty bottle of lube. Maybe he would take up Camie’s offer at some point, but that would also mean admitting he’d actually been using it. Not that Camie would care, really. She was about as open as they came. Still, it was a little awkward to just go up to a friend and casually ask for more lube so he could fuck himself with the dildo again.

But was going into a store and buying it really any better? Katsuki wasn’t sure.

The rest of his night was spent finishing homework and playing the part of the good student he’d masked himself as for so long. When he came into class the next day, though, he could’ve sworn he felt Camie’s eyes on him far more than usual. He sat down, fidgeting a bit in his seat (admittedly, he’d become fairly sore overnight), and was suddenly met with Camie’s mouth right next to his ear.

“You used the dildo, didn’t you.”

Katsuki froze, trying to keep away the massive blush threatening to swallow up his face.

“How-” He stuttered, turning back towards her. “How the fuck did you know?”

Camie smiled and shrugged. “Orgasms, man.”

Katsuki groaned, buried his head in his hands, and couldn’t look his friend in the eye for the rest of the day.

Chapter End Notes

tag urself im kacchan staring at deku’s ass

Thank u as always to my amazing beta @aetherlite, and my friend baku_bean for that
last bit of the chapter and for all ur MUCH APPRECIATED help w/ research and things. Ur the best ever

My twitter is @aeronines, and next chapter will b up next week
July fifteenth.

Izuku wasn’t sure if this would be his best or worst birthday yet.

He’d managed to chug his two cups of coffee (of his favorite high-caffeine roast), go out and buy a small pastry as a treat to himself, and board the train in time to get to the one thing he’d been looking forward to for weeks.

U.A. midterm exams. God, I still can’t believe they asked me to help out again.

But despite still being mildly confused about the fact that he’d been requested to assist in the exam, he was excited. This year, he’d be spending his birthday around his friends, his former teachers, and the students he loved watching grow.

Today was the one day this week he’d managed to feel awake.

It wasn’t as if he was slacking off and just not going to bed on time. No- this bit of weariness was only borne from extra hours and long night shifts, something he’d eagerly volunteered to pick up more of. If nothing else, even if he was tired, Izuku was getting everything he needed done and then some. He’d been told his recent rescue record was making headlines with how often he was on the scene, but Izuku hadn’t really found a chance to check it out himself.

To his relief, though, he’d managed to avoid any interviews that would expose the steadily worsening bags under his eyes. Even he was having a hard time ignoring them anymore. What few publicity events he had taken part in involved copious amounts of makeup and clothing that really wasn’t his style- honestly, if his publicist hadn’t demanded he attend a photoshoot, Izuku would have been more than happy to carry on without ever doing one. But at the end of the day, he was getting work done. Rising to the top. If he wasn’t working as much as he could, putting his entire self into becoming the best hero he could, then what was the point of all it?

However, the best part was how little time it left him to think about Katsuki. A few hours of sleep a night was enough to give him the rest he needed, yet little enough to where whatever dreams occurred were chaotic and distorted to begin with. It was such a relief to be able to rest without the anxiety-inducing fear that he’d wind up seeing blonde hair and a face flushed red as the crimson eyes staring back at him. The slight shaking of his hands was easy to hide or explain away, too. One less thing to worry about, even if the implications of it to begin with probably weren’t the best. The only thing that was particularly hard to deal with these days was the ever-increasing clutter in his apartment, so much to the point where Izuku was partly wondering if starting to sleep in his office would be a better move.
By the time he got to U.A. grounds, the caffeine started to kick in. Now, awake and at his favorite place on earth, Izuku felt a little bit better about what today promised. It was fairly quiet on the way to the grounds where Aizawa had instructed him and the rest of the assisting heroes to meet, but the sound of footsteps behind him caught his attention quickly enough.

“Hey, Midoriya.”

_Huh? Oh, that’s–!_

“Jirou.” He greeted, managing a slight smile. “S’been a while. How’ve you been?”

He slowed down for a moment to match her stride, and soon fell into a steady pace.

“Good, doing good. Hero work’s been keeping me busy.” She started. “I’m sure you understand, Mr. Bigshot.”

“Oh, come on.” Izuku rolled his eyes. “Just cause I’ve been taking a lot of jobs doesn’t mean I’m aiming for fame, you know. That’s never been me.”

“Yeah, yeah. You’d never stop reminding all of us about what it really means to be a hero back in class. I know how you roll.”

They laughed, and yet Izuku couldn’t help but feel a twinge of guilt in doing so.

_I’m doing my best to uphold my own vision of a hero, right?_

Izuku decided not to think too hard on the matter for now and unceremoniously shoved his doubts to the back of his mind.

“But seriously, you been doing anything other than hero work?” Jirou glanced up at him, a hint of concern in her voice. “I feel like I’m always seeing you on the news lately.”

Izuku rubbed the back of his head a bit more awkwardly than he should’ve. “Ah, um… not really. I think today’s my first day off in a while? There’s a couple of small media things I’ve been doing in the background that’ll probably go up soon, but... I dunno. There’s been a lot of shifts available, so I’ve been taking up a decent amount… aha.”

“Shit, man.” Jirou looked him over. “I don’t know how you do it. Without my music gigs on the side I think I’d go nuts. Hero work’s great, but it can be a lot sometimes.”

_It’s all I really know, though._

“It’s awesome that you’re still able to work with your music on the side.” He said, dodging the slight accusation. “What kind of stuff are you playing nowadays? Still rock?”

Jirou shrugged, hands in her pockets. “Mostly, but there’s some smaller venues around where I’ve gotten more into working with my keyboard. Restaurants seem to like it a lot. There’s this one coffeeshop I’ve been going to lately that’s had me working mostly with chill music, and it’s honestly really fun. The place is nice and they give me drinks on the house, too.”

“Ah, that does sound nice!” Izuku grinned. “I’d love to visit sometime if you’re ever free.”

“More like if you’re ever free.” Jirou snorted. “Lemme guess, you haven’t hung out with anyone since the Sports Festival?”

“I’m telling you, I’ve been busy…!”
“Call it what you want, but I know it’s just you being a workaholic.” Jirou reminded him. “Well, hit me up if you do ever get a chance to hang out. I feel like I’ve barely seen you since graduation.”

That’s cause you haven’t. “I’ll definitely be keeping that in mind. Promise.”

Jirou’s face was all-too knowing when he looked back, and he could’ve sworn a small bit of worry had crested over it. “I’ll be looking forward to it. Oh-” She paused, then turned back over front. “Look, the others are just up ahead.”

Sure enough, just up the sidewalk was a group of familiar faces- Inasa, towering over the rest, and accompanied by a couple of his other classmates. Tsuyu, Mirio, and Amajiki he recognized straightaway, a bit of a warmth managing to settle in his chest at the sight of the classmates and friends he hadn’t seen in so long aside from brief patches on duty.

Aizawa really went all out for getting this set up, huh?

However, the only thing missing from the group were his best friends. And Izuku wasn’t sure why.

They’re probably just late. It happens.

Still, though, something felt a little different about this absence.

I… I wonder if they remembered that it’s my birthday.

Izuku swallowed, shook away the feeling, and continued on.

“Midoriya!” Inasa greeted, his familiar enthusiasm full to bursting. “I wasn’t completely sure you’d be here after last time, but it’s nice to see you around again! Have you been doing good?”

“Ah, you know, I’m doing great.”

This right here, however, was the part of these gatherings Izuku always hated. At least lying through his teeth had become second nature by this point. He stood around and managed to socialize a bit, mildly overwhelmed by the amount of people trying to talk to him after so much isolation. Everyone knew he’d been rising in the ranks and doing great in his work, but all the conversation between the rest of his friends left him feeling like he was watching from the outside in.

“…you and Amajiki finally moved in together, Mirio? That’s awesome!”

…relationships, huh?

“I found this organization for musicians and stuff recently, and they’ve been hooking me up with a lot of gigs. It’s been really cool to find all these venues I didn’t know about…”

Stuff outside of work…

“The staff over at Shiketsu invited me over to help teach sometimes! It’s so fun to be able to help out all the up-and-coming heroes even more, like… I wanna see all of them grow up to be the best!”

Have… have they all just been moving on without me…?

Not for the first time that day, he missed his best friends even more.

I went to school to be a hero, I’ve been working my ass off to try and be the best, but is that… why do I feel like this? They’re all heroes too, and yet-
No. No thinking like that. At this point, he knew that even just admitting to himself that he might be a little lonely was a dangerous thought.

I’m fine. I’m perfectly fine. I’ve got a great job, I’m doing what I want, and I have my own place. So what do I have to complain about, really?

Suddenly, a flash of brown and red sped past him, and Izuku was nearly knocked over by the force of the people who had run in - the people who he also quickly identified as his best friends.

“Sorry, so sorry we’re late!” Ochako panted, looking as if she’d just run all the way to the school. “We left my place a little late on accident and missed the train, and the next one wasn’t coming in time so, uh, we just jogged instead!”

“Hey, they haven’t started yet, we’re good.” Kirishima assured Ochako, patting her back in a sort of comforting gesture.

Ochako took a deep breath, nodded, and leaned against Kirishima’s shoulder. “Okay, okay, yeah. We’re all good.”

Is it just me, or do they seem a little closer than usual?

“I was wondering where you guys were.” Izuku started. “You’re usually pretty on time, so…”

Ochako looked up to Kirishima, who held her gaze a bit longer than usual. “Oh, ah… yeah, sorry! We were a little busy, haha…”

A little taken aback, Izuku awkwardly tried to figure out how to respond. “You guys came together? I, um, didn’t know you were hanging out…”

Kirishima turned a little red at that. “We- well, we were at a party last night and wound up going home a bit early to hang out! It was all mostly last-minute, and I… I’m sorry, dude.”

“You don’t have anything to apologize for!” He said, getting the words out before they could say anything else. “I mean, you’re never obligated to let me know what you’re doing with your lives, you guys do what you wanna do, and, um…” Izuku paused, and forced his feelings back down his throat. “I was just… surprised. That’s all. I… I hope you had fun!”

They’re my best friends. They’re also their own people. And they… they can do what they want.

At that, Ochako smiled a little. “Yeah, we did. Hey, maybe if you’re not too busy, we could hang out after the exams? Both me and Ei- Kirishima- took today off.”

While there was no doubt that the offer had be made out of pity, Izuku was hardly in a position to refuse. “Yeah, I… I should be able to. I took today off too, cause-”

“Hey hey, we’re getting started!” Inasa interrupted, and Izuku bit down on his lip a little too hard as the people around him began to mill about as Aizawa approached the group. Ochako and Kirishima’s attention immediately turned away from him, just as it should, but still...

...I took today off cause it’s my birthday.

“Alright.” Aizawa began, scanning the group. “Good. You’re all here. That’s step one. Now, please tell me you all remember who it was you were assigned to fight. I’d rather not have to go back inside to look.”
There was a collective hum of acknowledgement across the group. Izuku had remembered easily enough- his assignment would be against the kid Katsuki had fought in the finals- Todoroki- and one of Katsuki’s partners in their first training session- Yaoyorozu. Needless to say, he was fairly certain it would be an interesting match. And as much as he had been disappointed that he wouldn’t get to fight against Katsuki again, Izuku knew that was probably better for the both of them if his still tough to control hard-ons told him anything. Though the dreams had become less frequent (due to his own countermeasures), they’d grown more chaotic and intense when they did appear. Izuku was nearly numb to the guilt at this point- despite how much he’d tried to stop them, he’d done all he could.

Maybe that was his punishment, though. Being left to desire the one thing he’d never be able to have.

Somehow, he couldn’t help but feel it was appropriate.

“These matches will be held one at a time, and for fifteen minutes each.” Aizawa continued. “I’m going to have you all watching from a contained area, the students watching from another. The only exception to this is the people that will be fighting in the next match- that person will head out to get ready while a match takes place. After the match, the students will return to the same viewing area as the rest of the heroes. Make sense?”

At the very least, he was excited about this.

“One more reminder-” Aizawa narrowed his eyes. “You are here to fight the students. You are not here to maim the students. If I see any of you going to extremes, I will call off the match immediately, and you will not be asked to return to future sessions. Remember, you all are older and more experienced than they are. This shouldn’t be a hard thing to do.”

It was a pointed remark, aimed right at Izuku’s forehead. No denying where the need for the warning had come from.

He swallowed.

Yes, sir.

They received their order soon after, and hardly felt surprised at this point when he discovered that Ochako had been assigned to fight against Katsuki in the match before his.

*It’s for the best. I don’t need to be watching him any more than necessary right now. Not until I can get a grip on these feelings, anyway.*

In any case, he had his own match to worry about. He was sure that Todoroki and Yaoyorozu would make no easy target, and with his slight handicap (consisting of a pair of small, densely weighted bands around his wrists- specially designed by the U.A. Support Department) he’d certainly have to give it his all.

“I guess I’ll see you after the fight, then!” Ochako grinned, that familiar, confident smile bright on her lips. “Ahh, this’ll be fun! It’s your fave I’m up against, Izuku. Him and, um, Ashido! I think she has an acid quirk or something?”

“I don’t have a fave.” Izuku pouted. “All the students are great.”

“Psh, please. You’re an open book.” Ochako teased. “I know you like watching Bakugou fight. I don’t blame you. He’s fun, isn’t he?”

*I really, REALLY don’t want to think about the extent of how “fun” he is right now.*
Izuku bit his lip and nodded. No more, no less.

I have other things to focus on. I have my own match to focus on. I can’t-no, I won’t have these thoughts anymore.

Admittedly, he had a hard time pulling his eyes away as the first match began not ten minutes later, but he didn’t have much of a choice in the matter. Thankfully. And as he made his way towards the exam grounds, this time in a sort of neighborhood-like setting, Izuku’s mind began to churn through information and potential plans.

Todoroki. Endeavor’s son. Likes using ice, not sure about the fire. He treated it more as a “use in times of crisis” during the Sports Festival. Had he not been as stingy with it, he probably could have won easily. Not sure how he’ll wind up using it, if he uses it at all.

Yaoyorozu. I think she can create things? Hm. Aside from seeing her briefly in the match against Kacchan and her short-lived performance at the festival, I really… don’t know much about her. I wonder how well she’ll work alongside Todoroki?

He arrived at his destination shortly after and flinched upon noticing Aizawa standing at the gate. Had he really been so bad in that first practice session that he deserved yet another lecture on top of the few he’d already received? Izuku bit his lip in anticipation, steering his eyes away from his former teacher and back towards the dusty ground.

“Midoriya.”

Here it comes…

“You do realize I wouldn’t have invited you back here if I didn’t think you could change, right?”

...wait, what?

Izuku awkwardly turned his head up, a slight hint of embarrassment flush across his cheeks. “Uh… well, I didn’t-”

“You were my student for three years.” Aizawa sighed. “I’d like to think I know how you work well enough. And I know now that I did not adequately prepare you for the last training session, either. I’m sorry. But, I trust you’ll do fine today.” Aizawa raised an eyebrow, arms crossed against his chest. “You will, won’t you?”

He’s counting on me. I- of course I’ll improve! I’ll do better than before. I won’t…I’m not going to hurt anyone the way I hurt Kacchan. This is just another job, another task, and I… I can do this.

“I will.” He promised. “I won’t let you down again.”

Izuku could’ve sworn there was a hint of a smile on Aizawa’s face.

“Good. Get in there and we’ll get started. Remember the rules- the students either have to immobilize you or escape the arena within the designated time frame. I hope you’ve planned accordingly.”

I have. I’ll play well.

Izuku grinned.

“Of course I have. Thought you would’ve known that of me by now, too.”

Aizawa rolled his eyes, though the affection present in them was far more obvious than it should’ve
been. “Hurry it up. Don’t keep the students waiting.”

And with that, he was off.

The starting announcement went off shortly after he entered, yet the arena was strangely silent. Hm. Yaoyorozu had technically fought against him before, but Todoroki…? Not so much. All he’d likely know about Izuku, if anything, was what he saw about Valiant on TV. From what he’d picked up, the news hadn’t been showing full coverage of his fights, so he still held some element of surprise.

*I wonder if they know how fast I am.*

And with that thought, he ran.

The exit he’d come in from stood seventy feet behind him. Far more than enough area to defend if needed. Izuku was planning to fight, to do his best, but really-

*I wanna see them win. Give me a good fight. Do your goddamn best for me.*

Izuku slowed down to scan the area, tight corners and low-roofed houses obscuring any clear view of his surroundings. In real work, these types of neighborhoods were always his least favorite to fight in. Property damage was a bitch to deal with, and Izuku wasn’t exactly the cleanest hero around. He wasn’t completely sure if Aizawa would be taking points from the students for disrupting the surroundings too much, which meant that *maybe…*

*I should be the one to destroy it.*

He smirked, and without a second thought, shot off a tight gust of wind towards the nearest facade.

*Stop me, heroes. Show me what you’ve got.*

Sure enough, someone shouted nearby as the students realized his presence. This was a different type of fight than his first one here- unlike the first, his main goal this time was destruction and defense.

“…but if I use too much here, some of the buildings might catch on fire!”

“You’re being too loud. What if your enemy is as close as I am?”

Izuku let off another blast just to scare them a little.

*Hm, should I tease them a bit? Hell, why not.*

“I heard there were some new heroes in town.” Izuku yelled, hoping they’d hear. “Figured I’d come give you a nice introduction.”

A pause, and then…

“Well, I think you’ve done the best you can for me!”

Izuku skidded back as the two rounded the corner, Todoroki’s flames lit on one side and Yaoyorozu carrying what seemed to be some sort of grenades on the other. But more importantly, Todoroki only ran near the areas that seemed to have already been destroyed- a good move on his part.

*If it’s already been destroyed, then you don’t have to worry about repercussions on your end!*
Perfect. And he is using his fire- I wonder how controlled it is, though?

Izuku let off another burst to deflect Todoroki’s incoming rush of fire, sending his flames spiralling high instead.

“That all you got?” He smirked, and sped forward. “Come on, don’t make this easy for me.”

A ten-foot shaft of crystalline ice erupted at Izuku’s feet, only to be smashed moments later.

Try harder, won’t you?

“See this?” Izuku taunted. “Your ice won’t stop me. Not if it’s as straightforward as that.”

“What about this seems straightforward to you?”

A new voice this time.

Yaoyorozu.

“Don’t underestimate us that quickly!” She shouted, and before Izuku could react, a blinding light seared his eyes as the familiar sound of a stun grenade graced his ears. It was all he could do to shield his eyes, to try and block the worst of it, but slick sleet beneath his feet didn’t help his situation, either. Izuku kicked his iron soles into the ground and broke the ice just enough to get a grip on it, but that didn’t chase away the freezing tendrils shooting up his legs, around his torso, even constricting his arms.

“Exit’s behind him. Think we can make it?”

“Don’t have much of a choice, do we?”

At Yaoyorozu’s reply, the two sped off from him, their frantic footsteps not fit for any sort of stealth. Admittedly, it took Izuku a little longer than it should have to break free from the ice. The effects of the handicap, in addition to the accelerated fatigue from frozen limbs, made his movements sluggish and legs stiff.

He couldn’t give them too easy of a fight, though.

“Watch your back!” He called, just before firing off a poorly-aimed gust of wind. Really, he was only attempting to trip them up so he could catch up in time and get some close-combat in, but his shot was half-deflected by Todoroki’s flames.

Tch. I see how it is. Well, at least he’s learning.

Izuku launched himself from the ice trap at last, speeding after the students. In terms of movement, he outmatched them tenfold- that was something they’d need to learn how to deal with.

Exit’s only about fifty feet away. I’ve gotta give them at least a little more of a challenge.

Though, he could admit that their teamwork had been nice to see. Even just watching the two run side-by-side, the confidence that both had displayed- no hesitation in coming up with individual ideas, smoothly communicating in the midst of battle, and their competence in their own abilities-

Those are the kind of heroes I want in the field.

Yaoyorozu shouted a warning towards Todoroki, and the two darted away in an instant before Izuku could get in close.
He grinned.

*This class… it’s strong.*

“You can’t hide forever, heroes!” He called out, chasing after them as he wound past fence mazes and low walls. “Don’t think you can leave here just like that!”

One punch—another building gone, and a pair of students revealed.

This time, though, something was different.

*“Now!”*

Another wall of ice. Simple. Izuku lept backwards, shattering it only moments after it was erected. There had to be *something* more to that, though, from the knowing look on Yaoyorozu’s face.

“You’re slow, Valiant!” Todoroki called out. “Since that first attack, you’ve been off your game.”

Izuku grit his teeth and ran. “Even if I am, so what? I’m still faster than you! And if you run away, I’ll knock this town to the ground! What kind of hero lets that get through?”

“Who said we were running away!?”

He was prepared for the flash grenade this time, ducking his head under his arm and covering his ears as best as possible. If they were just trying to delay him enough to get out the gate, this type of thing *would* probably be enough. And Todoroki was right—despite the adrenaline roaring through his veins, exhaustion from previous overwork combined with the handicaps on top of the numbing ice was slowing him down considerably.

*This needs to end quickly. If I fall down here, there’s no way I’ll be able to catch up again.*

And yet, when his vision returned, Todoroki and Yaoyorozu were nowhere to be seen.

*Huh?*

“Cowards!” He shouted, hoping provoking them enough would bring them back. “I knew you didn’t care about the safety of this town! Who do you think you are, huh!?”

And just as he turned to move, Izuku stumbled over something—something thin, pale, and ribbon-like.

*What?*

“Have you heard of nitinol alloy?” Yaoyorozu’s voice echoed from somewhere hidden, and Izuku lurched back as familiar flames began to engulf the wreckage around him, the thing he’d tripped over starting to harden and coil up at his feet.

“Don’t play games with me!” Izuku narrowed his eyes, preparing to jump with Full Cowl pulsing through his veins, just until—

*Holy shit!*

The ribbon-like material rose up from the ground, strewn around him beforehand in nearly unnoticeable loops, and Izuku realized what they’d been doing all along. No time to jump away now—before he could move, the material snapped to attention and into place around his body, heat shocking his numb limbs into stiff submission. There was nothing he could do now—no. Yaoyorozu
and Todoroki were already emerging from their poorly-hidden cover, a bit hesitant to come closer (as they should be), but quickly realized that Izuku was in no position to move anymore.

_This loss, though... this is one I can accept._

“You two did good.” Izuku dipped his head. “I’m done. I know you passed.”

And sure enough, only moments later did the victory alert echo through the arena. There might’ve been a hint of a smirk on Todoroki’s face, and Yaoyorozu certainly looked relieved.

“When you blasted away my fire so easily, I wasn’t totally sure what to do. Neither of us really remembered the wind pressure stuff you do at range, so… yeah. We had a change of plans about halfway through.”

“That’s why I wound up making the flash grenades.” Yaoyorozu added. “We needed some way to blind you because you’re just so fast… ah, I’m glad it wound up working! I had to look up the chemical compounds on the spot…”

Izuku grinned. “You did good, though. Being able to adapt like that is such a valuable skill to have.”

Todoroki awkwardly rubbed the back of his head as Yaoyorozu looked away, a slight flush over her cheeks.

“You’re very kind, Valiant.” She laughed quietly. “I can understand why Bakugou likes you so much.”

“He hardly shuts up about you sometimes.” Todoroki rolled his eyes. “But, yeah. Thanks. Especially for not taking it easy on us.”

Kacchan…? Wait, he…?

“He likes me?” He blurted out. “I-I mean, I’m not anything-”

There was a bit of surprise on Yaoyorozu’s face. “I think you made a impression on him after you saved his life. And he’s got one of the strongest desires to be a good hero in the class. It’s so obvious to see, and…” She turned a bit redder, suddenly not meeting Izuku’s eyes. “Just- you’ll have to take my word for it. He really, really likes you. Even if he doesn’t realize it himself.”

_No, no, he can’t… Kacchan, please, don’t do this to me…_  

Izuku tried to keep himself calm, as there was no way for him to really run this time. “I, um… I see. He’s… he seems like a good kid.” He couldn’t meet their eyes, not now. “You two fought really well. I wouldn’t want to take it easy on you when you’ve got so much potential. Keep it up, and I know you’ll make great heroes.”

To his relief, Yaoyorozu and Todoroki seemed infinitely more fascinated by those words than his thoughts towards Katsuki.

“Well, I suppose we’ll have to release you if you’re going to be so kind.” Yaoyorozu said, a teasing lilt to her words. “Can’t have the future number one hero defeated here, now can we?”

Izuku grinned. “What, like this is gonna stop me? No, no. If that’s what you think, then you’ve got a long way to go!”

As he was walking back to the exit alongside the two students, talking between themselves in casual
conversation, Izuku realized that he hadn’t smiled as much as he had today in so long.

Despite my friends forgetting what day it is. Well, I mean, it's not that big of a deal. It happens.

And yet, as he found himself arriving back near the viewing center, Izuku nearly stopped in his tracks upon realizing just who was standing in front.

Katsuki’s hands were shoved awkwardly into his pants pockets, and he looked to have made it out of his exam with only a few bruises. And only a few seconds later, he realized that Katsuki seemed to be waiting for someone.

For his friends? Is he friends with Yaoyorozu and Todoroki?

Well, maybe- Katsuki gave them a curt congrats before they entered the room, but as Izuku got a little closer, Katsuki stopped him in his tracks.

“Oi. Deku. You lost out there.” Katsuki started, red eyes staring straight up at him. “Why?”

Huh?

“I mean, it wasn’t really… my battle to win.” Izuku swallowed. “Plus, there were handicaps and stuff, and Todoroki’s ice was pretty fatiguing, it really wasn’t-”

“So you were tired.” Katsuki repeated, those eyes never leaving him. “Deku, you look fuckin’ exhausted. Don’t try and tell me you were on your A-game today.”

There was a pause, and then…

“...why are you so tired on your birthday?”

Izuku froze.

“You… you knew?” Izuku whispered, voice close to breaking. “H-How…”

Now, it was Katsuki’s turn to flush. “I-I mean, s’not like it’s that hard to find out shit like that online. I… I dunno, I just…” Katsuki fidgeted, and it appeared as if he was fumbling with something in his pocket. “I heard you were gonna be here today, and, uh... I just wanted to tell you happy birthday. Ain’t much, but-”

Before he knew it, Katsuki grabbed his hand and shoved something in his palm. “S’all I got. You deserve a break, too.”

Izuku was pretty sure he’d just died on the spot.

Katsuki was already turning away, going to leave, but-

“Kacchan, wait!”

He stopped, only half-turning towards him, and Izuku wished he was imagining just how red Katsuki’s face was.

“I… I just…” His hands were shaking, voice trembling, but he felt more alive than he had in so long. “Thank you. You… I don’t think you realize just how much…”
Don’t cry! Not here, not in front of him!

Katsuki’s eyes were wide, and Izuku really wasn’t sure what to make of it.

“It’s… you haven’t even looked at what it is.” He mumbled.

*It doesn’t matter what it is. You… you thought of me, and I…*

“Kacchan, could I… just, one more thing…?”

Izuku’s arms were ever so slightly outstretched, and yet Katsuki seemed to understand.

It was awkward. Hesitant. Yet, when Katsuki stepped closer and wrapped those warm arms around his waist, Izuku wasn’t sure he’d ever felt more at home.

Maybe this was too far. Too much. But Izuku knew he wasn’t imagining the way Katsuki leaned into his chest, how his own hands felt so **right** around Katsuki’s shoulders, how they fit together far better than anything that should’ve been allowed.

*This is too much, too much, I shouldn’t be doing this…!*

But Katsuki wasn’t running away. If anything, he hugged him tighter, as if savoring every bit of contact he could.

*He clearly wants this. Don’t be stupid.*

Somehow, Izuku allowed himself to relax just a little bit more.

They both knew they’d been there too long when they pulled back, Katsuki’s face as red as his eyes and hardly able to meet Izuku’s own.

*There… was there really something more in that?*

“I’ll see you later.” Katsuki mumbled, and turned to leave. Not to the viewing room, but towards the direction of the locker rooms.

*Oh. Maybe he just needs to go to the bathroom.*

Izuku finally let himself look at what Katsuki had given him- nothing much, for sure, just an envelope with “**Deku**” scrawled across the front. He almost despised how much fondness he felt for just this simple gift, but it wasn’t as if he’d asked for it. No- he couldn’t be distressed over this, because Kacchan had given it to him out of his own free will, completely unprompted.

Carefully, Izuku stored it away in one of his belt pockets and told himself he’d look at it later.

Watching the remainder of the fights was interesting, if nothing else. He learned from Ochako that Katsuki and his partner, Ashido, had cleared the exam with ease. Izuku wasn’t totally sure why Katsuki hadn’t told him directly. But the other students were fun to watch, especially since they were fighting his friends and former classmates. In the end, everyone wound up passing- the class really was competent, much as he’d assumed before. Katsuki had returned to the viewing area about ten minutes after he’d left for the locker room, and Izuku tried to keep his eyes away from him as he talked amongst his friends. He stuck close to Ochako, and later Kirishima, for the duration of the matches. While he still wasn’t totally sure what was going on between his friends, once he quietly reminded them that it was his birthday, they were far more apologetic than he ever expected.

All in all, the day could have been worse. If he was being honest, it was probably the best he’d had
in a while. After the exams, he and his friends went over to Ochako’s place to chill and catch up. As usual, hanging out with his friends involved shitty movie marathons, too many pizzas, and loads of cheap beer.

Izuku hadn’t been so happy in so damn long.

At least until his best friends, more than a little tipsy, disappeared into Ochako’s bedroom and locked the door behind them without so much of a word to Izuku.

Oh.

Izuku sobered up fairly quickly after that nauseating realization.

Oh, I... I see. They’re together.

He hated how sick he felt, how irrevocably jealous he was. They were his best friends. They could do what they wanted. And if what they wanted involved closed doors and drunken touches and sweet nothings whispered against bare skin, then that was... it was fine.

This... this is fine.

He sent a text to Ochako on the way out the door for whenever the fuck she’d see it, and got himself home without crying.

I’m fine. I’m perfectly fine.

Izuku took a blanket from his room, turned on the TV, and tried to forget what he’d seen and heard. It wasn’t a surprise, really. He should’ve taken the hint in the morning. The exam fights had distracted him enough, and his friend’s apologies and promises had left him happy for at least a little while, and Katsuki-

Kacchan. Holy shit, I never looked at what he gave me.

Izuku managed to steady himself enough to dig the gift out of the bag of gear he’d brought back from U.A., relieved to see the small envelope still intact. Maybe his friends didn’t want him around, and maybe he really was too in over his head with work to find time for other things, but Katsuki, at least...

He remembered me. I don’t know why he cares, but he...

Izuku swallowed, trembling hands opening it as neatly as possible, only to discover a couple small pieces of paper inside. Item one: a few 30% off spa coupons. Izuku snorted a little at that- Katsuki’s demands about him taking a break were more literal than he thought.

The other thing, though...

A note?

The paper was a little worn in his hand, but Katsuki’s scratchy handwriting was legible enough. Even just the fact that he’d taken his time to write something as simple as this, to think about him, was enough to bring him to tears for the umpteenth time that day.

Deku,

You’ve been working so damn much. You’re a good hero, but I was just thinking about how much you’ve been out in the field, and about how I usually try to relax after practice and stuff, and I wasn’t...
sure that you’ve really been as okay as you say you are. I wanna see you at your best. Don’t be stupid.

God, even just the first section alone was hard to read. To comprehend. Katsuki was right, but…

Izuku shook his head and went to read the rest.

Ignore this if you want, I don’t care, but if you’re ever free I just wanted to see if you’d wanna do some training together? One on one. Just cause you’re amazing you’re really good at what you do and I think training with people outside of class is useful. My phone number’s just below this. Call or text me if you ever wanna talk for a bit schedule something. I know you’re busy, so just ignore this if you want. It’s cool. Promise.

I just wanted to say happy birthday, Deku. Hope it’s a good one.

-Katsuki

His hands were numb, eyes frozen on the small note in his grip. And Izuku wasn’t sure he remembered how to breathe.

This is… no, I can’t be feeling…


Need.

He was terrified.

Not of Katsuki. Not of the gift.

But because no matter what he did, no matter how hard he tried, there was no escaping how he felt towards Katsuki. That his longing couldn’t be shoved back to the furthest corners of his mind anymore. He didn’t want to need him. Katsuki was going to be a great hero- and maybe one day, a great partner. But only for work. Nothing else. Nothing more.

I can’t accept these feelings, but I can’t deny them either.

Valiant was a good hero- good at winning, at saving, at escaping from danger when need be. There had never been a target he’d been unable to reach.

I’m in love with Katsuki Bakugou.

That night, Izuku didn’t sleep.

Chapter End Notes

slow burn step 1 achieved

as always, thank you to my beta @aetherlite for bein a bro and workin within my time constraints bc of these weekly updates that i love doin sm. my twitter is @aeronines if u ever wanna yell at me!

Next chapter next week! Back to baku boy for a bit. It’s been a bit calm for him lately,
don’t u think?
The cum before the storm

Chapter Summary

it's canon that kacchan likes puns

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Ugh, I'm exhausted…!"

Katsuki snorted as Camie flopped down on the couch beside him, dramatically falling onto his lap. “Man, I thought summer break was supposed to be fun! Where’s our pool party? Our trips to the shopping mall? Karaoke nights?”

“Quit complaining. You knew what you were getting into when you enrolled.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Look. We’ve got a nice, empty Sunday to look forward to tomorrow. Aizawa’s not gonna come running out of the bushes and demand fifty push ups while you’re out. And besides, we’re in hero school, not zero school.”

Camie pouted. “You’re boring. Only ever thinking about practice. Babe, when was the last time you went out for fun?”

“Well, I went mountain climbing with Todoroki last weekend, and Yaoyorozu and I went to this yoga class together on Wednesday—”

“Those are still all things related to working out!” Camie pointed out, only to receive a gentle slap in the face.

“I enjoy mountain climbing. And, if I recall, you were salty as fuck that you missed seeing Yaoyorozu’s ass in those yoga pants.”

Camie groaned. “Ugh, don’t remind me. You guys better let me know when you’re going next time.”

Katsuki sighed, but couldn’t hide the warmth in his voice. “Yeah, yeah. I will. I think she missed you too.”

“Aww.” Camie smiled. “Well, I know she did. She always misses me. She better, or we’re breaking up.”

“And here I thought you guys weren’t dating.” Katsuki raised an eyebrow.

“It’s an expression. Don’t go pulling your technicalities on me.” A pause, then- “And I mean, if you were to go telling people we’re together, I can tell everyone what you’ve been spending your time with too.”

This time, it was Katsuki’s turn to groan, head buried in his hands. “Shut up. I don’t wanna talk about it.”
“Bitch, you say that, then show up at my door twice a week asking for lube. Really, you should consider yourself lucky I haven’t started charging you at this point.”

“S’your fault I’m even in this situation to begin with…!”

“Oh, don’t even try me. You took that thing and shoved it up your ass five days earlier than I thought you would.”

Yeah, okay, maybe he really couldn’t argue with that logic. “Fine, fine. I ain’t saying anything. Not that I’d ever be the type to call out my friends, anyway.”

Camie smirked. “Oh, and we even get the “friends” title too now? Baku, you’re really sucking up to me today. What’s gotten into you?”

Katsuki huffed. “Literally nothing, sadly.”

“Is this one of those rare “good days”, then?” Camie gasped and sat up, still in his lap. “Oh. I need to take advantage of this, if that’s the case. Go get my laptop.”

“How am I supposed to move when you’re sitting on top of me? Get it yourself, asshole.”

Eventually, Camie dragged herself off of his lap and returned with her slim laptop, choosing to lean against Katsuki instead of seating herself on top of him this time.

“Now, I’m sure you’ve already heard, but your buddy Valiant is finally putting out a photoshoot. Positive it’s just cause his publicist begged him to do it. Normally, I wouldn’t really care, but Gale’s in the same one…! And oh, I sure as fuck hope you know what they got dragged into.”

Katsuki flushed. “I, uh, might’ve heard about it. I thought the theme hadn’t been released yet, though?”

Camie grinned, sorting through headlines and not meeting Katsuki’s eyes. “You would be right if you’d said that this morning. I saw the news on break, though, and figured you might enjoy it if you weren’t so busy being an ass.”

He squirmed a bit, having admittedly been anticipating the shoot since it was announced. “So, you gonna tell me or not?”

*Maybe it’s sportswear? Summer spandex? Form-fitting shirts or tight pants might be too much of a gamble, but god, if his nipples are showing through it at all I’ll die. He wears too much shit on duty, and there’s never enough ass shots on TV.*

Katsuki had stopped counting the number of times he’d wished Deku would have a slight wardrobe malfunction on camera.

“Keep your dick in your pants, but…”

*Sportswear. S’gotta be sportswear.*

“Gale and Valiant are doing a double-feature swimsuit shoot!”

Katsuki froze on the spot, trying to process what he’d just heard.

“You- you’re shitting me.” Katsuki said, trying to hold back the utter *elation* in his voice. “He doesn’t ever do fanservice-y stuff like that…!”
She smirked. “Like I said, I’m sure his publicist put him up to it. He hasn’t done an interview in months, dude. Of course he’s gotta go back on the media with a bang.”

Oh my god, his tits are gonna be out. His shoulders. His waist. His legs. His collarbones. His ass…!

Camie took one look over at him and choked. “Dear god, you’re gay. Talk about zero to a hundred. Do you need some quality time with your dildo?”

Yes, yes I do…!

Katsuki tried to relax, embarrassed that he’d gotten as worked up as he was. Ever since he’d starting using that goddamn toy, it seemed as if he was getting more and more desperate for the real thing.

Wisely, he chose not to respond out loud.

“So, are you just telling me this to be nice?” Katsuki swallowed, hoping he didn’t look as red as he felt. “There’s gotta be another motive here.”

Camie gave him a lazy smile just before tossing her arm around his shoulders. “Well… I was thinking I might be able to get someone to go down to the mall with me to catch the feature when it’s released tomorrow. Word is there might even be pin-up posters involved. Now, I would really appreciate some nice shots of Gale on my wall, and I figured I knew someone who might be interested in Valiant’s portion. How does that sound, babe?”

This… was a new development.

And they’re not just shitty gossip mag shots, either…!

Katsuki flushed, a bit of anxiety bubbling up in his gut.

“I think it sounds like I owe you lunch.”

Yeah, maybe he was a little more jittery than he should have been. But this was new. Something like this- this was the sort of thing he’d only ever dared to dream of.

“I like the sound of that.” Camie smirked. “Glad to know we’re on the same page, babe. Will you be up for me by ten tomorrow, then? I wanna beat the line.”

“Yes. That works.” I’m always up by eight, anyways.

The rest of the night came and left through takeout and gossip, TV and laughter. That’s not to say Katsuki didn’t leave enough time to have some fun on his own- admittedly, he’d grown attached to the dildo, though sometimes it was a bit awkward when he remembered the poster hanging above his bed while he had five inches of silicone up his ass.

Katsuki only allowed himself to think for a moment, though, about the fact that he’d be going out tomorrow to buy literal pin-ups of Deku. That somehow, he’d managed to fall in so deep to where his body had become regular masturbation material, as well as a significant presence in Katsuki’s fantasies. More and more he found himself imagining those strong arms pinning him down, holding his wrists taut above his head while that knee pressed against Katsuki’s crotch as his sinful mouth sunk into pale skin and whispered, confessing things Katsuki would only ever dare dream of.

Nowadays, even just remembering that Pro Hero Valiant had Katsuki’s contact info in his possession was enough to make him hard at times, and frankly, it was more embarrassing than he’d like to admit.
Maybe one day he’ll call. Or maybe he threw it out. Doesn’t matter. I don’t wanna invade his personal time if he doesn’t want me around.

It had only been about two weeks since he’d gotten to see Deku in person, though, and his track record had only grown since then. It seemed as if everywhere he looked, the news was covering Deku—there wasn’t a thing he couldn’t do. His smile, that strong, winning smile, had come to be Katsuki’s favorite part of watching his fights.

One day, he wanted to be the one to see that smile face to face. Side by side.

It’ll happen eventually. I know it.

He fell asleep to the memory of Deku’s hug, of gloved hands wrapped around his shoulders and the feeling of worn cloth against his cheek.

The next morning, Katsuki was stopped by Todoroki in the community kitchen.

“Are you busy at all today?” He asked, stepping in beside Katsuki to prep a small breakfast of his own. “Was wondering if you’d be up for extra quirk training. I’ve been working on some new techniques.”

Katsuki reddened, not meeting his eyes. “I’m… gonna be busy for the morning. There’s this thing Camie’s dragging me out to, and—”

Wait. Do I really wanna be alone with her in the middle of a mall crowd?

“Actually, wanna come with?” He asked, banking on the fact that Todoroki didn’t have a social life. And sure enough…

“I’ve got nothing to lose.” Todoroki paused. “You down for some practice afterwards, though?”

I’ll need some way to let loose after this. “Fuck yes. I’m in.”

Todoroki made the mistake of only asking where they were going after they were out the door.

At least his dad ain’t in this shoot. That’d be kinda awkward.

To his surprise, Todoroki took Camie’s answer in stride, saying that he’d be needing some new swimwear for the summer months and completely missing the fact that the entire shoot was clearly for the hero’s publicity, not advertisement for the clothing itself.

Whatever helps you sleep at night, buddy.

“Alright, line’s right over there!” Camie exclaimed, directing the three of them towards a semi-crowded storefront. “Come on, come on! It’s only an hour till it goes public.”

“An hour.” Katsuki groaned. “Dammnit, I didn’t think it would take this long…! Ugh, you’re lucky we’re already all the way out here.”

“I told you it was being released at noon. Did you just miss that or something?” Camie asked, still dragging him towards the line. “It’ll go by in no time. Promise!”

No time quickly became Camie goes shopping time. This, of course, left Katsuki and Todoroki to wait in line by themselves, questioning their life choices as they were surrounded by ever-increasing hordes of teenage girls.
About thirty minutes later, Todoroki sighed.

“Why exactly did you come out here again?”

Katsuki almost apologized for dragging him out here. Almost. But, the accurate answer of ‘I’m gay as fuck for Deku’s body and I’m gonna get to see his ass’ probably wouldn’t do him any favors either.

Instead, he shrugged.

“Camie… convinced me. I ain’t gonna leave at this point.”

And speaking of Camie- who was seriously pushing boundaries at this point- she showed up right then with four bags and a plea to help carry all her new things. Katsuki nearly told her to fuck off, but one look from those too-clever eyes and he knew that a single complaint would find him on the receiving end of mild public humiliation.

*That damn dildo is a double edged sword. Fun to impale yourself on, yet ready to stab you in the throat if your classmates find out.*

He still wasn’t sure why Todoroki helped him carry her bags- maybe he felt a little bad at this point. No matter the reason, he’d find a way to get back at Camie for this later.

*Maybe.*

Ten minutes before the release, a couple of teaser shots were displayed to the asinine crowd and were met with a raucous cheer. Katsuki craned his neck to see the shot, wanting to at least taste a hint of what he’d come here for in order to relieve a bit of his frustrations.

*Better be good, or I’m-*

Katsuki nearly dropped a shopping bag.

*Holy fuck.*

Deku was gorgeous.

It wasn’t anything more than a headshot- nothing he hadn’t seen before. But there was Deku, looking back over his shoulder, eyes turned away with a hint of shyness that somehow made him look even sexier than before. A strong, scarred hand held his shoulder far gentler than it should’ve, and if Katsuki didn’t know better, a part of him may have really thought that Deku was as bashful as he looked.

*I know he’s confident, though. I’ve seen it as much as anyone has.*

Yet somewhere in him, that slightly nervous persona of Deku’s had planted something in him. How he appeared so unintentionally sexy, so unknowingly *hot.*

Katsuki bit his lip and reminded himself that he’d save getting hard for home.

“Like it, huh?” Camie murmured, barely audible over the noise of the crowd. “Glad you came out?”

Katsuki’s face burned, though it wasn’t as if his friend didn’t know about his admiration for Deku.
“It’s… it could be worse.”

If Todoroki had asked him any questions, he didn’t hear.

The remainder of the wait passed quickly. Katsuki wound up buying a copy of the double-feature for himself, despite originally having planned on sharing with Camie. As soon as it was in his hands he shoved it into his bag (with the utmost caution, of course) along with the limited-edition promo poster. As long as he didn’t think too hard about the whole thing, it was fine, really. But still- it was easy enough to ignore the why he was there. It was easy to convince himself that he was just buying this shit because Deku was hot. And he was hot, no doubt about that.

What he did have a hard time explaining, however, was the reason he felt such a surge of jealousy towards the other people in line fawning over Deku just the same as he was.

At least I’m not shouting and screaming about him. Katsuki thought, mildly disgruntled. I know him better than any of those assholes do. He’s more than just a nice body.

But there was no way he’d ever go so far as to call them friends in any sense of the word. Deku hadn’t texted him. Hadn’t called. They’d had approximately three face-to-face conversations, saw each other on the media sometimes, and yet…

They’ll never know what it’s like to get a real hug from him. Suck it, you fucks.

Todoroki seemed relatively confused about why he was handed a poster featuring Gale in a pair of too-tight swim trunks, but seemed to know better than to ask at that very moment.

“Someone’s happy.” Camie remarked, having taken some of her bags off Katsuki earlier as they found themselves finally leaving the mall. “You always get this glow about you when you’re thinking about him. Like him that much, huh?”

Yeah… I like him.

“He’s awesome.” Katsuki mumbled. “I mean, just look at his track record. His stats for only year one are amazing. ‘Course I like him.”

“He has been doing well, but I’m a bit concerned Valiant’s going to burn out soon.”

That time, it was Todoroki who spoke.

Don’t remind me.

“He’s- he won’t burn out.” Katsuki balled his fists. “This is what he wants to do. He’s gonna be fine.”

You better be okay, Deku. You better take a break. Use those damn coupons, please.

Todoroki gave him one more look, mildly curious. “I’m just being realistic. I haven’t seen someone rise up the charts so fast in years. Incredible, yes, but not sustainable. When you look at heroes like Gale or Uravity, however, they’re making much steadier and effective progress. See what I’m saying?”

“You’re saying he’s gonna crash and burn. Yeah, well, no.” Katsuki muttered. “I know the guy. He’s not that kind of person. He’s just dedicated.”

“That, he is…” Todoroki sighed. “Well, only time will tell. I have my doubts, but whatever. Think
what you’d like.”

_Fucker._

“Hey, don’t be all down. Today’s a day to enjoy the wonders of photography and _muscles_!” Camie elbowed Katsuki just a little harder than she should’ve. “You gonna hang that poster above your bed, Baku? Right next to your other one?”

“I mean, where else am I gonna put it?”

Somehow, he’d found himself becoming less and less shameless in front of Camie as the months went on.

“At least now you’ll have some more eye candy to get off to.” She winked. “Man, how are you gonna deal with training tomorrow? He’s coming by, remember?”

“Shit, that’s right.” Katsuki frowned, pointedly ignoring her first sentence. “I wanted to get my new move perfected before the heroes came by again… dammit.”

*I just want him to see me as competent. I know he didn’t see my win in the exams, and all I want is a true victory in front of his eyes…!*

“You still up for training later?” Todoroki asked, and Katsuki was more than happy to steer the conversation away from Camie and her remarks towards his masturbation habits.

“Sure. You wanna be the one to convince Aizawa to let us use the big gym?”

Todoroki frowned, narrowing his eyes. “I did it last time. It’s your turn. And I’d say you owe me for dragging me all the way out here, don’t you think?”

Katsuki sighed, admitted that Todoroki had a point, and resigned himself to another potential argument about using the gym too late in the evening. Yeah, yeah, their health was important, but Katsuki always made damn sure that he got enough rest.

...or, well, he had. Recently, there had been a few _specific_ interruptions to his clearly defined sleeping schedule that resulted in maybe an hour or two lost here and there due to his new toy and Camie’s ever-loving gifts. In any case, training helped increase his chances of sleeping early. Losing in front of Deku cause he was tired was _not_ the way he wanted to go out, after all.

Then again, there _was_ the issue of the new feature. If he and Todoroki were going to be training immediately after they got back to the school, then…

_Shit, I need more time for this. Maybe I’ll just stop the training a little early, then._

That had been the plan, at least- but by the time Katsuki found himself near the end of an intense workout with Todoroki after having won the rights to the gym almost too easily, he knew there was no way he’d be reaching a reasonable bedtime in combination with his other needs. But the extra training had been good- Katsuki had been working on perfecting his new AP shot, hoping that the extra range it allowed him would give him a bit of an edge in their next bout of practice matches. Todoroki was at least mildly entertaining to be around when fighting, and though the use of their quirks weren’t allowed due to the highly explosive nature of their combined power, it was nice to have someone else to talk to bounce ideas off of.

When they returned to the dorms at a nice eight o’clock, Katsuki quickly noticed that both Camie and Yaoyorozu were absent among the main group of students in the common area. Yeah, maybe he
was willing to poke a little fun at his friends at times, but more than anything else, he was glad they had something nice together. If being with each other was the break they wanted, then…

*They deserve it. I wanna see them happy, even if they are irritating fucks sometimes.*

Katsuki ran a quick shower for himself after a small dinner, wanting to leave at least some time to skim through his new purchases of the day. Maybe the trip had been a partial favor to Camie, but he wasn’t about to go ignoring his own reward. He dug the stuff out of his backpack, making sure that it hadn’t been damaged in any way, shape, or form. Had the feature been bent at all, it would have been the *real* tragedy of the whole trip.

Upon being able to properly look at the poster, Katsuki found himself quite pleased. It was a nice shot, really. Deku’s back was turned three fourths of the way towards the camera, his ass on full display, hugged by trunks that had clearly been tailored to his size. A shy, sweet smile had crept up over his face, and those soft, freckle-covered cheeks held such a contrast to angular muscle winding throughout the rest of his body.

*Hot.*

The poster was the first thing to go up- not next to the other one above his bed, but instead, on the exact opposite side of the room.

*He’ll be the first thing I see when I wake up in the morning. Not a bad view, really.*

Thankfully, the only people coming in his room at any given moment were a mix of Camie, Momo, and occasionally Todoroki- all people who had at least some knowledge of his affinity for Deku. And if anyone else had anything to say about his interest, all Katsuki knew was that they were missing out.

*Less competition for me, too.*

The rest of his evening was spent flipping through the lengthy magazine feature, yet after only a page or two of nice shots, something he hadn’t expected began to catch his attention more than anything else.

*I had no idea Deku had so many scars… I’ve seen a few, but this is way more than I thought he had!*

That being said, Katsuki was amazed with Izuku’s unfailing confidence through the rest of the feature. Each one of his shots, whether fun, cute, or downright sexy, was full to bursting with all of him. Sure, Deku was so much more than just a pretty body, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t flaunt what he had either.

*He’s about six inches taller than me, right? Huh… god, I wonder how it would feel if he ever bent me over his nice desk and had his way with me.*

“*Fuck me.*” Katsuki mumbled, absentmindedly reaching down to fondle his own dick. “*Mm, shit… s’good.*”

Yeah, putting that poster right in his line of sight had been a very good idea.

Katsuki’s limbs were heavy from the extra practice today, and though he’d usually prefer a quick round with his dildo or even a few fingers up his ass, just his right hand would do for today. A nice, slow, heavenly bout of pleasure in combination with his new ‘eye candy’ was just *perfect* to wrap up the evening.
Camie’s right. Why do I even try to object her claims at this point?

The biggest upside of not using the dildo, though, was that his own raunchy noises weren’t nearly as obnoxious as usual. Soft, low, breathy moaning was far easier to let loose than the guttural groans he was learning to deal with. Katsuki’s toes curled into soft sheets, hand deep in his boxers to at least avoid coming on the bed itself. It was nice. Simple. And full of his hero’s lovely face, tits, and ass.

Dear Deku’s publicist, thank you for this good fucking food.

When he came, it was with a slight stutter and a choked, pleading whimper as the last cries of his orgasm were drawn from parted lips. Katsuki’s hips bucked into his palm with an uncouth rhythm, cum dribbling onto calloused fingers and the front of his boxers. Yeah, he’d need a clean pair, but that was a problem to deal with later.

“So damn good…” Katsuki’s eyes fluttered shut, and after one last squeeze of his dick, he fell boneless against the sheets.

If he was here right now… if he could hold me like he did before…

His face heated up at the mere thought of that, but it was more of a warmth than anything else. That hug- that perfect, unplanned hug was more than he ever could have hoped to get out of that meeting. Katsuki almost hated how much he longed for that touch again, that comfort, and the overwhelming desire that sent blood rushing straight to his dick.

No, no, no more getting hard tonight. I can’t afford to take one look at him tomorrow and have to go get off in the bathroom again. No more thinking of nice hugs and nice arms and-

Suddenly, something clicked.

Katsuki’s clarity returned all at once with one look at the incriminating poster on his wall, and he couldn’t remember the last time he’d felt so cold.

He’d told himself this wasn’t for Deku. That any bit of pleasure he was getting out of this was simply due to his attraction towards hot, muscular men, not Deku in particular. But one look at the poster, at the content sprawled across his bed, filled only with pictures of him and none of Gale’s equally tasteful shots forced him to reconsider just a little bit.

Okay. Maybe I’m kinda attracted to Deku. Whatever.

Though, he knew the real issue with the whole situation lie in the high probability of awkward feelings at very inappropriate times, like situations where Deku, his figure of admiration, were giving him completely innocent hugs. Where he wasn’t sure if he’d be able to talk to him face-to-face tomorrow without thinking about just how good Deku’s mouth would feel on his neck.

He had no real inclination to stop imagining Deku in this sense, but the thought of accidentally ruining any potential partnership because of a stray boner wasn’t exactly up his alley.

What to do, what to do…

Ultimately, Katsuki decided that it was a problem for another day, and resigned himself to changing into a new pair of non-sticky boxers and getting some sleep.

We’ll see how I do around him tomorrow, anyway. But I’m sure it’ll be fine. Yeah.

Everything’s gonna be just fine.
“...do you want to wake him up and tell him?”

“I- I mean, what if he already knows? He’s probably been on his laptop at least a little tonight, and I doubt he would miss this…”

“Well, at worst, he’ll find out tomorrow. I wonder if we’re gonna have a substitute brought in?”

“Maybe, but… god, this is awful. Even if I was never as connected as Bakugou is to him…”

“Babe, let’s just… let’s get some sleep, okay?”

“...okay.”

Katsuki woke up ten minutes past his alarm.

The rest of the morning sped by in a flurry of preparation as he attempted to at least get himself looking moderately presentable. However, hero training never left anyone looking their best after the fact, so Katsuki figured it was okay to appear slightly more disheveled than usual even if it was in front of Deku. Still, he managed a quick (yet healthy) breakfast before sprinting out the door to get to class on time. From there, they would be changing into hero suits, then regrouping with the rest of the invited heroes for special drills.

_I kinda modeled my AP shot off of Deku’s pressurized air blasts… I wonder if he’ll notice? Or mind. Maybe he’ll even find it kinda cool._

Excitement was an understatement. This was a chance for Deku to see him at his best.

*Watch me win. See what I can do.*

The class was oddly subdued when he arrived.

Katsuki slid into his seat, fingers drumming against his desk, impatiently awaiting permission to get started. Though, for some reason, Camie hadn’t said a word to him even several minutes after he’d sat down.

*Huh, weird. Whatever.*

Aizawa joined them shortly after, silent as the rest upon his entrance.

“We still plan to hold today’s practice.” Aizawa announced, strangely quiet. “It may wind up ending a bit short, but I don’t want to hinder your training because of this. Meet back at the grounds center as soon as you change and we’ll go from there.”

*Huh…? Wait, did something happen?*

Another glance around the room, and yeah. Okay. He was *probably* missing something here.

As the class got up to get going, Katsuki managed to pull Camie aside for just a moment, needing some sort of answer. Yet, before he could even ask-

“After practice.” She said, more serious than Katsuki had heard her in a long time. “Don’t… don’t worry about it until then. Please.”

*The fuck…? Don’t worry about what?*
Katsuki agreed, if for no other reason than the fact that Camie’s demeanor scared him more than he’d have liked to admit.

It started to hit him a bit more when he got to the grounds and saw the crowd that had gathered. Red Riot, Uravity, Gale- the usual gang, minus one.

*Deku…?*

None of the heroes looked particularly well put together, especially Uravity and Red Riot. Though Katsuki felt a bit less self-conscious about his own appearance upon seeing them, the fact that they looked so damn worried was its own cause for alarm.

Katsuki swallowed and pushed away his fears for now.

Practice continued on as usual. This time, it was more focused on individuals, with the pros helping to give them advice on how they could improve their own abilities and techniques. Uravity in particular managed to give him a hand, discussing his non-quirk attributes and how they could be applied in battle when configuring different positions to move and approach. Definitely helpful, but definitely *not* Deku.

By the time they were done, he was admittedly a bit frustrated. Deku was supposed to be there. Today was supposed to be the *day* Katsuki would get to show off. Yet, he noticed Red Riot and Uravity talking together with Aizawa at the end of the session, and upon getting a little closer managed to make out a bit of what they were saying.

*They’re… leaving to visit the hospital?*

Katsuki’s blood ran cold, and the slightest hint of what was going on began to creep up on him.

*No, no… no, that can’t be right. Deku… he’s…*

Hardly a minute after class, Katsuki found Camie again.

“Tell me- tell me what’s going on.”

He tried to pretend there wasn’t a quiver in his voice.

Camie went pale, but didn’t back away. Instead, she sighed and motioned for him to sit down with as gentle a request as he’d ever heard from her.

“There was… um, there was an accident last night.” Camie’s voice was as level as it could get, obviously trying to stay steady for him. “At about eleven or so. A building collapsed while he was on duty, and…”

She took a deep breath, reached out, and squeezed Katsuki’s hand.

“There was… um, there was an accident last night.” Camie’s voice was as level as it could get, obviously trying to stay steady for him. “At about eleven or so. A building collapsed while he was on duty, and…”

She took a deep breath, reached out, and squeezed Katsuki’s hand.

“There were seven casualties. Valiant barely made it out alive. He’s been in intensive care since then, in and out of surgery the whole time. Right now, he’s expected to make a full recovery, but…” She swallowed, lip trembling. “It’s bad. Aizawa told us last night. You were asleep, so…”

*Wha… wait, what…?*

Camie’s eyes widened. “Hey- hey. He’s gonna be okay. Try not to panic, alright? I- I know he means a lot to you, a-and I know you’ve been excited to see him, but I just- I need you to try and focus on the facts, okay?”
Katsuki wasn’t sure what he felt. Numb, maybe.

“Why didn’t you tell me…?”

_Deku, no, he can’t-_

“I didn’t want you to have to wake up to the news.” She hesitated. “I- god, I’m sorry. I didn’t want this to hinder you in practice, and I didn’t know the best way to tell you, and Momo was freaking out a bit too about it and I just- I didn’t know how-”

“Stop.”

Katsuki ignored the crack in his own voice, trying to just comprehend the news, the _everything._

“Deku’s in the hospital.” He repeated, words chalky in his throat. “He’s- he’s in intensive care. Undergoing surgery.”

She nodded.

_Why is everything spinning…?_

“And he’s- he’s going to be okay.”

Really, he was trying to convince himself more than anyone else.

“Yes, he’s going to be okay.” Camie repeated.

She was calm. Steady.

_One more question._

“Do they know how long he’ll be there…?”

Camie bit her lip.

“He’s having a sped up recovery with quirk usage, and he’ll likely be out of the hospital in a couple weeks or so due to that, but there’s no clear estimates for when he’ll be coming back on duty.” She shook her head, a bit misty eyed herself. “All the media knows right now is that he was badly injured. It’s only the pro hero scene that got the detailed news. What I wanna know, though…”

He was a little dizzier than usual.

“Katsuki, are you going to be okay?”

Chapter End Notes

_yes i did capitalize the fic title. fight me_
_anyways… think of the coming events this way. once everything’s hit rock bottom, you can only go up :(^)

Also, shoutout to sabasama, sianonymous, and nixblack for ur wonderful observations in the comments last chapter. it made me rlly happy to see kacchan’s horniness picked up_
on bc hes a lil shit and i love him

My twitter is @aeronines! next chapter next week my dudes
just be aware, most of this chapter takes place in a hospital room and there’s some heavier themes talked about in here. that being said, i’m very excited.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Get out of here! This whole place is coming down, you’ve got to go!”

“But- my friend, she’s—”

“I know! I’ll go get her, but you need to get out of here too! Tell everyone you see on the way out!”

“Valiant, are- are you sure!?”

“Yes I’m sure! Move! There’s only a few minutes before this whole place comes down!”

Breaking.

“Miss, where are you? I’m going to get you out of here, just speak up! Please!”

Crumbling.

“Your friend told me you were back here, and I’m just here to help! Where are you!?”

Dust. Debris.

“Shit, no! Fuck! Listen to me, dammit! There’s no time! I’m telling you, there’s no—!”

He screamed.

No, please no, don’t tell me she’s— she’s—

A desperate, choked sob forced its way from Izuku’s throat.

Wha… wait, where am…

“Midoriya. Please, relax.”

Who are…

Izuku forced himself to focus as best he could and realized someone was looking at him. Over him.

What’s going…

“Are you going to stay with us this time?” The voice spoke again, an odd solidity behind it. “We’ll put you under if it starts getting bad again, but you’ve been out of it for a while now. How are you doing?”
How am I…?

“W-Where…”

Izuku hardly recognized his own voice.

The other person sighed, shook her head, and knelt down a bit closer to him. “Midoriya, you’re in the hospital. Say something if you understand.”

Oh… oh, I’m in the hospital.

“Why…?”

The other person- who he assumed was a nurse- seemed as if she’d been through this already. “You were in an accident on duty. You were attempting to rescue civilians from an office building on the brink of collapse after an attack from a villain. You went back in to rescue the remaining civilians, but the building collapsed faster than had been expected. You were knocked unconscious, probably by debris, and wound up getting trapped under a fallen support pillar. About fifteen minutes later, the other heroes in the area found you buried in the rubble and called an ambulance. We’ve had you in and out of surgery since then.”

Izuku wasn’t sure if say *that again, but slower* was an option.

Instead, he fell quiet.

*God, everything is numb… I got… I got trapped, so…*

Thinking too much was very, very hard.

“You still here?” The nurse asked, a little gentler this time. “This is usually when you’ve been passing out again… that, or screaming. Are you hanging in there, Midoriya?”

He swallowed.

“Y-Yeah.”

*Screaming… why was I screaming…? Wait, what was I thinking of…?*

The nurse stood up a bit more, but didn’t take her eyes off of him. “Just let me know if you want anything, okay?”

*She’s… nice enough. She… wait, did she…?*

“D-Did she make it…?” He said, not even sure where the words were coming from.

The nurse stopped again.

“Midoriya, there… there were seven casualties. Most of the people were safe considering there were only about thirty there, but…”

*Oh… oh.*

Izuku stared ahead at the white walls.

“So she’s dead.”
I let someone die… no, I let… seven people die.


I let seven people die.

“Breathe, breathe, in and out for me, okay? I’m right here.”

Seven people.

“Shit, get the IV ready, he’s stopped responding. Don’t know if he’s gonna start going off again or not.”

I… I let…

“This is the fifth time this has happened, why do you keep telling him all this when he wakes up? He can’t handle it right now!”

“What else am I supposed to tell him? He’s asking questions and I need him to remember me! I’ve worked with him before, you know.”

“Yes, well, he might be a hero but he’s hardly dealt with casualties like this! Look, he’s barely twenty! Even if you have worked with him before, these leg injuries are way worse than anything he usually gets! Do you really want to put that mental strain on him after he’s already been through so much?”

Wait…

“He’s gonna find out sooner or later, the press has been banging on our front door since we admitted him! I just don’t want to lie to him and have him find out too late because that might cause worse problems, and he’s already suffering enough as is.”

“And you think telling him he was part of the reason all those people died is really going to help?”

What did you say about my…?

“He wasn’t the reason, it was just awful circumstance! Have you really been listening to what the news has been saying about it!? Midoriya wasn’t in the best condition to take on that job, but it wasn’t as if anyone else had tried!”

Izuku swallowed, tried to take a deep breath, and let out a small, pathetic whimper.

“What happened to my legs?”

The relief in the air was near palpable, though Izuku wasn’t totally sure why. Someone different- the second person in the room, apparently- came back over to his side after having stepped away from a moment.

“You still here with me?” The new person– maybe the doctor– asked. “That’s good, that’s good… I’m sorry for arguing a bit right over there.”

It hurt to attempt to look towards his feet, but it wasn’t as if he could see straight through what he assumed was the haze of pain medication anyway. After a minute, he stopped trying and simply lay back, ready to listen to whatever else the doctor had to say.

“S’Fine.” he croaked, and Izuku could’ve sworn the voice was coming from somewhere other than
himself. “Just… tell me what’s going on.”

It was getting hard to even keep his eyes open at this point. He was exhausted. Totally and utterly beat.

“Alright, so… the team that found you buried in the rubble found you stuck under some pretty hefty debris. The pillar missed everything above your waist, but… it fell directly on your legs.”

*Right on my legs… appropriate, I guess.*

Izuku made a noise of acknowledgement, and the doctor continued.

“In short, it crushed your legs. We’ve done several reconstruction surgeries already, and we didn’t have a choice but to rod both your femurs, but you haven’t really had enough strength for us to apply any quirk-induced healing without you suffering more repercussions than really worth it.” He sighed. “You’ll have to take part in extensive physical therapy after we get your legs back to a semi-functional point, but… I won’t lie, it won’t be quick. Even with quirks, we’re currently looking at about two to three months for your total recovery time.”

*Oh…*

“That long, huh…?” He mumbled, sounding so distant from himself. “When… when can I go back on duty?”

“Oh, Midoriya…” The doctor’s voice sounded strange. Concerned, maybe. “It’ll be a while. That’s all we really know for sure. There’s… other factors involved in regards to that too, but… we just need to focus on healing right now, okay?”

Izuku let his eyes fall shut, and might’ve acknowledged the last comment before drifting back into drug-induced sleep.

Two days later, he managed to stay awake for more than ten minutes, making it five days in total he’d been out.

Izuku hardly remembered them at all.

The first hour he was alert, they told him the same thing they’d apparently told him every other time-how he’d gotten injured, how bad it was, and how long it would take to heal. It wasn’t as if he was unfamiliar with injury– far from it, really. Broken bones and sterile rooms were something he knew all too well, but he hadn’t been in an accident this bad since, well... ever. The addition of the rods was a new one, too. Already he was mentally planning on meeting with his support team and arranging new upgrades in order to account for potential future instabilities. It was easy to focus on the technicalities– easy to take things in numbers, in practical preparation, but a part of him knew the real reason he was calculating the days he’d be in physical therapy was more than just to recover.

*One thing at a time. Please, just one thing at a time.*

The second day he was awake, someone new came in.

“Midoriya, we just received some reports from your agency that we’re rather concerned about.”

Izuku decided he liked his other nurse better already.

“About what.” He mumbled, only half-paying attention. His agency didn’t have anything to say about him. Or at least, they shouldn’t. He’d been managing his own tasks and workload for months
now with minimal contact from the actual agency heads.

“Will you be truthful with me for a minute?” She asked, almost too bluntly. “This will go a lot smoother if you’re honest.”

Izuku stared at the edge of his blanket and absentmindedly fidgeted with the trim. “Sure.”

She didn’t seem too terribly happy about his response, but carried on nonetheless.

“We have some accounts that you’ve been staying overnight at your office for about the past two weeks. Is this true?”

Izuku turned his lip at the accusation. “Why does it matter?”

“That was a yes or no question, Midoriya.” She spoke, sterner this time.

“Fine. Yes.” He admitted. “Got a problem with that?”

“Yes, I do.” The nurse narrowed her eyes. “Especially when taken into account that you haven’t been showing up to mandatory counseling. The counseling that every pro is required to partake in at least once a month or two. My guess is that you’ve been avoiding it because you know they’ll tell you things you don’t want to hear. Am I wrong?”

Shut up.

“Course you’re wrong.” Izuku mumbled. “I just missed my appointments. Work came up. It’s no big deal.”

*It’s no big deal. Really, it’s not a big deal.*

The nurse pursed her lips, but didn’t demand he change his response. “Either way, because of the amount of casualties sustained in this accident, you’ll be visited by a counselor while you’re in the hospital and over the period where you’ll be administered physical therapy. Depending on the results, it may wind up running far longer than that. Just by looking at the information we have, there’s good reason to believe that you’ve been suffering from more than just physical injuries, and these things need to be addressed if you’re going to be working so intensely in the field.”

…no, wait, that’s not—

“You’re wrong.” Izuku grit his teeth. “I- I’m fine. Just put me back on duty and I’ll be fine!”

The nurse looked up at him again, any trace of a smile gone.

“This isn’t optional, Midoriya.” She repeated. “We’ll be doing a total psych evaluation here soon, and from there finding you appropriate treatment. If you want to go back on duty so bad, you’ll take this seriously.”

She stood up, still staring at him. Izuku hated how small he felt under that gaze.

“We’ll have some lunch brought up to you and then allow some visitors in. Is that all right?”

Izuku’s stomach churned at the thought of anyone seeing him like this, but…

“That’s fine.”

Really, he was too tired to argue anymore.
The hospital food hadn’t improved since his last visit. That being said, it wasn’t awful when compared to the copious amounts of takeout and cheap snacks he’d been living off of recently. With any luck, he’d be out of the hospital soon, though, and free to go back to-

...my apartment. Ah, fuck.

Izuku was almost afraid to see what it looked like, if he was being honest. Even scarier was the thought of trying to clean up while injured as bad as he was.

Maybe… maybe I’ll just book a hotel or something.

He pushed that problem to the back of his mind and focused on his food instead.

Don’t think about the casualties, don’t think about the situation, don’t think of what the media is doing and everything will be just fine. I’ll be fine.

That being said, Izuku couldn’t make it through the rest of the meal. The rest of his time alone was spent in silence, staring at the blanket over his legs and at the plain white walls of the room. Some flowers had managed to make their way into the room with him as well— one in particular stood out to him, taller than the rest and painted in a bright splash of orange. In addition, a few cards were dotted around their bases, many with names he recognized all too well— names he wished had stayed away.

I’m sorry, Mom… I did it again.

He hoped she wasn’t the one visiting him, if nothing else.

“Midoriya, are you done?” Came the familiar voice of the first, and better, nurse. “Do you want anything else to eat…?”

He shook his head, not wanting to get into any further conversation about how much the guilt was getting to his appetite. Thankfully, she seemed to understand, and took the tray away from him without question.

She’s probably seen stuff like this a lot...

“Are you feeling alright enough to have visitors?” She asked, far gentler than he deserved. “You’ve had a couple people who’ve been coming by every day, and I know they’d really like to talk if you’re up to it. I know we’ve got you on pretty heavy pain meds right now, but if you’re feeling okay…”

God, I don’t know why anyone would really bother coming by, but...

“Yeah, it’s fine.”

Izuku wasn’t sure if he’d regret agreeing or not.

After a nod of acknowledgement, she disappeared, and Izuku heard the faint click of the door and the shuffle of quiet feet at the entrance. It was hard to turn his head too much, propped up as it was, but upon doing so almost wished he hadn’t.

No… you’ve gotta be kidding me...

“Izuku…?”

Her voice was as gentle as it had ever been, and Izuku wished he could run out the door.
“What do you want.” He hissed, trying not to tear up at just the sight of her. “Haven’t you done enough…?”

Ochako didn’t seem surprised by his comments, but didn’t back away either. “Eijirou’s here too. Is… is it okay if we stay for a bit? We’ll leave if you really want us to, but…”

In truth, he nearly told them to. But logic won this fight for him.

_They’re the only people who would bother keeping your miserable ass company. Don’t push them away right now._

“S’fine.” He mumbled, hating how broken he sounded. “Do what you want. It’s not like I have anywhere to go anyway.”

They pulled chairs up to his bedside so he could look at them a little easier, and Izuku was a bit glad the pain medication running through his veins was making it harder to put up a fight.

“How are you hanging in there?” Kirishima asked, far more hesitantly than he ever had. “We… we’ve been trying to get a full report on the status of your injuries, but they wouldn’t tell us in any detail how you’ve been holding up. I… I’m glad you’re awake now, though.”

...why?

“I’m gonna be deadweight for at least a couple months.” Izuku paused, a bitter tang gripping the edge of his words. “My legs are a mess, apparently. Got crushed. They had to put rods in or something, and I’ve gotta be in physical therapy for a while. Probably won’t even be able to use my quirk without pain for a while, either.”

It was easy enough to list off the facts.

“I– really, I’m just glad you made it out alive.” Ochako started, yet couldn’t meet Izuku’s eyes. “Izuku, I… I miss you. We’ve been worried about you. I-I was trying to contact you before this all happened, but you wouldn’t pick up my calls, wouldn’t reply to my messages, and I… Izuku, I’ve been terrified…!”

“What reason did I have to answer?” He retorted, trying to pretend his own voice wasn’t wobbling. “Don’t try and act like it’s my fault! You really think I wanted to talk to you after– after what you guys did back there!?”

“Izuku, I—”

“Shut up!”

Izuku’s chest heaved, as if every bit of his remaining energy had been put into those words.

“I’ll– really, I’m just glad you made it out alive.” Ochako started, yet couldn’t meet Izuku’s eyes. “Izuku, I… I miss you. We’ve been worried about you. I-I was trying to contact you before this all happened, but you wouldn’t pick up my calls, wouldn’t reply to my messages, and I… Izuku, I’ve been terrified…”

“What reason did I have to answer?” He retorted, trying to pretend his own voice wasn’t wobbling. “Don’t try and act like it’s my fault! You really think I wanted to talk to you after– after what you guys did back there!?”

“Shut up!”

Izuku’s chest heaved, as if every bit of his remaining energy had been put into those words.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I don’t want to make you hurt like I am…!”
“Izuku, I never said I wanted you out of my life.” Ochako said, her words wavering too. “God, no, not at all. Look, I… I know I fucked up. We fucked up. But I just—” She stopped, and Izuku realized with a tinge of nausea that she was crying too. “You didn’t give me much of a chance to make it up to you, or even just apologize…! I get it, you’re busy, but… I dunno, is it that hard to understand that I might feel like you want me gone, too? I just… I mean, Eijirou and I, we’ve been hanging out a lot, and maybe it has gone beyond just friendship lately, but still! You, you never reach out to me, or to him, or anyone else to my knowledge, and it makes it hard to know what it even is you want!”

*I was… I was just doing my job though, right?*

He didn’t have any words to that– really, it was hard to even process.

“Hey, Midoriya…” Kirishima started, hands clasped tightly in his lap. “I just… I wanna make sure you know that I really am sorry about what happened. I just… dude, I care about you, you know? I wanna make sure you’re okay, really. But, um, like Ochako said… it’s hard to know what you want. I… I can’t give you what we had in third year again, but I still want to be friends, you know? And I want you to be able to reach out to us too. But the few times we’ve reached out to you, it’s always been the same response. I know you’re busy, but… we’re still your friends, right? I need— I want to make up for what we did to you, but I feel like it’s so hard to even try most of the time.”

*Did I… did I really…?*

“It feels like I’ve been pushing you away…?”

For some reason, the thought of that came more as a surprise than it should have. But Ochako and Kirishima’s faces only confirmed his suspicions.

“I’ve been keeping up with the news.” Ochako fumbled with her hands, a slight nervous response. “You’ve been taking more work than you can handle, haven’t you?”

*Am I gonna get this question from everyone…?*

He swallowed. “…yeah.”

She paused for a moment, then continued with a slight change in her tone. “Is it because you wanted to get away from us? Is… is this our fault?”

Izuku’s eyes went wide. “No, I never started this to get away from you guys… I just… I wanted something to keep me going, you know? A reason to even really… get up in the morning.” A part of him almost laughed. “God, that sounds pretty pathetic, doesn’t it? But it’s like… if I’m not working, what’s the point? What else do I have to offer?”

“That’s just the thing though, isn’t it?” Kirishima asked. “Midoriya, you don’t need to give every bit of yourself away to keep going. You’re allowed to have time for yourself. You’re allowed to do the things you enjoy doing.”

“Easy for you to say.” Izuku mumbled. “You’ve got it made. You… you have each other.”

“This is still a new thing, you know—” Ochako started, only to be almost immediately cut off.

“No, I don’t know!” Izuku took a deep breath, trying to retain at least some level of force in his words. “You never told me you were together, and I only found out because you two thought it would be a great idea to go fuck on my *birthday*. Is that supposed to be the way this ‘friendship’ works?”
"We didn’t even do anything on your birthday!" Ochako interrupted. “I-I’m sorry, I was kinda drunk, and we stopped like a minute or two after you left. I know we made a huge mistake, and I’m sorry I didn’t check my calendar before rushing to U.A. that morning, but you didn’t give me a chance to explain myself! I– I know there’s nothing I can really say to make it better, but I just…”

Her voice broke off in a choked sob, and Kirishima wrapped an arm around her shoulders just as she leaned into his chest.

_Why can’t I have something like they have…? Is all the time I spend working really just making things worse for me in the end?_

Then, the gut clenching thought a few seconds later—

_Is this what I want with Kacchan…?_

He hadn’t let himself think of that name since his birthday– now, remembering hurt even more.

“…if you’ll let us, Midoriya…” Kirishima looked up, more sad and serious than Izuku had seen him in a long time. “We’ll find a way to make it up to you. And both of us agreed before you woke up, if there’s any assistance you need because of this, we’ll help out as long as you’re okay with it. Can we… can we start there?”

For the first time since they’d come in, Izuku was legitimately taken aback.

_…wait, can we?_

He swallowed, partly unsure of how to handle that sudden offer.

“I… I mean, the hospital told me that I could have someone come down to stay with me for a week or two after I’m released, but…” He flushed, admittedly embarrassed. “My apartment’s a mess right now. I, uh, I really need to clean up…”

_God, how much am I going to be able to move around with that much clutter after I go home? I hadn’t even thought about that…_

“If you don’t want us in your space, that’s fine, but I wanted to offer.” Kirishima repeated. “I know we fucked up, really, and I know that it’ll take more than that to make up for it, but I don’t want you thinking that you can’t rely on us either.”

Ochako lifted her head from Kirishima’s chest, eyes red, watery, but unwavering. “Yeah… yeah, exactly. Izuku, I can’t expect you to believe me when I say that I care about you because of what we’ve done, but if there’s anything we can do to prove it, I want to at least try.”

_It doesn’t seem… real._

Izuku bit his lip. “Give me a day or two to think on it, please… look, it’s hard enough to- to talk to you as it is. I’m sorry, there’s just… there’s a lot going on.”

“Right, right, sorry…” Ochako nodded, avoiding his eyes. “Do you want us to leave?”

He almost said yes for the second time before remembering that that would lead to nothing but silence and awkward conversations with doctors and nurses and too many technicalities he didn’t want to deal with. At the very least, his friends were a _little_ easier to be around.

“You guys can stay if you want.” He mumbled. “If you’re not busy, anyway. Don’t wanna hold you
“We set aside time to come out here.” Kirishima assured him. “Trust me, we’re fine in that area. And, well…” He paused. “Was there anything you wanted to know from us?”

From you…?

“Uh…” He trailed off, unsure of where to really go. “Has anything major happened in the past few days…? On the news, I guess, or just whatever.”

I don’t really know what I’m looking to hear, though.

Kirishima sighed. “Honestly, the only thing the media has been talking about is your accident. They still don’t have details, but between the body count and the fact that you got hurt, there’s been a lot of, uh… speculation.”

“Hey, he doesn’t need to know about the crap they’ve been saying.” Ochako grit her teeth. “Don’t worry about the media. They don’t know shit.”

Izuku’s eyes went wide. “Wait, what have they been saying…?”

Kirishima paled and shook his head. “She’s right. Don’t worry about it right now. Shouldn’t have mentioned it. Sorry.”

Great. One more thing to deal with once I get out of here.

“That photoshoot you did a month or so ago finally went public, though. It was getting real good traction.”

“Oh, that…” Izuku groaned. “God, I can’t believe they roped me into that thing. Never again.”

I wonder if Kacchan ever saw it, though… fuck, I hope he’s okay. I don’t wanna freak him out at all because of this mess.

“Hm? What’d you say?” Ochako leaned forward, and Izuku’s heart jumped to his throat as he realized he’d probably started mumbling again.

“O-Oh, nothing.” He stuttered. “Sorry, sorry… um… do you know if the other people in the incident are doing alright?”

At that, he actually received a more positive response from Kirishima. “Yeah. Actually, aside from you and the other people who didn’t make it out, the other twenty-four are doing just fine. Apparently, one of the people in the survivors group reported you telling him to get everyone else out and away before running back in to try and get the rest.”

“I did…?”

Then… was it really all my fault that everyone else died? Did I do all I could’ve done? God, I really don’t remember…

“Yeah. Well, that’s the one good thing the media’s been reporting on.” He said, just before stopping and shaking his head. “Agh, sorry, no media talk right now.”

And suddenly, for whatever reason, Ochako put a hand on Kirishima’s leg and whispered something in his ear. A hint of confusion fell across his face, but he stood up and left the room after a quick, awkward nod and a hand rubbing the back of his neck.
Ochako looked over at him again, but this time, there was something different in those warm eyes.

“Sorry, I just didn’t want him to listen in on this. Don’t- don’t worry about it.” Ochako sighed, almost as if she were preparing for something. “Well, we went to U.A. for a summer practice lesson again.” She started, hands clasped tightly in her lap. “I helped out Bakugou for a while, and he’s… he’s a good one. I get why you like him so much.”

“Shit, I did miss that, didn’t I…” Izuku cursed. “Was he doing okay? How is he?”

Ochako smiled, albeit sadly. “Honestly, I don’t think he’d heard the news yet. More than anything, he seemed kinda confused… I might be wrong, but I think he was hoping to see you there. There was this one new move he showed me- pretty sure he called it his ‘AP shot’ or something, but it was funny. It… it reminded me of one of yours.”

“He really, really likes you.”

Those words came back unbidden, and it was all Izuku could do to keep from smiling like an idiot at the thought of Katsuki doing something to emulate him. But the fact that he was wanting to see him there…

*I hope he doesn’t look up to me too much. Maybe I am a pro, but I… god, after letting everyone die in that accident, how can I ever hope to be a decent example to him?*

Iizu pushed his extraneous feelings away and found a logical response instead. “I wish I could’ve gone.”

There was a brief spot of silence, but before it could go on too long, Ochako spoke up again.

“Hey, Izuku…” She started, a little quieter this time. “You don’t have to answer me, but… um…”

Wait, what could you possibly be asking me that’s—

“Are you in love with him?”

The drop of a pin could’ve been heard in the shocked silence that followed.

“Why- why are you asking me that?” Izuku sputtered, trying to pretend his hands weren’t shaking. “How did you–”

“It’s okay.” She said, looking all too worried herself. “It’s- I’m not going to yell at you or anything, I’ve just been seeing the signs, okay? I know what you look like when you’re in love. And I… I can tell he means a lot to you.”

*Stop, please, I can’t afford to think about him too much right now…!*

“I didn’t ask to fall for him!” Izuku’s voice cracked, every one of his worn walls going back up. “I didn’t mean for this to happen, okay!? I know I’m messed up, and I’m sorry! I’ve been trying to make these feelings go away!”

“Calm down, okay?” Ochako stood up, taking a step closer, and Izuku felt himself shrink back under her presence. “It’s… it’s okay. I promise.”

*No, it’s not…!*

“S-Stop… what do you w-want from me?” He croaked. “Don’t… please, don’t say that. I can’t have him. I won’t have him. Kacchan’s sixteen, and I can’t… please, don’t tell me it’s okay!”
“I’m not saying you should go have sex with him or anything!” Ochako exclaimed. “Just that… it’s okay for you to feel that way. I don’t want you to go pushing away your own feelings again because you think it’s for the best.”

Again? Wait…

“You… you knew about…?”

“You and Eijirou?” She finished. “Yeah. I mean, he told me before we started our whole thing a few weeks ago, but honestly… during third year, it was easy to see that you had fallen at least a little bit for him. And a part of me thought that the reason you started isolating yourself was because he didn’t want you as a romantic partner. I was scared to approach you about it cause I didn’t want to make things awkward, but the only reason Eijirou and I got together to begin with was because I thought you were over him enough…! I-I mean, I’ve liked him for a while, but I never wanted to hurt you any more because of those feelings, even after you’d kinda drifted away from us. But… I dunno, I think it was after the sports fest? Something about you… the way you were talking about him, the way you watched him… it felt the same as when you’d been in love with Eijirou.”

At this point, it felt futile to even try and build his defenses back up. Izuku felt as if he’d been laid bare, feelings he didn’t know he’d had and feelings he’d shoved so far back surfacing all at once.

She continued.

“Bakugou… he likes you, Izuku. He wants to be around you.” Ochako sat back down, trying to smile, to be strong when he couldn’t. “I can’t tell you what exactly he’s feeling towards you, but it’s so much stronger than just simple admiration. I just… I don’t want your feelings towards him to be another reason for you to beat yourself up. You’re allowed to be friends, you know. You’re allowed to want to spend time with him.”

Izuku let himself lean back into his bed, just trying to let everything sink in.

“I didn’t mean for this to happen.” He repeated, trying not to cry again. “Really, I…”

“You don’t have to apologize.” Ochako said, daring to rest a hand close to Izuku’s own. “It’s okay. I promise.”

Is it…?

“I… I miss him.” Izuku mumbled after a long moment. “He… last time I saw him, he gave me a hug, and I just… oh, shit.”

“Hm?” Ochako scooted a little closer. “You okay?”

Izuku swallowed. “He… he gave me something on my birthday. Well, two things…” He paused, heart racing. “There were… a couple of spa coupons, and a note with, um, his phone number.”

“Wait, he gave you his phone number!?!”

Izuku flinched at her sudden reaction, unsure of how to really take the shocked expression on her face. “U-Uh… yeah? He said if I wanted to schedule training with him at any point to just text him and work something out… wait, what’s that look supposed to mean…?”

“God, I forgot how much of a dumbass you are. Dammit, Izuku.” She buried her head in her hands, mumbling under her breath. “You- you really think that he gave you that just to schedule training?”
“I mean, yes, why else would he—”

Oh.

Oh.

Izuku went beet-red all the way to the tips of his ears.

“No, no, h-he didn’t…” He stammered, trying to pretend his heart wasn’t threatening to hammer out of his chest. “In his note, he just said that it was for… training…”

Ochako’s eyes looked as if they’d rolled all the way to the back of her head. “Do you really need me to spell this out for you? He missed you at practice. He went out of his way to do what I failed at doing on your birthday. He gave you a hug, he gave you a note, and he gave you his goddamn phone number. That’s not even mentioning the fact that you have a pet name for him! Please, do you really think anyone in the know is gonna have any question about who Kacchan is!?”

I… I-I can’t…!

“Stop. Please.” Izuku forced out, the sheer amount of realization too much to handle. “Really, I can’t deal with this right now. Later. I… I don’t wanna think about this at the moment.”

Beside him, the heart monitor was racing.

The panic in his eyes must’ve been enough for Ochako to finally drop the subject. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have pushed.”

Izuku was trying to catch his breath again, to at least get himself to a more steady, slightly less dizzy place.

“If I say stop, then please, just… don’t ask me more.” He swallowed. “I’m… look, it’s not easy to focus right now. I’m still doped up on pain meds and I can’t really take in all of this, okay?”

Ochako dipped her head, a hint of apology on her lips. “I get it. You… you really do look exhausted, Izuku. Do you want me to go?”

Well, um…

“If you go now, will you come back tomorrow?” He asked, so much quieter than before. “I-I don’t wanna impede on your time, but it’s… well, I’m, uh…”

Lonely.

Ochako seemed to understand without having to hear him finish. “For sure. If you’re okay with it, I’d be more than happy to visit you. If you can, think on our offer, okay? Both me and Eijirou want you to be as comfortable as possible right now, and we don’t mind taking the time to help you with whatever you need after you’re discharged. Promise.”

As upset as he still was with his friends, there was a wave of relief that swept through him at her words. “I’ll try to think about it. And, uh… tell Kirishima I said bye.”

There wasn’t anything else he needed to say. Ochako cracked a small, slightly wobbly smile, and nodded. “I will. And, well, thanks for letting us talk to you. You’re… you’re a good person, Izuku. Too good.” At that, she almost laughed. “Well, we’ll see you tomorrow. I hope the rest of the day is alright.”
And on that note, she left and shut the door with a gentle click.

Izuku let out a breath he hadn’t known he’d been holding.

Truth be told, he wasn’t sure what to do- where to go, what to think, how to deal with everything around him. There were still too many factors at play, too many things spiraling outside of his control. But as he let himself sink back into his bed again, drowsy eyes falling shut, a vivid orange splotch from before drifted into the corner of his vision.

_Huh… it kinda looks like Kacchan…_

For the first time in months, the name sung through his heart a little lighter than before.

That night, he dreamt of blonde hair, of crimson eyes, of warm hugs and winning smiles.

And that night, he dreamt of hope, too.

“Hey, hey, easy there! Careful, he’s gotta relax once we get upstairs. I’ve got him, just a little further!”

Kirishima let out a grunt and a laugh as Izuku fell into his arms, trying not to topple backwards from his sudden weight. “Alright, buddy. House key?”

Now supported by Kirishima’s steady grip, Izuku managed to dig through his pocket and hand off his key, praying that his friends wouldn’t run off as soon as he saw the interior of his apartment. And as they got closer, he was almost certain that he could smell it from outside.

_Fuck, this really is bad. How on earth did my neighbors not report me?_

A small part of him was glad he wouldn’t be able to clean up much of it himself.

“Good luck.” Izuku pressed the key into Kirishima’s waiting hand. “And don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“I’m a hero! I can take on whatever it is you throw at me.” Kirishima proclaimed. “C’mon, dust, show me what you’ve—”

The door scooted open, only to get stuck almost immediately.

“Oh, god… dude, this is awful.” Kirishima’s nose scrunched up, and he let out a pathetic half-wheeze. “Shit, man, I’m not even that clean, but this sucks ass.”

“You offered, I said yes. And I did throw out everything in the fridge before I left.” Izuku glanced up at his friend, who looked about ready to drop him right outside his doorway. “So, sorry?”

Before Kirishima could respond, a familiar pair of footsteps greeted them. Ochako appeared from the staircase with Izuku’s token from the hospital in hand, took one look at the sad sight in front of her, and had some manner of real fear fall across her face.

“Are… are you gonna go in?” She said, slightly paler than before. “Wait- fuck, is that smell coming from in there…?”

Izuku leaned back into Kirishima’s slightly shaking arms and nodded. “No point in waiting around, right?”
It wound up being another minute or so before they were able to pry the door open again, and Izuku had to sit down outside the door while Ochako and Kirishima fought their way in. Already the fact that he could barely stand for more than a few minutes was becoming readily apparent in his newly-discharged life, the fresh rods in his femurs making it abnormally difficult to do everything he’d never had issues with before. That being said, he’d never been more thankful to have Ochako in particular as his friend when they drove up to his apartment complex and remembered the four flights of steep stairs up to Izuku’s third floor apartment. Slowly, they had floated and carried Izuku up the stairs, an event that he was not particularly happy about taking part in. It had already taken him a couple weeks to agree to their offer to help, and being around them was still… very tough.

“I’m gonna put the flowers on the coffee table, is that okay?” Ochako asked.

“Yeah, sure.”

At that, Izuku went to stand up, only to immediately remember why he had sat down in the first place. Walking- and especially standing up- was a bitch to deal with.

After nearly three weeks in the hospital, he was dying to get more use out of his mending legs. His physical therapist had made sure to beat it into his skull that he wasn’t allowed to do anything more than walk for a several minutes at a time, and that absolutely no running, jumping, or stair climbing was allowed. Much to his chagrin, it would be a slow recovery. And while they were currently projecting for him to be able to walk a bit better in a week or so, it would be at least two months before he would be allowed to go back on active duty. Even then, he’d been told again and again that it would only be part time for a while until he displayed the capacity to work on his own schedule again. That meant his hours would be monitored even more closely now, his office was a restricted as a no-sleep space, and he had to get a set amount of rest before coming to work. So much stricter than Izuku would have liked, but a necessity, apparently.

“Ugh, god. Eijirou, did you bring the good smelling spray?”

“Yeah, yeah, lemme grab it…”

The worst thing by far, though, were the mandatory and all-too-frequent counseling sessions he was given no choice but to take part in if he wanted to retain his hero eligibility. Admittedly, not much progress had been made in the past few weeks with it in regards to his overall issues- which he’d been told time and time again were, in fact, issues— but coping with the failure of losing seven people at once in that mission had become slightly easier, at least.

“Okay, you can come in now!” Ochako called out. “We’ve got our work cut out for us.”

Kirishima met him at the doorway to help him up and inside. It was a short walk to the couch, and after pushing aside pillows and magazines that had piled up away, he sat down to be met with the squeak of old cushions beneath his weight.

“Shit, okay.” Kirishima rubbed the back of his head. “Well, I’d imagine you want somewhere to sleep tonight. Think we should start with your bedroom?”

“That’d be great.” Izuku nodded. “Just, uh, lemme know if there’s anything I can do.”

Ochako rolled her eyes. “You know you’re not supposed to be carrying stuff around. We’ll take care of it, so you just sit tight, okay?”

*Useless even in my own home. Great.*

Not that it was anything unexpected, really. Izuku had known from the start that there was no way
he’d be able to move back into his apartment with the state he’d left it in, but it still hurt to look at all
the clutter and not be able to do a damn thing about it.

_Huh… I wonder, did I leave the TV remote around here?_

There was no way he’d be putting on the news right now- not only would it be hard to listen to all
the incidents he couldn’t be out there solving, but for weeks, the media had been reporting on his
current conditions and throwing controversy after controversy over his actions back and forth. He’d
only consented to telling the media when about he would be back on duty and nothing more, yet
even so, the brunt of the reports were far too much for him to handle at any given moment.

That being said, there _had_ been a certain channel he’d been watching more than anything else in the
hospital.

After a few minutes of pushing aside random junk that had amassed itself on his small coffee table
and on the floor just within his reach, Izuku found the remote and turned on the TV, flipping through
news broadcasts till he found what he’d been searching for. A bit of contentment made its way into
his face as he leaned back and let himself try and relax a little bit more.

_“This time, our contestants will be cooking up a meal with…”_

For some reason, the cooking channel had become oddly therapeutic. Izuku was well aware he was
an awful cook himself, but something about seeing a beautiful dish come together from simple and
sometimes odd ingredients was strangely amazing. Best of all, it was completely disjointed from the
news and its endless arguing. Izuku would most certainly rather watch someone fuck up with the ice
cream machine than botch a real mission right now.

But after a good ten minutes or so, the show went to a commercial break, leaving him
absentmindedly scanning the stuff right in front of him and organizing what little he could. Loose
leaf papers were one of the biggest culprits of the mess, so he began sorting through them, setting
aside those that mattered (which weren’t many) and those that didn’t (everything else.) It was simple
enough- at least this was _something_ he could do- until a too-familiar, too-valuable note found its way
into his hand.

_Oh my god, how did I forget this was here?_

Colorful spa coupons spilled out onto his lap as he pulled the note to his chest and reread the
message that had branded itself into his brain.

_“Kacchan…”_ He murmured, choking up a bit after all this time. _“Are you… are you doing okay?”_

And yet, upon looking at that telling number on the bottom of the screen, just begging to be used,
Izuku found himself pulling his phone out of his pocket before he realizing that he’d even moved to
grab it.

_Shit, it’s been over a month…! I hope he doesn’t think I forgot about him, or I don’t care, or…_

He stopped right after he typed in the number, thumbs hovering over the keyboard.

_Wait… wait, what am I doing? I can’t… I can’t train right now. I can’t schedule a practice with him
while I can’t really leave my own home. Would he even want to talk to me? What do I even say?_

But upon looking at the note again, Katsuki’s poorly crossed out writing told him all he needed to
know. Everything he’d avoided comprehending before.
Crooked fingers smoothed out the small note, and he reread the parts he’d ignored again.

“Call or text if you ever wanna… talk for a bit…?”

_I… I kinda wanna talk, if that’s okay…_

There was still a moment he took to gather his courage- yet after another look at the note, his fingers hit the keyboard.

_**Please don’t think too badly of me for taking so long, Kacchan. I’m getting better. I promise.**_

On his coffee table sat the one thing he’d wanted to bring home from the hospital– the bright orange flowers that had kept him company the whole time he’d been there.

They were bold. Strong. _**Brilliant.**_

Izuku smiled, if only a little.

_[Sent]_

**Chapter End Notes**

_/wipes tear my son is growing_

Also, i dont usually link other stuff, but theres a couple songs i was listening to while writing this that are pretty relevant- so if you havent heard, _Burn Out_ by Imagine Dragons, and _Hospital Flowers_ by Owl City. both great songs.

Twitter is @aeronines, and thank you to my wonderful beta @aetherlite and my friend _baku_bean_ for all the extra help!
Healing 101: A three-part guide to stop worrying about your crush

Chapter Summary

ft. special guests “i have no social skills”, “everything is solved with ice cream and spa days”, and “look im mildly responsible”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Three days after the incident, Pro Hero Valiant remains silent to the press. The hospital staff have continuously been refusing access to him, and Pro Heroes Uravity and Red Riot have been at the forefront of trying to deter the news from reporting on him. Could his injuries have been worse than anticipated? Will he be suspended from duty for his carelessness and lack of judgement on this mission?”

Katsuki pulled his blanket tighter around him, numb eyes still staring at his laptop screen as the newscasts rolled.

“There’s been some speculation that the young hero has gotten in over his head this past month. While there’s been a rather ridiculous amount of coverage of Valiant’s exploits lately, it seems a crucial part of that had been overlooked- though he has been incredibly present and active on duty, looking back at these broadcasts implies that he may have been far overworking himself and simply throwing himself into missions in order to make himself look better for the next round of hero rankings. Before the incident, Valiant was projected to make it into the top twenty, far above his current spot of number seventy-six. But if he’s unable to recover from this incident soon and rectify his status, then there’s no doubt his overall reputation will continue to collapse.”

His tears had left by this point, all dried and shriveled away to nothing. Not as if anyone would notice at this ungodly hour, not when he’d perfected the art of shoving away his feelings long ago.

“It’s a shame, really. Pro Hero Valiant has shown so much potential over this past year. Ever since his debut, he’s been pushing past every challenge that’s gotten in his way. But this massive blunder of his is sure to spark debate over the conditions of active duty Pros in regards to the monitoring of their health on duty. Valiant should not have failed. On any other mission like this one, there’s almost no doubt that he would have made it out with at most one, maybe two casualties. But seven? That is an absolutely unacceptable number.”

Katsuki grit his teeth, trying to avoid clenching his trembling fists and smashing a hole through his laptop. He wasn’t sure why he was still watching- all the reports were so ridiculously, so horribly wrong.

They don’t know him. They don’t know Deku.

It hurt.

He’d missed training the day after he’d been informed about the incident. Shut himself in his room, ignored the knocking at his door until it went away, and turned on every news station he could find. Someone had to be understanding. Someone had to be sympathetic to Deku’s situation. But each
one- each one- had been doused in nothing but misunderstanding, criticism, and bashing of the person he’d come to look up to more than any other.

*Leave him alone, don’t talk about him like this anymore!*  

Katsuki buried his head in his knees, pulled them closer to his chest, and choked back the hoarse sob crawling up his throat.

Absentmindedly, he remembered he’d forgotten to eat.

*I’ll get food in the morning. For now, I’ll just… try and sleep.*

But sleep came in fitful bouts and broken, frantic nightmares, and Katsuki only escaped after scrambling out from his bed and falling straight onto his bedroom floor. Blood and broken limbs danced through his head, Deku’s crumpled body at the forefront of his vision.

*No more, no more…!*  

A glance at his clock told him it was only a quarter past five- almost three hours before summer training would start.

*Shit.*  

After one more hour of lying in his bed and staring up at the ceiling, Katsuki went down to the showers and hoped that at least some of his worries could be washed away, too.

Practice was difficult, to say the least. Just as yesterday’s had been. He remained quiet too much of the time, drew away from his classmates, his friends- even Camie hardly attempted to approach him after he shook his head and turned away.

Three hours in, they broke for lunch. Katsuki grabbed his food and scooted off to a small bench on the far side of their practice field, trying to give off the *I don’t wanna talk* vibe as much as possible.

However, there was a certain someone who never seemed to understand his *very obvious* body language.

“You look like shit.”

Right on *fucking* cue.

Katsuki glanced up at Todoroki, worn eyes saying everything he needed. “Fuck off.”

Todoroki sat down next to him instead. Katsuki was too tired to move.

“How long is it going to take you to bounce back?” He asked. “I’m bored. You usually put up a good fight, but your coordination has been awful today.”

“Shut up.” He mumbled, all the fight gone from his voice.

They were quiet for a few moments- or at least, right until Todoroki thought to open his mouth again.

“I didn’t think this would hit you this hard.” He continued. “What’s the problem? Heroes get hurt all the time.”

“Is this supposed to be some sort of *comfort*?” Katsuki scowled. “Don’t quit your day job.”
“Bakugou, you do realize I’m still in school.” He started with a hint of confusion. “I don’t have a–”

“It’s an expression.”

Silence.

“...oh.”

*Go away. Please.*

But Todoroki just sighed, steepling his hands in his lap. “Then, is it cause he’s hot?”

Katsuki’s head whipped around at that remark, a furious blush rising over his cheeks. “The fuck is that supposed to mean!”

He shrugged. “You masturbate to him, don’t you?”

“Oh my god, we are not having this conversation right now.” Katsuki groaned, burying his head in his hands. “For fuck’s sake, I–”

“Camie told me that you do.” He carried on, completely ignoring Katsuki’s cries of protest. “And Yaoyorozu said she was coerced into making you a *self-help* device?”

“We are not talking about my masturbation habits, and we are especially not talking about the damn dildo!”

Katsuki found himself staring up at Todoroki not two seconds later, having yelled a bit louder than he should’ve. “Shit, sorry, I–”

“You’re really not that quiet.” He added unhelpfully. “But thanks for doing it before I go to sleep, anyway. Doesn’t usually keep me up.”

There really was no good reaction to this.

“Could you have possibly picked a worse time to want to talk about this?” The question strained on the edge of his voice. “Look, I’m just...”

*Tired. Scared. Angry.*

“...really not in the mood.” He finished, voice dropping again.

“Then why does this have you so worked up?” Todoroki repeated, pressing the question a bit harder this time. “It’s not like you to get so... I don’t know, weirdly quiet?”

Katsuki didn’t answer that one, either.

“Proving my point, then. Fine.” Todoroki sighed. “For the record, I do think that now is the time to talk about your masturbation habits. It’s the first thing that’s gotten a real reaction out of you in days.”

“Yeah, maybe cause it’s something *really fucking personal.*” He hissed. “Wanna tell me what you’re puttin’ up your ass? Call it even?”

“To be honest, I haven’t really tried anal-”

“Actually, nevermind. Forget I said anything.” Katsuki shuddered, trying to erase the image of
Todoroki awkwardly fumbling with his dick on his tatami-mat floor. For fuck’s sake, he probably had weird-ass, bi-colored pubes too.

And then, back to silence. Great.

“You know, you’re not being very helpful.” Todoroki muttered. “I asked you a simple question. I’m trying to make you feel better.”

Katsuki gave him an incredulous stare, mouth hanging open just a bit. “You came up to me and told me I looked like shit. What, am I supposed to say thanks?”

Todoroki looked back over at him for a moment, contemplating something. “I was thinking something more along the lines of ‘You’re right, I’ll stop being moody and quit pouting over him.’”

“First, I’m not pouting. Second, it’s… not that easy.”

He doesn’t get it… god, nobody here does…!

But instead of just accepting that answer like he should have, Todoroki decided it was a great idea to run his mouth again.

“Why?”

The fuck?

Katsuki was getting more confused by the second. “What do you mean, why?”

He shrugged. “Like, why isn’t it easy? He’s just another hero.”

Katsuki’s nails dug into his knees, and he bit his lip to keep from protesting too much. “He’s not.” He insisted. “He’s… yeah, maybe heroes get injured all the time, but this was different. They all-everyone keeps blaming him for fucking up the mission! I- I mean, he probably shouldn’t have, but the news keeps making god awful assumptions about him. For fuck’s sake, he’s still unconscious!”

He didn’t notice the crack in his own voice.

“Is it his health that you’re mostly worried about, then?” Todoroki pried. “They said he’s going to make a full recovery. I get being upset over the media, but you seem more anxious over him as a person rather than frustrated about the state of his public image. Does that make sense?”

“I mean, duh.” His foot rapped against the ground. “Of course I’m more worried about his health. They still don’t know how long it’ll be for him to really make a recovery, much less go back on duty!”

“There’s nothing you can really do to help, though-”

“You think I don’t know that?!”

Katsuki shot to his feet, chest heaving. “You… you really think I don’t know that? Why the hell do you think it’s fucking hard to deal with!? Maybe, just maybe, it’s possible that I give two shits about him! Maybe because it’s pissing me the hell off to see his name dragged through the mud while he can’t say a damn word about it! Maybe it’s because he- because I–!”

Because… because, what?

“I- I didn’t ask for this conversation.” Katsuki finished, chest heaving. “Lunch is over in ten minutes.
I’m leaving.”

Yet, as soon as he turned away-

“You told me you weren’t going to accept my bullshit back then, right?” Todoroki found his way up and over to Katsuki’s side, supposedly still not understanding the meaning of *leave*.

He clenched his teeth. “Yeah. So?”

There was a hand on his shoulder, and Todoroki stepped out in front of him, blocking any route to run away. “I won’t accept yours, either.”

“You trying to tell me I can’t be concerned?” Katsuki hissed, shoving him off. “Don’t try and compare this to your *family drama*.”

“I didn’t say that.” Todoroki muttered. “Don’t talk about my family like that, either. All I’m trying to say is that you’re making too big of a deal out of this. He’s going to be okay. And you need to trust that he’s gonna be okay. Would he want you acting like it’s the end of the world?”

*I do trust Deku, don’t I…?*

Katsuki took a deep breath, and a step back. “What are you trying to pull?”

Again, Todoroki shrugged. “For the record, I’m trying to be a good friend. I don’t like seeing you in such a pitiful state. Moping isn’t a good look on you.” He paused. “I’ve said my piece. I’m done talking. It’s up to you to decide how you wanna handle this, though- that’s all.”

And finally, fucking *finally*, he walked away.

*Up to me, huh…?*

Though those words haunted him for the rest of the training session, it felt a little easier to move than before.

He didn’t retreat to his room until later that night, and managed to spend a bit more time around his classmates. Not that it was much- Katsuki found himself hanging out mostly at the edge of the common room after practice, watching the commotion while maybe making a side comment or two. It was something, anyway. More than he’d done the last few days. Camie gave him a few looks from the other side of the room, and Yaoyorozu appeared as concerned as ever.

But Todoroki’s words- his *challenge*- remained firmly seated in the back of Katsuki’s mind for hours.

*Up to me to decide…*

It wasn’t as if he hadn’t tried to convince himself that Deku would be alright. He knew the facts that had been provided. Knew that logically, yes, he would recover.

*Then why is this so hard?*

Katsuki wanted more information. More defined timeframes and more detailed analysis of his injuries. Really, just…

*Anything.*

Maybe that desperation for more knowledge was why he’d been so wrapped up in watching all the
god-awful reports. No one really knew what was going on behind those hospital doors, but he’d been pretending that there might be a kernal of information in the news that he wasn’t already aware of.

*I just... I don’t wanna see Deku hurting any longer.*

And as wonderfully overwhelming as that hug between them had been, there was something telling in Deku’s voice. It wasn’t what Katsuki remembered from his time in the hospital after his rescue, or even during that first training match.

He hated to admit it, but Deku hadn’t seemed… strong.

*I have no clue what’s been going on in his head, but it felt like he was at his limit. I’ve never heard him sound so weak on TV, much less in person.*

His dreams that night were still chaotic, still intense, but more bearable than before.

Camie came up to him the next morning before practice.

“Hey, Baku.” She started, more hesitant than he’d ever heard her. “Would you be up to seeing a movie tonight? Just, you know, get off school grounds for a bit?”

She was fiddling with her fingers, looking a little more nervous than usual.

*My choice to decide how to handle this.*

Katsuki managed to crack a wobbly half-smile. “What time?”

The relief that swept over her face was palpable, and before he could react, she threw her arms around him in an overdramatic hug.

“Whatever’s good for you, babe. My schedule’s open.” She hugged him close, her iron grip near suffocating. “I’m here for you, okay? If you ever need some ice cream, or a massage, or wanna paint your nails or anything, I’m your girl. I gotchu.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Katsuki murmured, but with a little more life than before. “I know.”

They wound up going to see a movie later that night after some consideration in regards to the genre. Any romance movies were out- neither of the two felt the need to address that particular subject- and Katsuki quickly turned down a new action-adventure film, too. Burning buildings didn’t exactly fall along the lines of what he wanted to see right now.

So, comedy it was.

And for the time he was in that theatre, Katsuki managed to think a little less about his looming problem than before.

After Camie dragged him out of the theater, Katsuki found himself accompanying her on a late-night window shopping trip. With the street washed in the low glow of lamp posts, the soft sounds of passersby filling the air, and his best friend hanging off his arm, it was easy to forget everything else.

“Oh, look!” Camie gasped, pointing ahead of them. “That’s such a cute flower stand… c’mon, let’s go check it out!”

Katsuki couldn’t argue with her when she had that enthusiasm in her voice, and so off they went. It really was a cute little stand- small, but built with a painted magenta frame lit by the warm streetlights
and framed by small rows of bright flowers. Camie quickly fell into an excitable conversation with the shopkeeper, and though he didn’t really have anything to add, it was nice to hear the familiar energy in her voice that been missing for the past week. And with it, some semblance of normalcy began to return as well.

It was a few more minutes until Camie finished her conversation and turned back towards him.
“Baku, what do you think of this one?”

He stepped forward, a slight smile cresting over his lips. The shopkeeper had grabbed a large flower, colored with a vivid orange, and held it up for them to see.

“It’s nice.” He nodded. “There a reason you’re interested in flowers all of a sudden?”

At that, Camie hesitated. “Ah, well… yes? But thanks. Just wanted to make sure you liked it.”

He snorted. “Yeah, okay. But if you’re looking for one to give Yaoyorozu, I feel like she’d want something a bit different.”

“Good thing it’s not for her, then!” She said, and turned back to the shopkeeper. One minute and the pass of a credit card later found them walking away, strangely empty handed.

“Well, gonna tell me what that was about or not?” Katsuki nudged her. “You were talking for a while.”

Much of the conversation from the other people out had begun to die down, leading into a cooler, more intimate quiet.

Camie sighed.

“Baku, you… you do know that sending people flowers is common practice if they’re in the hospital, right?”

Every muscle in his body froze at the word hospital.

“You wouldn’t happen to have a relative or something in the hospital, would you…?” Katsuki’s voice faltered, and he saw the shake of her head coming from a mile away.

“It was Momo’s idea first.” She started. “To… to send Valiant something. We may not have a direct line of contact with him, but Aizawa knows some people who’ve been visiting him and he told us that we might be able to get a little something from our class up to Valiant. They’re not really taking much up to his room right now to avoid clutter, and just about everything is being redirected to his agency’s P.O. box, but we figured sending something might be kinda nice.”

“And you didn’t think to tell me about this?” Katsuki rasped, growing quieter by the second. “Why…?”

Camie shifted awkwardly besides him. “I mean, I was going to talk to you about it more earlier, but you, uh, wouldn’t let us in your room, and I didn’t want you to be thinking about him too much tonight…”

Katsuki’s stomach turned.

*What all did I miss?*

“Are- are there any updates on how he’s doing?” He asked, sounding so much smaller than before.
“Is he awake yet?”

“Ask Momo.” She said. “I… well, really, I didn’t ask for all the details. But I think she knows a little more than I do? She’s been talking with Aizawa about Valiant a lot lately, trying to figure out how to get in at least a little bit of contact with him.”

Katsuki’s heart sunk to his stomach. “…okay.”

They walked in silence for a few minutes back towards their campus, filled only with the gentle hum of the city and the chirp of crickets under the moonlight.

“I know it’s not much, but… really.” Camie started. “You can talk to me if you want a bit of distraction, okay? I know you’re hurting. Seeing anyone you care about in his position can’t be easy.

He didn’t respond to that statement. Couldn’t, really.

*How I decide to deal with this is up to me, but still... none of these ways are easy!*

Despite that, Katsuki continued to hang out with Camie for the rest of the night, and found most everyone else asleep or winding down when they returned to the dorms. They’d planned on stopping by and seeing Momo before going their separate ways, but found that effort fruitless after discovering she was asleep, too. Katsuki resigned himself to getting more information in the morning, and fell asleep after an hour or two of restless fidgeting.

That night, his dreams were filled with Deku, with smoke, with orange petals stained red with blood.

Todoroki complimented him in practice the next day.

“That was a nice pivot.” He remarked, approaching him after a quick spar. “You’re more on your game today.”


“So you admit you have a problem, then?” Todoroki raised an eyebrow. “Good, good. Progress.”

“Oh, fuck off.”

The rest of the day crept by in eager anticipation. Yaoyorozu had been busy with her own sections of the training, and Katsuki wasn’t sure that he’d be able to handle any new news during their lunch break. That meant both the morning and afternoon were out of bounds, and that he’d be (hopefully) getting his news after training was done for the day. Though it was still practice, summer training meant more fun and a more intense focus on combat- a good way for him to get energy out and focus on things *not* named Deku.

Yet, after class, Yaoyorozu managed to escape *again*, leaving him no choice but to wait around for whenever she’d be coming back. A part of him wondered if her sudden absence had to do with the flowers- when had they been sent, anyway? Yet another was well aware it could just be personal business, and that… that was fine, too.

Katsuki was in the middle of inhaling a crappy dinner when he saw her again, and nearly choked on his food when she appeared in the dormitory entrance. After he’d managed to clean up and make slightly less of a fool of himself, he rushed out to her before she could vanish on him once more.

“Yaoyorozu, I–” He started, only to be cut off by a look of surprise and relief.
“Oh, I was about to go look for you.” She greeted. “How are you holding up? You look a little better than you did the other day. Sorry I haven’t gotten to talk to you much, I’ve been… ah, doing a lot of running around.”

He shook his head, waving it off. “Don’t worry, no big deal. I just… well-” Katsuki took a quick glance around the area and noticed an emptier spot in the common room corner. “If you’ve got a minute, could we, um, talk about him?”

No need to specify which ‘him’ he was talking about.

Yaoyorozu nodded, her face falling a bit. “For sure. I, ah, actually wanted to talk to you about him too.”

That piqued his interest. “Shit, really?”

She nodded, and gestured over to the corner. “Wanna go sit down for a bit?

Some of their classmates were still milling about the common room, but no one interrupted them on their way over but with a nod or a smile, which Yaoyorozu so easily returned. Katsuki himself was struggling to just keep a straight face, though the incessant tapping of his fingers against his leg was sure to give anyone a real hint about how he was doing.

“You comfortable?” She asked again, sitting down and following suit beside him. A quick nod from him confirmed it, and she took it as a confirmation to begin. “Good, okay… that’s a start.”

“Is the news really that bad?” Katsuki asked, though there was no hiding the fear in his voice. “You’re acting like I’m about to break or something. I ain’t that fragile, you know.”

Yaoyorozu fixed him with a knowing stare, as if she could see right past his defenses. “Really, is that so?”

“Oh, shut up.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Anyways, what’s going on? Do you have any updates on how he’s doing?”

Yaoyorozu nodded, but it was a bit more hesitant than before. “Well… technically, yes. Keep in mind they’ve only released the barest information, okay? Even with the people I know, Valiant hasn’t had a chance to really talk for long.”

_Talk? Then, does that mean-_ 

“He’s awake?” Katsuki’s eyes widened. “Wait, did he wake up? Is he stable? Is he-”

“Relax, relax. One thing at a time.” She said, and didn’t continue until Katsuki had quieted again. “In short, yes. He’s awake. Or, well, he woke up this morning. They’re still not allowing visitors, but they’re expecting that he may be able to handle company tomorrow.”

Katsuki swallowed. “So he is stable, right?”

Yaoyorozu gave him the barest hint of a smile. “Yes. He’s stable. Still expected to make a full recovery, but he’s been through a lot.”

Katsuki nearly cried in relief right then and there, clenched hands meeting his forehead as he leaned down into them. “Thank god.” He rasped, voice trembling. “Thank fuck. That’s… that’s good. Okay.”
Okay. Okay. He really is going to be alright, then. I’ll still be his partner someday.

“Bakugou, there’s, ah, a little more info I have…” She started, and just her tone of voice made Katsuki’s blood run cold again. “Sorry, sorry, but…”

“Tell me.” He begged. “Please.”

Yaoyorozu pulled a small sheet of paper out of her bag, covered in hastily scribbled notes. “Please remember, I still don’t know much, but… his injuries are very serious. Just because he’s expected to make a full recovery doesn’t mean he’ll be able to operate at his full strength anytime soon, or possibly ever again. I don’t really know the details, but… he was trapped in the rubble when the building collapsed. You know that much, right?”

He nodded, palms sweating.

“Apparently, it fell on top of his legs. For the situation that it was, I’m honestly just thankful he lived. The other people in that building had it far, far worse.” She paused. “They wouldn’t give me any details on what they did to remedy it, but… I imagine he won’t even be able to walk for a while, much less do any hero work.”

Oh, shit…

“You serious?” Katsuki whispered. “You… you’re telling me he’s not even gonna be able to walk for a while?”

Yaoyorozu nodded. “I’m sorry, but… that’s more likely the case than not.”

Her hands were shaking too.

Fuck. It’s going to be so long till he’s back on duty. Oh, god… when… when am I even gonna be able to see him again?

His throat hurt when he swallowed.

“I… I see.”

I wish he’d call or text me… anything would do, really.

“He’s going to be alright. It’s just going to take some time.” She reassured. “I… I know how much he means to you. And I’m sorry that this awful accident happened in the first place.”

“Don’t apologize. S’not your fault.” Katsuki mumbled, drawing his arms in close to his chest. “He’s… god, he’s just a dumbass! He- he shouldn’t have gotten hurt that bad to begin with!”

“What are you saying?” A bit of anxiety had grown in her voice. “Bakugou, what do you–”

“You know what the media has been saying about him, don’t you?” He shivered. “That Deku- shit, Valiant- that he’s been overworking himself? That he shouldn’t have gotten in this situation in the first place?”

“Bakugou, the media doesn’t have all the information-”

“And you don’t either!” He shouted, and bit down hard on his lip when he realized that that was probably far too loud of an accusation. “Fuck, I- I gave him those spa coupons, and I doubt he even used them!”
If only he’d listened, taken a break, done- I dunno, anything different, then he’d- then he’d still be able to walk…!

“What’s done is done.” Yaoyorozu said. “There’s nothing you or me or anyone else can do to change what happened. But he’s going to recover. Can you trust me?”

There’s nothing I can do. That’s… that’s what Todoroki said too, right?

He tried to breathe a bit, to calm down just slightly more than before.

“I… I hate seeing him like this.” He croaked. “I know that… that there’s nothing I can do, and that it’s up to me to decide how to handle this whole thing, but it’s not easy! None of this shit is easy!”

Some heads in the room started to turn, and Katsuki forced himself to try and stay calm yet again.

Yaoyorozu sighed, and what came next was something he hadn’t heard in a very long while.

“Remember when we talked back at that first training session?” She started. “When I asked what Valiant was to you?”

Katsuki looked up, a certain vulnerability opening up at that question. “I mean… yeah?”

“Can I ask you that again?”

There was no malice in her words- no deceit, no hidden intent.

And somehow, Katsuki didn’t feel near as defensive as before.

“He’s my hero.” He clasped his hands together in his lap, thumbing over his knuckles. “He’s… he’s an inspiration.”

A strange twist of warmth, nearly bordering on unease, flooded through his stomach.

“He’s kind. Dedicated.” Katsuki paused, and the image of Deku in his recent shoot flashed through his mind. “Hot as fuck, too.”

And he gives good hugs. Has warm hands. Speaks with that gorgeous voice of his I wish I could fall asleep every night to.

“He’s… amazing.” Katsuki mumbled. “I want to get to know him better.”

Even though he’s not always strong.

A bit of humor had appeared in Yaoyorozu’s eyes, and that smile of hers seemed to grow a little brighter.

“These are all things about him, though.” She gently reminded him. “What is he- or, maybe- what does he mean to you?”

I might be attracted to him.

He swallowed.

“I… I mean, he’s…”

What am I trying to deny anymore? Is it because saying it feels too real? But can I really pretend
“It’s okay.” Yaoyorozu dipped her head. “It’s okay, I promise. I won’t tell.”

And it sounded so stupid- so incredibly, so horribly stupid- but at this point, there was little reason to keep up the act.

“I…” Katsuki’s face heated up, blooming in a rush of red warmth. “Yeah, fine. I like him.”

Yaoyorozu raised an eyebrow. “Like, like him?”

Katsuki buried his head in his hands, wishing he didn’t look like a schoolgirl with a crush. “Yes. Yes, I like like him.”

*I like Deku.*

And as hard as it was to think it, to say it, it felt as if a weight had been lifted off his chest.

“S’not like it’ll ever lead to anything, though.” He mumbled, trying to juggle too many factors at once. “Especially if he’s gonna be stuck up in the hospital for so long… I mean, he’ll probably forget about me anyways.”

*God, I sound stupid. What the hell happened to me?*

She laughed.

“Don’t go giving up yet, okay? Give him some time to recover. He’ll get better. He’ll come back.” She paused. “Actually, maybe if he’s recovered enough by then, we could invite him out to the culture festival when it happens.”

“That’s in a month and a half, though.” He frowned. “Enough time for him to recover, don’t you think?” She smiled. “Look. I won’t be the one to encourage you to seduce him or anything- though Camie may try and educate you on that- but you can always be friends. Like you said, he is a good person, and I think he’s got a lot of good qualities you could pick up on, too.”

“You think so?”

Yaoyorozu shrugged. “He has his flaws, but I don’t think he’s an inherently bad influence for you.”

Katsuki wished he could help the rush of heat through his gut- now really wasn’t the time for that, after all- but he managed to acknowledge her.

“I think I’d like that. Inviting him out here.” He mumbled. “I… yeah, I wanna spend more time with him.”

*I wanna see more of you, Deku.*

“And you will.” She said, reaching back into her bag again. “Before you go, one more thing. I got something to send to the hospital along with the flowers- Camie told me you picked them up with her last night- to send from the whole class. It’s nothing much, just a get well card, but I thought it might be nice to get everyone to sign it and then give it to him? At least, to let him take a break from the inevitable hate that’s going to be thrown at him.” She put the card on the table in front of him along with a pen. “Don’t take up too much space, okay?”
And despite everything that had happened, it seemed things were finally starting to feel a little more okay.

Katsuki signed the card—nothing much, just a short note of ‘Get better, dumbass’ and signed with his first name. Yeah, it was nice, but…

“Any chance I could give you something else to take to him?”

As soon as Yaoyorozu granted him clearance, he rushed upstairs to go find something. It wasn’t as if he had much to his name— he still didn’t have a job for himself, or much time to go out and buy things, but he was fairly sure he had something more than just a small note to offer.

Something, something… hm, what do I have that Deku likes?

An idea struck him as soon as he ran into his room.

Got it.

It wasn’t anything much, really. The gift in question was thrown together a bit too hastily, the item inside protected with its own bit of plastic and sealed inside a quick (but slightly more personal) note, folded over and taped together on the sides. With a small laugh, he began to wonder if this was their method of communication for now—simple notes passed back and forth, but on a much larger scale than just the back of a classroom.

But despite its rough quality, Katsuki was fairly certain he’d like it.

At least, I hope so.

If nothing else, he could try and give Deku a better impression of him.

Yaoyorozu promised she’d get his gift to Deku safely, but wasn’t positive it would go to his room or not. At worst, his note would land somewhere in Deku’s P.O. box and he’d see it later. But really, it was fine either way.

Maybe now, everything really will improve. This is progress, right?

Five days after Deku’s accident, Katsuki finally managed to sleep a little easier.

I like Deku. And that’s… that’s okay.

His dreams that night were of green hair, of warm hands, of bright smiles and sparkling eyes.

“You got the math homework finished, right, Baku?” Camie asked, lazing against his shoulder. “Mind sharing the answers?”

Katsuki rolled his eyes. “One- you’re well aware I don’t like you just taking my answers. Two- it’s three pages long and lunch is over in ten minutes.” He dragged out that last word, and Camie whined beside him.

“Well, yeah…” She sighed. “But Baku, I got busy last night. I had more important things to take care of. I was gonna ask you to help, but then…”

Yaoyorozu fixed her with a sharp glare from the other side of the table, leaving no doubt as to just who had kept her busy.
“Are you seriously trying to win favors by bragging about your sex life?” Katsuki scoffed. “No need to rub it in, asshole.”

Yaoyorozu flushed, obviously having been trying to keep those words from coming out of his mouth. “I-I mean, if you’re struggling with that, I don’t mind making you a bigger… ah…”

“He’s doing fine.” Todoroki muttered. “Please don’t remind me of Bakugou’s masturbation habits while I’m trying to eat. He hasn’t gotten any quieter these past few weeks.”

Katsuki groaned, burying his head in his hands. “You all suck.”

“He’s probably just extra pissy because the news was going off about Valiant again.” Camie said. “Someone didn’t turn off the TV in the common room last night.”

“Valiant’s been out for a while now…” Todoroki started. “It’s been about a month, right?”

“Closer to three weeks.” Katsuki corrected, pointedly ignoring the look Camie was giving him.

“Of course you’d know.” She winked, only for him to sigh quite loudly once again.

“I’m allowed to know things, dumbass.” He rolled his eyes. “And really, you are not helping your chances of looking at my homework. In fact, maybe instead of begging me for help, you should go try and do it yourself. We’ve got a test next week.”

As Camie continued to try and get him to hand over his homework, his phone buzzed in his pocket. Part of him was tempted not to check it considering all of his friends were right there with him, but his mom had been bugging him to call home a little more often lately. Chances are it was her attempting to get his attention again now that the next semester had begun.

Ugh, what does she want now…

Katsuki pulled out his phone, lazily glanced at the lock screen, and noticed an unknown address instead. Someone texted the wrong number was the first thing that crossed his mind—until he read the first line of the preview, anyway.

His heart stopped.

“I, uh, I gotta go to the bathroom.” Katsuki stammered, jamming his phone back into his pocket. “Homework’s in the second pocket. Blue folder. Take my stuff to class if I’m not back when you leave.”

He didn’t leave them time to ask questions before he scrambled out of his seat to sprint to the restroom.

Why now, why now? You can’t- holy shit, you can’t just–!

Katsuki was out of breath by the time he made it to a stall and slammed the door behind him. Violently shaky hands managed to wrangle his phone back out, and all Katsuki could really hope for was to not drop it in the toilet.

But sure enough, there it was. An unknown number, with the first line reading-

[?] Hi, Kacchan! It’s Deku.

He wasted a minute staring at that screen, not even opening up his phone to read the rest.
He’s… this isn’t a prank, is it…?

Katsuki managed to unlock his phone, nauseous with excitement and anxiety and everything in between. But it was still there- that little red notification reminding him that this was real- that this wasn’t a dream.

He opened it up.

[Deku] Hi, Kacchan! It’s Deku. Aha, sorry it’s been so long. And I’m sorry for missing the practice last month too, I really was looking forward to it. I’m gonna use those spa coupons when I can walk around a bit more! I just got home from the hospital, and we’re trying to clean my apartment right now, but I just wanted to say hello! I hope you’re doing alright!

[Deku] *alriht

[Deku] *alright

[Deku] fuck

[Deku] sorry ifnore that kacchan

[Deku] blame the typos on the painkillers

[Deku] damn i really should just shut up now shouldnt i im embarrassing myself

[Deku] why isnt there a delete button

Katsuki wasn’t sure if he was about to cry or laugh.

Fuck, he’s cute.

There was no keeping the smile off of his face when he went to reply to Pro Hero Valiant. No, not Valiant. *Deku.*

He’s always just been Deku to me.

[Katsuki] dumbass. Painkillers dont mess up ur coordination

[Katsuki] n heroes are allowed to make typos too yknow

He swallowed, unsure about sending his next text.

[Katsuki] I, uh. just wasnt sure if u remembered that I gave u my number

But before he could continue, he saw Deku typing a quick response.

[Deku] im sorry!! really, if i couldve gotten ahold of your number earlier, i wouldve, but… i didnt put it in my phone before my accident. my bad.

Katsuki noticed the time at the top of his phone and cursed. Two minutes till his next class started.

Shit.

With that in mind, he bit his lip and just went for it.

[Katsuki] I gotta go to class now. Wanna talk later? We can call if ur comfortable with that
To be honest, he didn’t expect the approaching enthusiasm.

[Deku] yes!

[Deku] i mean, ah, i dont have much going on right now. as long as youre not busy!!

[Deku] if so thats okay too

[Deku] wait you offered first

[Deku] oh god im sorry i must really look stupid right now dont i

[Deku] but uh. yeah thatd be good. aha

Katsuki wasn’t sure if he’d make it through the rest of the day after all this.

[Katsuki] cool. Last thing. I need to give u a contact picture but I dont have any decent ones of u that arent from the media. Mind sending me something?

[Deku] oh! ah, sure. im sorry, im not very good at taking pictures, but, um…

Not ten seconds later, a photo appeared in their text log. Deku was smiling at the camera- no teeth in it, just a beautiful, honest smile that Katsuki had almost forgotten existed. Granted, it wasn’t a great picture. Deku had gotten it at a slightly weird angle- his nostrils were showing a bit more than they should, and the lighting, admittedly, was garbage.

But it was him. Really, honestly him.

You’re beautiful.

He set the photo to his fresh contact page. Maybe later it would feel real.

[Katsuki] ty. Ima go to class now

[Deku] oh, good luck!! sorry if i was distracting you, youre a good student

[Deku] ...but if you get a chance later could you send me something to put as your photo, too?

Yeah, this was just about too much for his weak heart to handle.

[Katsuki] ofc

He wasn’t sure if he could say more without sounding like a stupid, crushing idiot.

I really, really need to go.

Before he even looked to see if Deku had sent anything else, he turned his notifications off and put his phone back in his pocket, knowing that it’d be too much of a wonderful distraction to think about the fact that Deku was for some reason, finally texting him.

It still hadn’t sunk in.

I hope he’s doing okay. Ah, well, guess I’ll hear more later.

Katsuki walked into class five minutes late with the biggest, stupidest smile on his face.

Holy shit, I get to talk to him later.
There were so many things he needed to know. So many things he wanted to share. Now, he had a real chance to get to know Deku better. But more than anything personal like that, one new factor stuck out above all the rest.

*You’re safe. You made it.*

And despite the press, despite the still-lengthy recovery process, it wasn’t over. No, not over at all. After all—

*This is our beginning, isn’t it?*

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**Chapter End Notes**

deku’s google search history that day:
- how to delete texts from other persons phone
- how to delete texts from other persons phone without stealing it
- how to text
- how to not sound awkward over text
- does ofc mean of course or of fucking course

I know this chapter mirrored a lot of ch 10 but ¯\_(ツ)_/¯ it b like that. originally, i actually planned to have 10&11 in one chapter, but they both just got too long… whoops. This one, though, is also kinda the end of this first “arc” in my head, and im excited to continue with all the stuff that’s to come!!

twitter is aeronines, and ty to my beta @aetherlite!! next chapter next week!
“Oh, so you guys did outdoor rescue training today? Ah, that’s my favorite!”

There was a small snort at the other end of the phone. “Wow, I’m so surprised. The hero famous for his rescues loved rescue training. Shocker.”

Izuku flushed. “Kacchan, shush. It did me good, didn’t it?”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever. You’re still a nerd.” Katsuki finished, but Izuku could’ve sworn there was a hint of humor warming the edge of those words. “You still gonna be able to make it out here for the culture festival?”

“It’s in a few weeks, right?” Izuku asked, running through his (admittedly short) list of things before that. “I don’t think I’ve got anything else planned close to it. Shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Sweet.” He said, a bit more excited than before. “You better come to my class’ event. S’gonna be great.”

Izuku nodded, forgetting Kacchan couldn’t see him. “Why wouldn’t I? It was your class that invited me first, anyway. And maybe after you’re done, ah—”

“We could spend some time together?”

“-nevermind.” He finished, trailing off. “But, yeah. I’m looking forward to it.”

“You sound weird.” Katsuki remarked. “Sure you wanna go? Are your legs acting up again?”

Izuku sighed, leaning back onto the couch. “For the last time, physical therapy’s going fine. My legs are okay. Or, well, more okay.”

“You told me you tried to climb down the stairs on your own yesterday, dumbass. Don’t give me that shit.” Katsuki scoffed. “I don’t wanna see you limping around the next time you come here, got it?”

“And I don’t want to deal with your grouchingness, either.” Izuku grinned, but knew that Katsuki would be amused, if anything. “If I show up at your classroom, ‘Sit your ass down, Deku’ shouldn’t be the first thing I hear. Besides, I’ll have had more time in therapy by then!”


“I will, I will, I—”

There’s a sudden thud at the door that causes him to snap to attention.
“Izuku! Can you open the door for us? We got groceries!”

He cursed under his breath, resigning himself to continue the conversation some other time. “Coming, coming!” He called out, getting back up to his feet. “Sorry, gotta go. Talk to you later?”

Katsuki grunted. “Nah, I got homework. Tomorrow?”

“Sounds good. You get all the stuff done that you need to do.” Izuku said, but can’t deny wishing that Katsuki could stay up and talk to him. “Bye, Kacchan!”

“Seeya.”

Izuku was almost always the one to hang up first, and today was no exception. He shoved his phone back into his pocket in a hurry and rushed over to get the door for his friends so as to not keep them waiting too long. After a quick moment of fumbling with the lock, he pulled the door open to let them in.

“Thanks!” Ochako laughed as she stepped inside, a little more awkward than usual. “We, ah, forgot to take the spare key before we left. Sorry about that!”

Izuku waved it off, standing back to let them in. “All good, don’t worry. What’s for dinner?”

His friends walked in, a few bags between them. “Well, we did pick up some vegetables.” Kirishima started. “And pork? I dunno, maybe can throw together a stir fry or something?”

Izuku’s eyes lit up. “That sounds good. I’ll cut stuff up if you guys wanna take care of the rest.”

There was a brief, awkward glance shared between his friends, almost missable. “Ah, if you want to!” Ochako rubbed the back of her head. “We’ll get everything washed up, so, um, feel free to sit down for a bit?”

*If I ever have to hear the words ‘sit down’ again after I’m out of therapy, I’m going to scream.*

With a slight grimace, he did as he was told and took a seat at the bar counter, somewhere he could at least *kinda* feel like he was part of the process. His talk with Katsuki had definitely improved his day, as it usually did, but until people stopped treating him like he was helpless his frustrations would undoubtedly be slow to cease.

*I’m sick of being here, all cooped up and useless.*

Really, it wasn’t that every day was so bad. But today in particular–

Izuku sighed, tried to forget about his god-awful counseling appointment, and scrolled back through his texts with Katsuki in some form of distraction. Speak of the devil, though–

“How was counseling this morning?” Ochako asked, completely and utterly innocent. “You said today was supposed to be an important one, right?”

He scoffed, shut off his phone, and tried not to roll his eyes. “Yeah. *Supposedly,* that’s what this was.”

Kirishima frowned. “What was so bad about it, dude? She’s trying to help you, you know.”

“Yes, and she never believes me when I tell her I’m doing just fine.” He groaned. “Wanna know what she tried to pull today? She asked me about medication. As if I need something else on top of the drug cocktail I have to take for my legs. It’s ridiculous.”
Ochako had busied herself washing off carrots as he complained. “There’s nothing wrong with being on medication, you know. Did she suggest getting you in contact with a psychiatrist to prescribe you antidepressants or something?”

He rapped his fingers against the countertop. “I mean, yeah. But I still can’t believe they’re trying to convince me I have depression, of all things. It’s not like… not like I’m having major issues.”

No answer.

Great.

“Midoriya… at some point, you’re just gonna have to let them help you.” Kirishima started. “They won’t let you back on duty if you’re not gonna comply, y’know.”

“That’s the bullshit part about all this.” He muttered. “What kind of top hero needs that kind of help? My only real issue is the fact that my legs are in garbage condition right now, and yet, they insist on having me in counseling twice a week.”

Ochako pursed her lips, but didn’t push it further. “…anyways. Did you do anything other than that today?”

He shrugged. “Watered the plant. Walked around the hall a bit. Even took a look over the balcony. But, don’t worry! I didn’t go down the goddamn stairs!”

“You’re always so snarky when you’re bored.” Ochako remarked. “Look, I’m sorry. You know getting groceries takes longer than you’re allowed to walk around for. And remind me, what does your PT tell you?”

Oh, for fuck’s sake.

“Don’t exacerbate the injury.” He muttered, having repeated that cursed phrase far, far too many times than should’ve been necessary. “I’ll be out longer if I don’t follow directions.”

“Look, dude, I know you don’t like it-”

“Don’t like is an understatement.” He hissed. “Wanna switch places? Be put under near house arrest? I don’t think I’ve gone two days without a proper workout in years, and now, it’s been almost two months since I set foot in a gym!”

“Know what? That’s it. We’re done arguing.” Ochako groaned. “Izuku, cut up the vegetables. Eijirou, we’re going in the other room.”

Izuku grit his teeth, clenched his fists, and slowly, slowly, let them relax.

They’re trying to help. Don’t give them such a hard time.

It had been three weeks of the same. Three weeks of physical therapy, of counseling, of his friends doing their damndest to make sure he was as comfortable as possible. He couldn’t count the number of times they’d helped him out at this point, whether it was buying food, cooking, cleaning the place, cleaning Izuku-

Well, okay. That was just more awkward than anything.

He could tell they still felt horrible about the stuff that had happened on Izuku’s birthday, but now, almost three months past that incident, things were starting to heal. They’d had their fair share of
fights since Izuku had gone home, but overall, it was better. It was progress.

And yeah, maybe the company was nice too. At the very least, it beat out reruns of home improvement shows and the weather channel.

The vegetables are waiting. Get on with it. Don’t be wasting time moping around when you could actually be helpful.

Izuku grabbed the nearest kitchen knife and went to chop up the small pile of carrots and onions resting on the counter, struggling a bit at first but quickly getting into a rhythm. Simple. Easy enough. And okay, maybe the pieces were a little bit uneven, but it would all taste the same once it was in the pan.

But for some reason, though, the memory of the morning’s counseling session wouldn’t leave him be.

I don’t need medication. I’m not depressed. I’m a damn good hero, and once my legs are healed, I’ll be in great shape.

“Great shape, huh…?” He mumbled under his breath. “It’ll go back to being like before. I’ll work, and I’ll…”

Stop thinking about this. I don’t care what their psych evaluation said. I’m not depressed. I’m doing great.

Izuku had learned a long time ago that he was a very, very bad liar.

He dumped the vegetables in a bowl and grabbed the pork, trying his best not to graze his finger in the process of cutting it up.

And… even if I am depressed…

He bit his lip, trying to pretend that the tears threatening at the edge of his vision were due to the onions.

Is there really any good way to fix it?

It was a long moment before he managed to call Kirishima and Ochako back to his kitchen to fry up the rest of the ingredients. Neither of the two commented on his sudden quietness when he moved back to the barstools without complaint.

I wish Kacchan wasn’t so busy all the time… well, I mean, it’s not like I was any less busy in high school. But talking to him is always so nice…

Scrolling back through their texts made him a little happier, anyway.

2 Weeks Ago:

[Kacchan] oi. deku

[Kacchan] ur not busy. Proofread my essay for english

[Izuku] for class? sure, just email it to me!

[Kacchan] u better make sure i didnt fuck up
Kacchan] u graduated third in ur class. I hope english wasnt ur weak spot

Izuku] oh, you knew that? hah, well, english was one of my best! math, on the other hand…

Kacchan] math is cool

Izuku] math is not cool when you’re filing property damage reports

Izuku] but send it over. ill look after dinner!

Izuku fixed one typo in that essay. Katsuki got a perfect score.

I Week Ago:

Kacchan] wanna see the new gear i got

Kacchan] (1 image attached)

Izuku] oh cool!! what’s the high collar do? is it like heat generation? cold protection?

Kacchan] bingo

Izuku] thats awesome!! ahhh, you look

Izuku] you look comfortable. aha

Kacchan] mm. Its comfortable

Kacchan] looks nice, right?

Izuku] ah

Izuku] ah, yes! it looks really nice! aha. the support companies do a nice job

Izuku] :

Kacchan] hm

Kacchan] thanks:

Kirishima and Ochako had been confused as to why he’d been so flustered during dinner that night.

Yesterday:

Izuku] ah, sorry, i cant call until a lot later if youre still even up for it

Kacchan] ...why?

Izuku] i, ah

Izuku] well, i just wanted to get my mail…

Kacchan] u went down the stairs on your own didnt u

Kacchan] fucking hell deku

Izuku] its fine!!! my uh my pt is coming by to make sure i didnt hurt anything. its probably fine but
They didn’t end up talking last night, and Izuku apologized as much as he could during today’s call. In the end, his legs were fine, but he was definitely regretting the trip by the second flight back up.

“Well, did you call him today?” Ochako asked, breaking the still silence after a long few minutes. “You’re smiling at your phone.”

Izuku blushed a furious red, nearly slamming his phone back down on the table. “He called me. Don’t go making assumptions.”

There was a plate of food pushed in front of him, and soon enough, his friends went to sit down at the other open barstools. “Seems like he’s always the one that calls you.” Kirishima pointed out. “There a reason why you never do it yourself?”

“I mean, I don’t want to seem desperate.” He prodded at his food, frowning. “Nor do I wanna seem like I really want his attention.”

“Izuku, I’ve seen some of your texts. If ‘not desperate’ is what you’re going for, then you definitely need some help.” Ochako snorted. “Lucky for you, the fact that he keeps calling means he’s probably just as bad himself.”

“He’s not desperate either!” He protested, swallowing down a mouthful of food. “Sometimes I don’t really know how to read him, but he’s definitely not desperate.”

Kirishima reached over to pat him on the shoulder, awkwardly stretching out in front of Ochako’s face. “Well, you always seem happy when you talk about him. I’m glad you guys are keeping up.”

“Me too.” Izuku admitted. “Ah, well, at least I’ll be able to get to go to U.A.’s culture festival coming up here…!”

There was a slight hum to his side, and he looked over to see Ochako pulling out her phone. “Y’know, if you wanna get out of the apartment for a while, you should seeing if any of your other friends are available. Like, I know you enjoy talking to Bakugou and everything, but it’s not like you can really go visit U.A. that easily right now.”

“Yeah, I know…” Another bite, another sigh. “But, I dunno… god, I really haven’t met up with anyone else in so long. Don’t really know anyone’s schedule, either.”

“I’m sure your counselor would be thrilled to know that you got out and spent time with people.” Ochako pressed. “Maybe she’d get off your back a little bit. Look through your contacts. Text someone.”

“I already-”

“Text someone not named Bakugou. He’s not an option right now.”

Izuku slumped back in his seat. “Fine, fine. Tomorrow.”

“Or tonight.” Ochako said. It wasn’t a question.
“What can I even do that doesn’t require me walking for more than forty minutes? And I mean, I’d need help even getting back up here…”

**Plus, I could get hounded by the press, or run into too many people asking me about my injuries, or accidentally strain something… agh, there’s no good options here!**

But this time, it was Kirishima who suggested something. “I’ll take my break tomorrow to help you travel back if you want. I bet you could find someone to get coffee with you in the morning? I mean, I’d go with you if you want, but it would probably be better to find someone that you haven’t been spending hours a day with already.”

“Eijirou’s right.” Ochako echoed. “Izuku, I love you, but I can tell you’ve been getting tired of having us here all the time. And I don’t like seeing you cooped up either! Going out for coffee’s a good suggestion. Everyone likes coffee.”

**As long as I go somewhere quiet, I can probably avoid the press… alright, alright.**

“Deal.” Izuku caved, shoveling down his last bit of stir fry. “I’ll find someone. I’ll… I’ll get out of here for a bit. I mean, I do want to leave, I’m just…”

“Nervous?” Kirishima supplied.

“I guess.”

A soft chuckle rose from his friend’s lips. “Ah, you’ll be fine! Catching up with people is fun, y’know?”

Izuku snorted. “Maybe if I had something other to say than ‘Yeah, I’ve been sitting at home alone being bitched at by both my therapists and watering my plant. Oh, and I also binge watched all twelve seasons of Sliced. Don’t worry, if there’s anything I’ve learned in this time I’ve been out, it’s that attempting to cook a risotto in thirty minutes is guaranteed to end in sadness.’ Life of the party, huh?”

And for whatever reason, Ochako laughed.

"You’ll be fine.” She assured him, humor dancing in those warm eyes. “Trust me.”

They broke from dinner to clean up, Kirishima quickly claiming custody over dish duty and Ochako preparing leftovers while Izuku retreated to the living room to water his plant- the singular one he’d brought home from the hospital. In the past few weeks of sunlight and consistent care, it had managed to bloom into something quite striking, the orange petals a bright mark against the more subdued colors of his home. He’d done his reading on houseplants, too. Not all of his friends were great with them (Kirishima was the first to come to mind) and though he’d really never attempted to take care of a plant, his treatment seemed to be working at least a bit.

*It really does kinda look like Kacchan, huh?*

He kept the thought to himself, and quietly finished tending to it.

*Still need to find someone to ask… don’t really know anyone off the top of my head that’d be open to going out. Or that I’d really wanna go out with… hm.*

Izuku took a step back to admire the plant, and deemed it good enough for another day. Now, for the next- and harder- task of the evening. He settled back onto his couch, pulled out his phone, and forced himself to not get sucked into going back through his texts with Katsuki again. It wasn’t that
he had a shortage of contacts- everyone in his graduating class had his number, but some of them just didn’t feel right to contact.

_I love Inasa, but I don’t think he’s gonna be the one I want to go sit down and have a casual coffee with. Tsuyu’s great, but I feel like I’d get a bit of a lecture on my conduct with her. Mirio and Amajiki... again, great people, but I know they’d come together, and I really don’t wanna feel more like a third wheel than I already do._

He groaned, fell back onto a pillow, and winced as his phone fell straight onto his nose.

_Damn gravity._

But when he picked it up and saw the name staring straight back at him he suddenly remembered a short conversation he’d had just months ago.

_“Hit me up if you do ever get a chance to hang out. I feel like I’ve barely seen you since graduation.”_  

Izuku opened a new text message, wrote out a quick request, and hit _send._  

_I hope this goes over okay._  

With a sigh, he stood up to head over to the kitchen, only for his phone to buzz just before he stepped into it. Quickly, his eyes widened as he skimmed the message, and for the first time in a while he felt a little more comfortable about going out than before.

_“Well, I’ve got plans tomorrow.” Izuku’s lips twisted up, a hint of excitement flushing through him. “Anyone gonna be around at nine to help me get to coffee?”_  

The question was met with a cheer from his friends, and though there were still things to be dealt with- the lingering issues of his counselor, the possibility of the media interrupting his time outside, and the simple problem of personal transportation, just this felt a little less daunting than before.

_“Glad you could finally make it out here, Midoriya.”_  

_“Ah, shush. I’ve had a lot going on.”_  

Izuku squeezed himself into the small seat, a bit more tired than he would’ve liked from the half-hour walk. “But yeah, no, thanks for agreeing to meet up with me! I’m glad I could see you again.”

Jirou chuckled, and casually stirred her coffee just a bit more. “Sure you are. But trust me, I’m more happy to see you alive than anything else. I wanted to come say hi to you at the hospital, but man... just getting up to you was so damn hard.” She paused. “You told the media you’d be back on duty in what, a bit more than a month from now? That still true?”

_“Yeah, as of right now.” The coffee was warm in his hands- already, in mid-October, the outside temperature had begun to cool. “My agency doesn’t and won’t have full details until I’ve made more progress, but, I mean... there’s almost no doubt that I’m only going to be able to work on limited hours for a while.”_  

It was easy to talk here- Izuku had come in wearing a hoodie, covering up his too-distinctive hair in at least a little bit of disguise. He was sure the barista had recognized him when he went to order his drink, but to his relief, didn’t push the subject. But the hush of the coffee shop was pleasant, and the low strum of jazz in the background was a nice break from the commotion of the street outside.
Though the both of them were easily recognizable pro heroes, the crowd paid Jirou no mind, obviously used to her presence here. Izuku could tell on sight from the welcome smiles they gave her and the way she moved around so easily through the small shop that this was one of the venues she played at on occasion.

“Well, good on you for avoiding the press.” She commended, taking a small sip from her cup. “By the way, did you want anything to eat? They’ve got some really good chocolate croissants here.”

“Ah, that does sound pretty good.” He admitted, and cracked a small smile. “Yeah, I’ll go get one. Didn’t really have anything before coming out here.”

Jirou went to stand up and order for him, but he waved her back. “I got it, don’t worry.” Izuku assured. “You already got the drinks on the house for us. I got this.”

And for the first time in what felt like forever, he wasn’t told to sit down, let me handle it. As nice as it was to have people willing to help him out, it was more than a little frustrating to be treated like he couldn’t handle even the simplest of tasks.

But Jirou just nodded, and let him go without protest.

There was no line at the cash register when he went up, and yet, as soon as he finished ordering and went to pull out his wallet, the barista shook her head.

“Ah- it’s on us, don’t worry!” There was a slight twinge of nervousness in her smile. “Seeing you out and about is more than enough payment for us, sir.”

Izuku flushed, stuttered out a few words of thanks, but managed to shove a few thousand-yen bills in the tip jar before he was shooed away.

_I mean, it’s not that I don’t appreciate it, but…_

Jirou tried to hide a laugh when he stumbled back to their table, obviously having expected the reaction from the staff. “They’ll have it out in just a minute. They do it to me, too. Refuse to let me pay, claim that it’s ‘the least they can do to thank me for my service.’ It’s not like I’m short on cash at all, but… I guess it’s kinda nice, right? Being appreciated?”

_It’s not like I’ve done anything to be ‘appreciated’, though. And Jirou does more than just hero work to help out this place._

“But you play here too, right?” Izuku brought up, and she nodded.

“Yes. Only a few times a month, but it’s nice. In the evenings, they’ll set up that small area in the corner for me and I bring my keyboard. The staff’s super friendly, the customers like it, and I mean… it’s just nice to do something kinda outside the usual rescue routine.”

Izuku nodded, and looked up to see his croissant being set in front of him, as well as his coffee refilled before he could say anything to stop them.

“Have you been up to anything lately, though?” Jirou continued. “I know you haven’t been out of the hospital for too long, but man. You been getting bored at all?”

He shrugged, awkwardly rubbing the back of his neck. “Ah, I haven’t really been doing as much as I’d like to. You’d think you wouldn’t miss working out so much, but…” He almost laughed. “God, I wish I could go to the gym like normal. Physical therapy definitely isn’t easy, but it’s… it’s not the same at all.” Izuku snorted. “Been watching too much TV. Don’t know that that really counts as a
hobby, though.”

“Ah, you should come down and watch me play sometime!” Jirou suggested, a slight tease in her eyes. “I’ll make you a list of my upcoming gigs and everything. They’re mostly in the area, so you shouldn’t have to go too far.”

“Yeah, I’d love to!” He nodded, managing a small smile. “I still can’t get over how cool it is that you’ve been doing this on the side for so long, though.”

Jirou leaned back in her chair a bit and brought the cup up to her lips. “Like I said before, I’d go crazy without it. And it might sound a little weird, too, but my music’s kinda like a friend. Always there for me even on the bad days.”

*Like a friend, huh…? Ah, that sounds nice.*

“No weird at all.” Izuku murmured. “No, really, it sounds awesome.”

*She’s really built a life with her hobbies, huh? That, and heroing…*

They chatted aimlessly for another hour or so, and for the first time in a while, Izuku found things spiraling back into a bit more normalcy than before. By the time he got up to leave, it was nearly lunchtime, and he made sure to get a list of Jirou’s upcoming performances for future reference. And after the walk back to his apartment building, he found Kirishima waiting to help him up the stairs.

*I really am too hard on them sometimes. They… they really are just looking out for me, aren’t they? Maybe… maybe I have been shutting them out more than I should.*

For as much shit as they’d been through in the past months, there was a part of him that felt a little better than before. Heroing was great- it kept him busy, let him do the things he’d always dreamed of doing, but he’d forgotten about all the things outside of work, to an extent.

The first thing he saw when he walked back in his apartment after Kirishima had left was the plant in the windowsill- as bright and beautiful as ever.

*I… I helped it become that strong, didn’t I?*

Izuku heated up last night’s leftovers for lunch, and pulled out his laptop to search up something he’d only scratched the surface of before.

*Could I do it again… hm, I wonder…*

After dinner, Izuku found himself ordering a small planter box, seeds, and a copy of *Apartment Gardening for Idiots.*

*Even if it’s just something small… if it’s something I’ve created myself, that counts, right?*

And for once, he found himself thinking that maybe his counselor wasn’t so wrong about him needing to pick up a hobby after all.

It’s four days, three phone calls with Katsuki, two dinners with friends, and one packet of seeds later when Izuku finds himself in front of his counselor again.

*“Have you thought about what I asked you at all?” She started, and though his first reaction would normally be a scowl, or a complaint, or a ‘This is stupid’ comment, he stayed quiet.*
Izuku sunk back into the couch, held his notebook tight between his fingers, and nodded.

She seemed a bit surprised by his actions- or more, his inactions. “Well, do you have an answer?”

_Do I…?

He swallowed. “Can we talk about that at the end?”

“Of course, if you’d like.” She nodded. “How’s your week been?”

Izuku shrugged. “I… I think it’s been pretty good. Still been inside a lot, but I went out to go get coffee with one of my friends earlier this week.” He shifted, and looked down at his notebook again. “I bought some seeds and a planter. There was that one plant I had from the hospital that’s been doing pretty well, so… I dunno. Figured a few more wouldn’t hurt.”

That seemed to catch her attention. “Oh, you’ve been taking care of that plant yourself?”

“Yeah. S’not hard.” He mumbled, not meeting her eyes. Something about his counselor always made him feel too watched, too pried open. “I helped out with dinner when they’d let me. Talked to Kacchan a few times.”

When he looked up, there was a gentle smile on his counselor’s face.

“Talkative today, huh?” A faint smile grew over her lips. “Well, I’m really happy to hear that you got out of your home, even if it was just for a bit.”

_It was… yeah, it was pretty alright to leave for a while._

“Ochako and Kirishima made me do it.” Was what he said instead. “They told me you’d get off my back some more if I did.”

“Well, even if that was the case, you don’t seem like you hated it.” She remarked. “Am I correct?”

“I didn’t hate it.”

She paused, and then-

“How did you feel about it, then? Going out and spending time with your friend?”

_How I felt about it? I mean, it wasn’t awful. It was kinda nice?_”

Izuku swallowed, fiddling with his fingers. “Wasn’t bad. Everyone insisted on buying me stuff. Friend got me coffee on the house, I tried to buy food, but the staff said it was on them, too. I did tip them.”

“Sounds like they wanted to help you out, then.” His counselor started. “Or at least try and express their gratitude.”

“I mean, I know, but it’s just…” Izuku sighed. “I’m already useless enough as is. Why do people feel that taking away the few things I can do is going to help…? I… I want to help people. I want to be able to do stuff. I- I’ve been nothing but a burden to people for so long, and I want to be able to actually do my damn job!”

There isn’t an immediate response- really, he was more glad than anything, because only moments later found Izuku with his head in his hands, trying, begging himself not to get upset over the same thing again.
I’m so damn useless right now. Even if I try and help, it just makes things worse! I can’t cook, I can’t clean, I can’t force myself to make plans. Why am I even trying? Why does nothing I do make an impact? Why am I in this fucking situation to begin with!?

It was a few minutes before he was able to calm down a little and breathe a little easier. Still, white-knuckle fingers grasped at the worn fabric of his sweatpants, and nails dug in tight where they could.

“I just wanna be back in the field.” He finally mumbled, pretending there wasn’t a crack in his voice. “I’m… I’m tired of being here. I can’t save anyone while I’m stuck here.”

His counselor was quiet for a moment. “Do you think that you’d be happy if you were out in the field right now? If everything was as it was before your accident?”

Was… was I happy before?

“I could make people happy with my work.” His arms were drawn close to his chest, eyes firmly focused on the floor.

“Midoriya, I’m not asking you about how other people would feel.” She reminded him. “I’m asking how you feel. Were you happy working as much as you were?”

Shut up…!

“We’re not talking about this.” Izuku grit his teeth. “You bring it up every time you come here. I’m done.”

“Why is this such a difficult question for you?” She pressed. “We can’t keep putting this off. Midoriya, I want to help you.”

“And I keep telling you, I don’t need help!”

I don’t. I’m fine. I’m just fine. I went out with a friend. I’ve been trying to take notes. I’ve been taking care of my plant. Is… is all this still not enough?!

Yet, some part of him was finally bending, finally breaking. Izuku swallowed, trying to make sense of all the static in his head.

“How I feel… how I feel doesn’t matter when I’m on the field.” He said, attempting to remind himself of that as much as he was his counselor. “I’m not out there for myself. I’m out there to help people. And that’s all that matters. That’s why I don’t need help.”

That’s why I don’t want help. If I’m showing weakness, then how can I call myself a hero? How can I show people that I’m strong enough to save? If I’m not strong enough to…

Not strong enough to… to what?

“Do you know why we have mandatory counseling for heroes?” She asked again, more statement than question. “It’s because of things like this. It’s because the things you see in the field are incredibly hard to handle for many people, and to help you guys remember that you don’t always have to be the one to handle everything. There isn’t a person in the field who will fault you for accepting help.”

Izuku shifted awkwardly on the cushions, palms sweating more than before. “I… I just…”

“It’s something I’ve seen in a lot of heroes, Midoriya.” She continued, yet for some reason, his
defenses were lower than they’d been before. “It’s like you skipped a step in growing up- you learned to live for everyone around you before you learned to live for yourself.”

How do I even respond to this?

“Then… if all of this is true, how can I learn to live for myself?” Izuku’s voice carried with it a tremor, one he hadn’t felt in a long time. “If that psych evaluation is accurate, and if I have… depression– then what can I even do about it?”

I… I just… I don’t wanna rely on drugs, on other people, on anything except myself, but…

“Start journaling. Keep track of how you’re feeling instead of just what you’re doing.” She said, and for the first time, Izuku found himself starting to listen. “Write about the help you’re already accepting- the help from your friends, the help from your medical team- and think about what it is you try to do yourself. I want to help you find ways to lift the burdens you’re carrying all on your own.”

Maybe it’s not the end of the world if I do, just for a little while.

“I’ll… I’ll try.”

It’s more final than he intended- the room is quiet and still, waiting for the next words to breach the moment.

“And if I say yes to the medication, too, will it really help me feel… I don’t know, a little happier again? More normal?”

I don’t wanna live each day like this, I think… no, I don’t wanna go back to the way things were before. I don’t wanna rely on talking to Kacchan to be happy, as much as I like him. He makes me happy, so happy, but I can’t have him be the only one that does.

Izuku could’ve sworn there was hope on his counselor’s face over just that question, though.

“Yes and no.” She answered, more energy in her words. “It’s not a miracle drug, but it should help balance your emotions and keep the worst of the symptoms away. It’ll allow you to get the motivation back to implement the things we’ve been talking about here, too. Stuff like establishing a hobby, like you may be starting with these plants, as well as talking to your friends and getting together more are going to be the things that will help the most in the long run.”

He nodded, still nervous, but less so than before. “I… yeah, that makes sense. I don’t really like the thought of having to do all this in the first place, with the medication and all that, but if it really would help, then I guess…” He paused, and finally, something in him let go. “I’ll… I’ll give it a try.”

Is this me doing something? Is accepting help taking matters into my own hands, in a way?

He’d never seen so much relief in his counselor’s eyes. They set up some more of the technical details following his answer- when he’d be able to go out for an appointment with a psychiatrist, to discuss with his medical team when it would be okay to start taking the new medication, and his few plans for the coming weeks.

The end of that appointment marked the first one he hadn’t left feeling sick or angry. Soon after his counselor left his apartment, Izuku went back to tend to his plant again, trying to figure out how to best attach his new planter to the windowsill. But just as he sat down with the manual, something buzzed in his pocket. He didn’t expect to see Katsuki texting right now due to it still being the middle of the school day for him, but sure enough, there was his name on the screen.
Curious, Izuku opened up the message, just to be faced with a shoddy picture of some half-dead bush. He frowned, mildly confused as to just why Katsuki had sent him this, of all things.

**Izuku** why did you send me this?

His answer came but a few seconds later.

**Kacchan** made me think of u

**Izuku** what?

**Kacchan** green n dying

Izuku stared at his phone, utterly aghast.

**Izuku** thats not funny kacchan!! just cause im injured doesnt mean im a dead bush!!

**Kacchan** mhm. Sure

**Izuku** kacchan!! >:(

**Kacchan** well if ur so mad abt it come to the culture festival and say it to my face

**Kacchan** prove to me that ur a healthy bush instead

“Jerk…!” Izuku’s mouth fell open. “I’m… I’m the healthiest damn bush there is!”

**Izuku** i cant believe youre doubting me like this kacchan

**Izuku** and here i thought we had something

And as soon as he sent the message, Izuku’s eyes widened in straight panic.

*Oh shit. Oh shit. Oh god don’t take that the wrong way, Kacchan, I didn’t mean to send that…!*

Earlier mistakes had at least taught him that saying more wasn’t usually in his best interest, so instead, he just prayed and hoped for the best.


Then, just moments after the small *Kacchan is typing…* notification came up-

**Kacchan** then come spend time with me during the culture festival. prove that we have something

**Kacchan** nerd<3

Izuku dropped his phone and screamed.

“Shit, Izuku, are you okay!?”

Ochako burst into the living room from the doorway in a flurry of panic, but stopped two steps in when she saw Izuku’s current state.

“Oh my god… Izuku, you gave me a heart attack!” She exhaled, coming a little closer upon seeing that he wasn’t bleeding or in any amount of severe pain. “What’s going on, though? You’re… uh…
really red.”

He must’ve stuttered out some nonsense, because she noticed his phone on the (thankfully carpeted) floor next to him, and went over to pick it up.

“Hm. Okay, I see.” She said, scrolling back through his messages. “Both you guys are so dumb.”

“Don’t you get it!?” Izuku choked out. “He- he sent a–!”

“Yeah, yeah, he sent a heart. Relax.” Ochako snorted, and patted Izuku on the shoulder when she handed the phone back. “He was probably just teasing you. But god, you scared me bad for a second. I thought there was an emergency or something.”

“Are you trying to tell me this isn’t an emergency?” He cried out.

She rolled her eyes. “You’re in so deep. I guess it wouldn’t help to say that we found something he mailed to you sitting on your desk today? It got rerouted from the hospital, and for some reason, didn’t go straight to your P.O. box. Not sure why it took so long to get here, but…”

Ochako pulled something small out of her bag and handed it to him. “Don’t go throwing this on the floor too, okay?”

It wasn’t big- no, just a sheet of paper folded halfway over and taped on the sides, but the name, as well as the handwriting, left no doubt as to who the sender was.

What did Kacchan send me now…? I still have those spa coupons, and this isn’t much bigger.

“I won’t.” He promised. “Ah… thanks for bringing this up here. I, um, really do appreciate it.”

She’s helping me out, and that’s… that’s not something I have to push away.

Ochako looked a little taken aback by his words. “Ah, yeah! It’s no problem. You… you sure you’re doing okay?”

Is hearing me accept her actions and words that strange? How… how much have I been pushing them away?

“Positive. I-” He said, and caught himself just before finishing. “I, well…”

Izuku stared down at the piece of paper in his hand, at his phone beside him, at Ochako in front of him. Thought about Jirou’s words, his new plants, his new choices.

This is progress.

“I’m doing okay, and… things are gonna get better.”

One step at a time.

“Is this what you call flirting? God, Baku, this is hard to read.”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake- Camie, give back my damn phone!”

“Hm… ugh, geez. You really didn’t give me much to work with here. A dead bush? Really?”

“Well, it’s accurate.”
“No one cares about accuracy in this case! If you want him to come out here to spend time with you, then you need to be a little more direct about it. Not this ‘prove to me you’re a healthy bush’- Baku, what does that even mean? God, at least he gave you a bit of an opening. You just need to be a little bit more confident! Here, like this.”

“Are you sending something? Wait, Camie, what are you doing with my– WHAT THE FUCK DID YOU JUST SEND!?”

“Oh, well, it might make you seem a little more smooth… did I do a decent impersonation? Hm?”

“If this fucked up my chances with him, I will make you pay.”

“Pfft, okay. And if it helps?”

“…then I’m taking the credit, and this conversation never happened.”

“Whatever helps you sleep at night, babe. I just wanna see you get your mans.”

“Yeah, about that- I am never coming to you for flirting advice again.”

“Wanna say that again when you’ll inevitably come knocking on my door tomorrow trying to figure out the ‘deeper message’ behind Valiant’s smiley faces?”

“That was one time!”

“Mhm.”

“Asshole.”

“Jerk.”

“…”

“…”

“…if he does reply, will you help me plan stuff to do during the festival?”

“Of course, babe. Anytime.”

“You’re still an asshole. But…”

“But?”

“…thanks. Maybe.”

Chapter End Notes

happy holidays yall!! Hope ur all havin a good end of the year too:D

Also, i ran a poll on my twitter earlier this week abt which oneshot spinoff to work on for this fic over the break, and by a fairly close margin, the one that won is gonna be an extra scene within the current fic timeline with kiri helping deku wash up after they returned to his apartment from the hospital. Expect some reflection on 3rd year and
feelings! I'm excited to write it. The other option is gonna be written too, but this one will come first

And lastly, thank you so much to my beta @aetherlite and all y'all for your support with this fic, I love all y'all so so much
The best damn not-date

Chapter Summary

my new year’s resolution is to keep the rest of the chapters under the length of this one. enjoy this 10k monster

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Katsuki shuddered.
Camie cowered.
Todoroki trembled.
Yaoyorozu sighed.

“That was… exhausting.”

The four of them let out a collective groan, heads in their hands, utterly and completely done.

“All I wanted was a maid cafe…” Camie whimpered. “How did we wind up in a class-wide civil war?”

Katsuki lifted his head and stared dead-eyed at the ceiling. “Don’t… don’t say those words again.”

“I still don’t see what’s so bad about a soba stand…” Todoroki grumbled. “I mean… we could still sell it alongside the… uh… what was it that won again…?”


“…can I still wear a maid outfit?”

“No.”

Katsuki could only shake his head as Camie let out a long sigh.

“Baku, why aren’t you with me on this on?” She complained. “Don’t you think he’d like seeing you in a maid outfit? Come on, you’d be so cute, and he’d be-”

“The answer. Is. No.” Katsuki said, ignoring the strain at the edge of his words. “I’ll wear a goddamn apron or whatever for this bakery thing. But, you are never getting me in a goddamn maid outfit. Nope. Nada. Not happening, especially not in front of him!”

At this point, there wasn’t a single person in the room that didn’t know who ‘him’ was. After a week of disappearing in his room for hours and getting called out for checking his phone in class, of all places, his friends set to interrogating him to find out the now not-so-secret of him and Deku’s frequent communication. On the list of “Katsuki’s most embarrassing moments,” that night ranked about number four.
“Party pooper.” Camie pouted. “Fine, fine… guess I’ll just have to find another way to help you look half decent instead.”

“Shut up, I don't need your fashion sense to look good.”

Katsuki was very ready to leave the conversation, and the common room altogether. Yaoyorozu looked dead tired, and Todoroki, dead inside. The conversation seemed ready to end itself.

“I mean, a class bakery will likely go over well at the culture festival.” Yaoyorozu shrugged. “Food generally keeps people happy, and most enjoy sweets.”

“Not me.”

“I said most, Bakugou.”

On second look, it appeared that Todoroki may have actually fallen asleep amongst the remains of the argument.

“Does your friend like sweets, Baku?” Camie asked, and Katsuki wanted to curl up even further in a ball and die. “Oh, I can see him having a sweet tooth! But maybe, you should call him and ask.”

“Fuck off.”

Katsuki slapped away her hand as it began to reach towards his phone and shot her a glare. “I thought I said go away. After that shit you texted him earlier from my number, I think you’ve lost phone permissions.”

Sadly enough, the disappointment on Camie’s face was almost enough to make him pick up and call right then and there.

But I… I don’t really know what he likes to eat, do I?

“Bet he likes matcha.” She continued. “Would match with all the green he has going on, you know?”

Fuck, that would be kinda… kinda cute.

“It’s whatever.” Was what he said instead.

“You’re turning red again.” Camie teased, and Katsuki drew back almost immediately.

“I’m- I’m not red, asshole!” He sputtered, and nearly ran away due to fear of maybe, just maybe, going a little red in the face thinking about Deku.

Camie frowned, trying to look more innocent than she was, and shrugged. “Look for yourself, babe. You’ve got a phone camera, don’t you?”

You little…

Katsuki yanked the phone out of his pocket, swiped to open the camera, and only had a split second to see the hint of a blush rising over his cheeks before the phone began to spasm in his hand and flash with an all-too familiar name.

If he wasn’t blushing then, he certainly was now.

For fuck’s sake, why did you decide to call me now!?
“Oh- Oh my god…!” Camie squealed, and yanked his phone out of his hands before Katsuki could do a damn thing. “Yes? Hello? Valiant, sir? Oh, sorry! Kacchan’s a bit busy right now, but I don’t mind keeping you company until he’s done taking care of his little problem!”

Katsuki was too stunned to move for a split second, and it was only when Camie began to ask about Deku’s favorite dessert flavors that he shook himself back to focus and dove back across the couch to try and get his phone back.

“Camie, give my damn phone back!” He screamed. Todoroki might’ve woken up. “Holy shit, shut up!”

He grabbed his phone again and wrenched it from Camie’s manicured grip, heart racing a mile a minute as he sputtered an awkward sorry to Deku and ran out of the common room, up to his dorm, stopping in front of the door to catch his breath from the run up four flights of stairs.

“Shit, Deku, I- I’m sorry.” He gasped, begging that Deku wouldn’t take this whole incident as an insult and hang up before they could talk again. “You… you just called, and she was right there, and I couldn’t-”

And then he heard something he hadn’t expected from the other end. Deku’s laugh, clear and bright. “It’s all good.” He said, and that voice radiated sunshine and comfort and warmth more than ever. “She seemed nice enough. Was that your friend?”

Katsuki scoffed, and twisted open his doorknob. “Right now, ‘friend’ isn’t the word I wanna use. ‘Parasite’ is probably better.”

Deku laughed again, and Katsuki could’ve sworn he was melting. “Sounds like what me and my friends were like in high school. But, um… do you have any idea why she was asking me about… dessert flavors?”

He was about to start complaining about Camie once again, until Deku decided to continue. “I do like matcha. But, ah, mint is really good too!”

Fuck, wow. How is he so damn cute?

“That’s… that’s cool.” He mumbled, and finally shut the door behind him. “You like, uh, sweet shit like that?”

“Only sometimes.” Deku answered. “I used to have a bit more of a sweet tooth, but… ah, usually I like more comfort-food style stuff! My favorite dish is my mom’s katsudon… I can’t make it like she does, though. Maybe one day I’ll figure it out…”

Katsuki made a mental note to research katsudon recipes later.

“But food talk wasn’t why I called you…” Deku said, voice beginning to waver. “I, well, just got some of my mail in from the hospital, and I…”

Huh? Wait, shit, does that mean that–!

“…ah, actually, would you mind if I turned on the camera for just a second?”

Katsuki had to slap his hand over his mouth to keep the ungodly noise threatening to tear through his throat, and nodded instead.
Idiot! He can’t see you!

At some point he managed a choked sure and looked down at his phone, watching as the audio call switched to video one. After a quick, slightly-careful check to make sure his own camera wasn’t on, he braced himself for... for what?

Nope, now’s not the time to think too much about that. Focus on the moment.

“Oh, Kacchan, can you hear me?” Deku started, and though the camera wasn’t front-facing and Katsuki was getting a nice view of his wall instead, he gave a quick acknowledgment. “Ah, okay! Cool, cool, um... shoot, I left it in the other room. I’m sorry, I, uh... be right back!”

Katsuki watched the video shake as Deku hurried into his other room, but suddenly realized that this was the first time he’d really seen his apartment. Fairly stark walls and carpeted floors in what he assumed was the living room, and a bit of dirty laundry came into view as Deku walked into his room.

He’s got a decent sized bedroom... is that a full? Probably enough for two, if we really- agh, no, stop, dumbass!

And despite the wonderful distraction that was Deku’s mumbling, Katsuki couldn’t help but notice there was room at the head of his bed for a second pillow.

Maybe... maybe one day...

Katsuki swallowed, sunk down to the floor of his dorm, and pulled his knees to his chest.

I’d like to visit eventually, anyway. No harm in that, right?

“Oh! Yeah, there it is. Sorry, sorry.” Deku said, shaking the camera fairly violently, but enough so that Katsuki caught a glimpse of one of his strong, scarred hands. And sure enough- there was his gift in it- nothing much, really, but-

“Kacchan, um...” Deku paused, hesitating on his next words. “H-How did you know that he was my favorite hero as a kid?”

He flushed and rubbed the back of his head. “You, uh, said it in an interview a while back? Just like in the end, you briefly mentioned it, and I had that card lying around, and I just... I knew it was at least a little valuable. Figured it’d be more use to you than me. S’all. Nothing much.”

“Nothing much?!“ Deku screeched. “Kacchan, this is from the first print version of All Might’s limited edition set of Silver Age cards! This- don’t you realize how valuable this is!? There’s only a hundred in the world...!”

Course I know. But every bit of that goddamn excitement in your voice makes it worth you having it instead.

“Like I said, more use to you than me, right?” He grinned, sounding a little more confident this time.

“Kacchan, I... god, I have a copy from the second print, but this is just...!” He paused, and Katsuki could’ve sworn he heard a slight hiccup in Deku’s voice. “I... Kacchan... I just wanted to say thanks. And, um, show you that it got here safely. Though, you really should’ve wrapped it in something more sturdy!”

“Guess that gives me something to do next time then, huh?”
“Don’t even say that…! Kacchan, this is more than enough!”

Katsuki snorted. “Well, I’m just glad you don’t hate it.”

“Hate it!? Kacchan, I—”

And all of a sudden, the camera was flipped around, and Katsuki was met with a full-on, grainy rendering of Deku’s gorgeous face.

If he was being daring, he’d say there was a hint of a blush over those freckled cheeks and dried tears in those glistening green eyes.

“Kacchan, I love it.” Deku managed, and Katsuki felt as if ten years were added onto his lifespan at that. “Thank you.”

Suddenly, something unreadable crossed over Deku’s face, and the camera was flipped back around again.

_Huh?

“Why’d you turn the camera?” Katsuki asked, wanting to look at him for just a little longer. “Deku?”

There was a longer pause that time- the camera was trembling a bit more than before.

“I, um, I-I didn’t mean to flip it earlier.” He mumbled. “A-Ah, sorry!”

_Why does he sound so nervous?

So, only seconds later, he bit his lip and went for it. “Would you turn it back around for me?”

He could’ve sworn Deku’s breath hitched, just a little bit, even if the phone static made it difficult to tell. “No, no, you don’t… um…”

_Holy fuck, is he nervous?

“I like being able to see you when you talk.” Katsuki pushed, and Deku went stone-cold silent for a long, long moment.

“…ah, s-sorry, um, Ochako needs my help with vegetables the cutting!” Deku stammered, and immediately hung up on him.

Katsuki stared at his phone in utter disbelief, trying to comprehend the fact that _Pro Hero Valiant_ probably just hung up on him because he was nervous.

_You’re shitting me._

And sure enough, only seconds later-

[Deku] ah! sorry! didnt uh mena to hang up so fast!!!

[Deku] talk to you later kacchan!!!!

And if that wasn’t embarrassment, he wasn’t sure _what_ was.

[Katsuki] k. gl with the vegetables

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Katsuki couldn’t help but think that if that’s what Deku was like
over the phone, how he’d be in person in just a few short weeks.

*Does he get all red when he’s flustered? All the way up to his ears, even?*

Then-

*Is there anything I could do to get him all flustered like that when I see him again?*

Katsuki’s mind wandered back to what he’d talked about with Camie not a few hours ago, and silently, he wondered if any of her suggestions for his so-called *date* could be put in place.

*But getting him to spend time with me at the festival doesn’t count as a goddamn date. And, I mean…*

Katsuki swallowed, stared down at his phone and read over their texts from earlier that day again. Despite his slightly failing attempts at so-called *flirting*, Camie’s intervention of sorts with her choice phrasing and goddamn heart emoji had, sure enough, drawn a response from Deku confirming that yeah, maybe he *was* interested in at least hanging out together. But as for anything further…

*It doesn’t exactly count if only one of us knows that it’s a date, right?*

He didn’t leave his room for the rest of the evening, set to at least brainstorming the best ways he could go about making sure Deku’s eyes stayed on him.

*Might not be a battle, but I’ll still win! I’m gonna make this festival the best not-date there is, dammit!*

For that night, and all the nights leading up to the festival, Katsuki made sure to fuck himself extra hard with his dildo for good luck.

---

The morning of the festival was, as expected, hectic as hell. Some amount of chaos was usually fine, but when not only his class, but all the other classes were running around too, it was… *difficult*, to stay focused.

“Bakugou, did you bring the piping bags in?”

“Twenty minutes ago, asshole! What the fuck did you shits do with my food coloring? *And* my goddamn sprinkles!?”

“Chill out, dude! Look, we’ll get them, we just left them in the other room on accident!”

“...you’re all fired. Someone competent better get me the *very basic* stuff I’m asking for, before someone loses all *their* basics!”

Katsuki pointedly ignored the confused whispering around him trying to figure out just what that meant, but sure enough, the threat worked at least a little. His materials miraculously appeared in front of him not one minute later, and finally, he was able to finish up the next round of fan-fucking-tastic cupcakes.

*Gonna make our class the best damn stop in this place!*

“Baku, they said we’ve got twenty minutes before we need to be ready to open!” Camie alerted him, and he cursed under his breath.

“Only twenty minutes? Is that *really* all the time you’re leaving me to finish up this crap!?” He
Camie came a little closer, all dolled up in makeup and a baker’s outfit, and leaned close. “If anyone can get it done, it’s you, you know? You’re the best we have, Baku.”

“Damn right I am.” He hissed, and went back to expertly decorating the remaining cupcakes. “And of course I’ll be able to get this all done. Look at these little shits. Fuckin’ gorgeous. You better sell ‘em all.”

Camie nodded, and dared to pat him on the shoulder. “We got it from here, babe. You just keep doing what you’re doing, okay?”

He shooed her away with an aggressive shove from his shoulder, but didn’t disagree. “‘Course I will. Now, get out so I can!”

_Gonna be the death of me, I swear. I’ve still gotta make sure I’ve got something ready for Deku, too!_ 

It was a messy event, but Katsuki could’ve sworn there were _ooo’s_ and _ahh’s_ from the small group watching him go to town on the decorating side of their small bakery counter. He made sure to keep everything in line- frostings, sprinkles, additional toppers- yes, _everything._

_This is gonna be so damn good, Deku won’t be able to ignore it!_

But suddenly, as he went to go reach for a certain item-

“Where is my _goddamn whipped ganache_!?! Assholes, get my shit over here!” He screamed, absolutely and utterly done with the rest of his useless classmates. “Oh my god, how do you expect me to get anything done when you guys can’t seem to get me this stuff! Hurry it up!”

Thankfully, a refill showed up at his counter shortly after, but he was starting to get slightly more desperate, slightly more anxious about Deku walking coming in and seeing him looking like- like _this_. Disheveled, mildly disorganized, and disagreeing with his classmate’s poor choices of sitting on top of the nicely put together tables without so much as a second thought.

_Ignore it, ignore it, I’ve gotta be running this machine from the back end. They’re taking care of everything else, remember? All I gotta do now is make these cupcakes look fucking delicious._

Katsuki set his jaw, blocked out the sounds, and dove back into decorating like an absolute madman. With precision, of course.

_And after I get these done, I can get outta this place. Spend some time with Deku. Class B’s doing a play, or something, and General Studies is doing some sort of haunted house, right? Ah, maybe we could go over there, and if he gets freaked out he’ll hold onto me, but then again I might also freak out, but-_ 

Katsuki stopped his thinking in his tracks, bit down hard on his tongue, and went back to the cupcakes.

_They’re all relying on me, after all. And I ain’t gonna let my class down either._

Three minutes later, the next batch was done. And five after that, the next. Only one batch was left- Katsuki had saved them for last for a reason. These were all more specialty- while the rest were all general hero-themed cupcakes, the ones in the last round had been order more on special request. Camie had put in an order to get one for Yaoyorozu, which he couldn’t decline, but he made sure to slip in a new, special mint-chocolate flavored cupcake he’d baked on the side just for Deku. With
any luck, it’d go over well.

*If nothing else, I… I hope this one looks okay.*

He finished up the last tray with two minutes to spare, and finally let himself step back from the counter after a grueling hour of absurdly intense decorating.

But damn. They looked *good.* Almost enough to want to eat them himself. They’d brought in a cheap glass case and had Yaoyorozu make a few custom displays to set their cupcakes on, and as his decorated ones were placed on them, the room began to light up even brighter than before.

And maybe, just maybe, their class would be the best after all.

“Looking pretty good, huh, Baku?” Camie reapproached him, a little calmer now. “You should go change into something a little nicer. I know that sugar-stained aprons are a little bit in fashion, but… hmm, yeah, not sure Valiant’s gonna be into holding your sticky-ass hands.”

“We’re not- we’re not gonna *hold hands.*” Katsuki scoffed. “This ain’t even a date, asshole. It’s a *not-date.* No romantic lovey-dovey shit like you and Yaoyorozu do, no hand-holding, no acting like a loser in love. We’re *hanging out,* got it?”

“…sure, *Kacchan.*”

“Oh, shut up!”

Katsuki rolled his eyes and left her again, going off to wash his hands, and everything else, in the bathroom in the hallway just outside their classroom. And though they’d just opened up for guests, technically, there shouldn’t be any-

“Oh- Oh, Kacchan! Oh my gosh!”

You’re *fucking shitting* me.

Katsuki stared down at his black apron, coated in powdered sugar and brightly colored sprinkles, and nearly screamed on the spot.

No. No. *This is absolutely, one-hundred percent, not happening yet.*

But the voice was unmistakable, even if he’d only heard it over the phone for weeks now. And that name- that *goddamn nickname-* was not coming from Camie’s mouth this time.

He sighed, clenched his fists, and accepted his fate.

“Deku.” He said, and turned back around to face him. “You climb up the stairs to get here?”

And if he wasn’t already sure of who had greeted him, the completely and utterly exasperated groan made it more clear than ever.

“Kacchan, I swear, if you tell me to go sit down I am leaving *right now.* Don’t you remember what we talked about!?”

*Fuck, how’s he even cuter in person?*

And on second look, Deku was… taller than he remembered. Maybe even up to a whole head taller than Katsuki himself. He’d dressed simply, just in straight jeans and a long-sleeved, black shirt, but he looked like he’d gotten a fresh haircut since Deku had last graced him with pictures and he looked
as gorgeous as ever. Warm eyes, warm lips, warm freckles dotted over that pale skin made him want to know more, more than ever about him.

“But, um, Kacchan?” Deku started, staring at him a bit inquisitively. “You, uh… I think you’ve got a little something right-” He looked at him a little closer, pointed, and traced a whole circle around Katsuki’s face. “…there.”

Katsuki tried to find the spot he was talking about, but from the look of mild distress on Deku’s face, realized he’d just made the mess worse.

Then, not a moment later, Katsuki felt a rough thumb wipe the misplaced frosting off his cheek. “I meant over here.”

And at the same time, they both realized what had just happened.

Katsuki flushed all the way up to the tips of his ears, averted his eyes, and couldn’t meet Deku’s again.

*Shit, shit, shit!*

“I need to go change!” Katsuki blurted out, and sped off towards the bathroom.

“I’ll- uh, I’ll just go sit down.”

Deku swiftly left back into the classroom, leaving Katsuki to change and get himself looking at least mildly presentable.

Looking in the mirror was almost worse, though. Katsuki could’ve sworn that his hair, at least, had stayed safe, but alas, some traitorous chocolate syrup had managed to wrangle its way into his all-too-soft spikes. With a bit of irritated grumbling and fighting with the faulty school bathroom soap dispensers, he eventually managed to get the sugar and syrup stains off of his arms and face before changing into a new set of nice, clean, fresh-smelling clothes that Camie remembered to bring over through all the chaos.

Katsuki licked his lips, tugged at his sleeves a little bit more, and made sure that his shirt was buttoned up some- not all- the way up before leaving the bathroom.

And quietly, he realized that his new black button down and Deku’s black shirt matched, kinda.

*Not on purpose, either. Eh, I mean, it’s a common color. Nothing real special about it. Don’t need to make a big deal out of just a damn black shirt, of all things.*

But, he did feel a little nice in his gray skinny jeans and clean clothes now. More comfortable, more confident. And hopefully less flustered.

Maybe the whole event was just a stupid school thing, but it was his chance to show off to Deku. To maybe, just maybe, let Deku see him in a new and improved light.

*Look, I’m put together. I know what I’m doing. Go out with me?*

And when he stepped back into that classroom, fresh clothes and frosting-free face, he felt that maybe, maybe his chances weren’t completely in the gutter.

*He at least enjoys talking to me. Or he wouldn’t answer every one of my phone calls and texts, even if some of them are, uh… really stupid.*
Katsuki swallowed, looked around the small room, and saw a few more people had entered as well. He hadn’t noticed when Deku had approached him in the hall earlier, but Uravity and Red Riot had accompanied him. Not that that was too much of a surprise, really. From what he’d been hearing, they’d been the entirety of Deku’s entourage, keeping him company and helping him out with everything he needed done while he was still out of commission. Good friends they were—and good friends that apparently, were getting a little closer than just friends. The three of them were sitting together at one of their tables, and yeah, okay, maybe Deku looked like an awkward third wheel sitting alone on his side of the table, while the other two heroes were practically lying all over each other.

But, there were other people who had entered the room. A few students from the other classes and a couple of teachers that had stopped by to check out the show. There’d definitely be an influx of pro heroes coming in later and other students, but for now, this was a good start.

“Oh, Bakugou!” Yaoyorozu greeted him, looking him up and down. “You look good. Guessing you escaped Camie helping you out, then?”

Katsuki must’ve flushed at least a little bit, because she simply laughed. “Ah, figured. But you seriously, you look good! And Camie’s really just trying her best for you when it comes to clothes. Just cause she’s a little ditzy doesn’t mean she’s incompetent.”

“Yeah, yeah. Aren’t you obligated to say that, though? With your girlfriend status and all that?” He grinned, and now, wasn’t the only one looking a little red.

“I’m just speaking the truth.” She mumbled, and glanced back over at her girlfriend, who had busied herself starting to plate desserts and talk with the guests. “She’s got… a wonderful heart, you know. She really does care about you.”

“Pfft. Yeah, okay.” He snorted, only for Yaoyorozu to give him a strange glance.

“I’m not kidding, you know.” She smiled. “Even Todoroki still likes you. As… um, well, strange as he is sometimes. But just remember that you’ve got a lot of people looking out for you, okay? Myself included.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever you say.” He grumbled, but he was sure that she wouldn’t miss the hidden affection in his words. “I’m gonna make sure they haven’t fucked up my cupcakes.”

“We’re taking good care of them all!” Yaoyorozu called, but he just waved and made his way back towards the bakery counter in the corner. Todoroki and Kaminari had become the self-assigned arrangers of the cupcake displays, and though some had been put up, it was fairly clear that they were getting in some sort of argument about whether to place the orange-frosted ones next to the blue-frosted ones or not.

“Purple is the complementary color to orange. This is basic. Put them next to the purple ones on the left.”

“Nah, nah! But the orange-and-blue combo’s got that nice fire-and-ice vibe, y’know? And, well, you, of all people, should know how nice it is!”

“I never asked for this combination. I was just born like-”

“It’s a good combo. Just. Please. Trust me.”

“That doesn’t mean that they’d look better next to the blue, though. Put them next to the purple ones.”
Lord, they're hard to listen to.

Katsuki walked up and stepped between them. “Put them next to the green ones.”

Both Todoroki and Kaminari looked at him with confusion, yet it was only after one more glare from Katsuki and a finger-across-the-throat motion that got them to relent and reluctantly agree to his placing.

“They… don’t look awful there.” Todoroki admitted. “It’s a little strange, but…”

“Eh, who woulda thought!” Kaminari laughed. “Thanks, Bakugou! You’re a bro!”

Katsuki rolled his eyes. “It was just hard to watch. Where did you put my specialty ones?”

Todoroki pointed to his right, in the nicer display. “Did you make that green one with the black for Valiant?”

“Maybe.” He narrowed his eyes. “I’m allowed to, aren’t I?”

Todoroki shrugged. “You know more about the art of seduction than I do. But it seems a little strange to give someone something to eat that looks like them. Would you want to eat something with your face on it?”

Katsuki groaned, and had to physically restrain himself from slapping Todoroki. “Yes, I would, because my face is the best goddamn face. But that isn’t even relevant here! It doesn’t have his face on it!”

“Well, it could.”

“But it doesn’t! Look at it!” Katsuki’s finger jut out towards the case. “Look. On the left, a polar bear themed one for you, asshole. On the right, Camie’s special order for Yaoyorozu. In the middle, a nice, well-designed, perfectly iced mint chocolate flavored cupcake with homemade mint, buttercream icing, and custom-designed chocolate toppers to reflect Valiant’s mask designs. See? No faces here.”

“Well, I mean, it still has the essence of-”

Katsuki clenched his fists, sent him another glare, not wanting to cause a public disruption when the object of his immense affections was still in the room with him. “Just. Stop. Please. Get me a nice plate, and let me serve this before someone else gets to him.”

Todoroki looked a little confused, but finally stopped arguing with him to fetch a plate from behind the counter.

I don’t wanna get myself any dirtier now that I’ve gotten myself cleaned up. This is good. I look great, and Deku’s gonna love this shit. Right?

“Baku, what are you- what are you doing?”

Camie had somehow reappeared, carrying with her a couple plates all topped with cupcakes. “Are you really wanting to give that to him and not give stuff to Uravity and Red Riot, too? That’s just gonna make him feel more awkward than he already does! Look at him!”

And sure enough, one glance over at Deku confirmed her words. His eyes were darting all over the room, fingers tapping nervously on the desk, and seemed to be avoiding staring at him.
“How about this.” Camie sighed. “I’ll serve the other two, and you can come with me and give yours to Valiant. Think that’ll be okay for you?”

“Sure. Fine. Just- don’t say anything weird. Please.”

Camie seemed to notice his sudden fidgeting, and frowned. “You okay, babe? Feeling alright?”

Katsuki swallowed and rubbed the back of his head, praying that his palms wouldn’t start crackling. “Yeah- yeah. Feeling fine. I just, uh, ran into him in the hall when I was going to the bathroom, and…” He flushed at the uncalled for memory of Deku’s hand on his cheek. “What’s the point of looking half-decent if he’s already seen me looking like shit? I didn’t wanna start off this day like that. I just- I want a good impression, y’know?”

For some reason, Camie grinned.

“Well, I don’t think the reason he’s acting so awkward is just cause he’s alone, you know.” She nudged him. “Minute you walked in here again and caught sight of you, he started looking away. Might be wrong, but I can almost guarantee you that he thinks you’re hot. Alright?”

Deku? Thinking that I’m–? Come on, don’t be ridiculous.

Katsuki fumbled with the edge of his shirt and nodded. “Yeah, sure. Whatever.”

I know he doesn’t see me like that. Today, though, I’ve just gotta… you know, make that impression a little bit better.

A hand came up to pat his shoulder. “Come on, babe. Let’s go, okay? Sooner he finishes up here, the sooner we can we you go off and have fun with him. You’ll be okay, I promise!”

Yeah...I’ll be fine. “Okay.”

Plating the cupcakes went fast enough, and yet, Katsuki couldn’t help but smile when he finally saw Deku’s finished product. It really did look nice- there was a thin chocolate drizzle over the top of it, matching with the nice, light green that went so well with his eyes. It wasn’t exactly the same, no, not by far, but it was something. The two cupcakes they’d gotten for Uravity and Red Riot were nice as well- pink and red respectively, and custom enough to where it probably wouldn’t seem too out of place for Deku to have his own specialty one.

But Uravity and Red Riot don’t have a special recipe. I didn’t bake those ones, just decorated them. It’s not the same as Deku’s, so… that makes it kinda special, right?

Deku was barely fifteen feet away from him, but it was still a bit nerve wracking to be serving him like this, after their only communication for so long was brief spots of talking between practices or phone calls or one-off text conversations. But all the same, he realized that this must’ve- had to have been, really- one of Deku’s first real trips outside his apartment in so long.

He still looks strong, but… he’s definitely gotten paler. Maybe a little thinner? But he doesn’t… he doesn’t look nearly as tired.

Somehow, it felt like there was a little more life to Deku than before, too. More energy in his words, his movement, hell, even the way he was sitting.

Happier, maybe? Is that the word I’m looking for?
No matter what exactly it was, there was no doubt there was real, legitimate improvement there. Deku was alive.

_Nervous, still injured, but alive._

He swallowed, picked up the plate, and with Camie at his side, went for it. She started up the conversation- placing the food in front of Uravity and Red Riot, seeing their excited smiles, but lastly-

“Deku.” Katsuki started, trying to sound like he knew what he was doing. “S’for you.”

And for the first time since he walked back in the room, Deku looked up at him- well, maybe not at him, but at least at the plate in his hands before his eyes trailed up to meet Katsuki’s own. But instead of the expected ‘oh, thanks!’ or other generally positive reaction, Deku’s mouth just hung open a little bit, and the faintest hint of red dusted itself over his cheeks.

“You did change.” Deku said, and Katsuki figured that was the dumbest thing he’d ever heard come from his mouth.

“Uh, yeah?” He replied, and missed Camie’s snort beside him, alongside Uravity and Red Riot’s mildly exasperated faces. “The other clothes were dirty as fuck.”

_Wait, was there something Camie told me to say? To, uh, make him more interested or something? Shoot, gotta hurry, before he says something next!_

“Do these make me look hot?” Katsuki fumbled out, and realized only a moment later that those were very much _not_ the words Camie had told him before.

_Shit, shit! She said to do something like ‘do I look good?’ That was… dammit, that was probably too forward!_

Sure enough, Deku looked mildly stunned by those words, but still managed a bit of a smile. “It, um, does look nice on you.”

_Yeah, okay, I wasn’t prepared for this. Calm down, it’s gonna be just fine. Just fine!_

He managed to take a deep breath, and nodded. “Thanks.” A pause, and then. “I forgot to tell you earlier, but… you look like you’re doing better?”

_That was more normal, right? We back on track now?_

At that, Deku seemed to relax a little more. “A-Ah, thanks! I, uh… well, the healing injuries really aren’t that pretty, but… aha. You can’t see them when I’m wearing pants, anyway.”

_Take ‘em off and show me, then?_

To his relief, the words stayed in his head this time. “I’m just glad to see you out here. Really.” He swallowed. “I wanna show you some new techniques I’ve been working on when you get a chance.”

And for whatever reason, the mention of combat made Deku’s face really light up. “Ah, yeah! I’d love to see what you’ve come up with whenever you, uh, get time to. I know you’re probably busy though… um…”

_Fuck, are we both gonna be awkward?_
“We could set something up later?” He suggested, and Deku’s eyes went wide at that comment. “I dunno, I mean, right now’s kinda busy, but I do have… uh… some, free time?”

“Yes!” Deku’s eyes shot open, only for him to quickly sink back down into his seat upon realizing what he’d done. “I-I mean, uh, yeah! Sure, I don’t mind scheduling something if you’re not gonna be overwhelmed, ah… aha.”

...am I missing something? He’s… he really does seem a bit more nervous than I thought he’d be.

“Okay.” He dipped his head, deciding not to worry about that for now. “Uh… anyways, this is still for you. For the, y’know, bakery stuff.”

Deku took his eyes off him for just a second to gaze over the cupcake. “This really is nice looking. Who did the decorating?”

Shit, was that not obvious enough?

When he was supposedly too slow to answer, however, Camie did it for him. “Baku here did it! All the decorating for the cupcakes was his job! Ah, aren’t they just as sweet as he is?”

“Yeah… yeah, they are.” Deku murmured, not realizing that that was the exact wrong thing to be saying at that point in time. “I guess that’s why you were all covered in dessert stuff then, Kacchan? When I saw you outside there?”

Katsuki awkwardly rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeah. I mean, someone had to do it. Didn’t wanna be serving all these extras, either.”

Deku chuckled, and raised an eyebrow at that. “Oh? Does that mean I’m not one of those ‘extras’, then? Lucky me.”

His friends laughed a little bit, and a small part of Katsuki just wanted to run and hide. “I- I mean, I did a damn good job of it! I told you our class’s event was gonna be great, didn’t I?”

Deku pursed his lips. “Well, you never bothered to really give me any details about it, so how would I know what to expect?” He paused, and graced Katsuki with a soft smile that made his gut twist more than it should. “But yeah, it is pretty great. I’ll give you that. God, I haven’t gone out for any fancy desserts like this in a long time! It’s, ah, really nice to be treated a little by you and your class.”

“I’m glad.” Katsuki dipped his head, trying to keep the too-happy grin off his cheeks. “After all the shit you’ve been through, I’d say you deserve a little something nice, hm?”

“Yeah, I’m not gonna push it away if you’re offering.” Deku said. “I… well, it’s getting a little easier to do things now, you know? I mean, I’ve been talking to you about it a little, but… ah, sorry! Actually, do you wanna talk after I eat? I don’t wanna just let this go to waste after you spent so much effort decorating it.”

“Ah, sure.” Katsuki agreed. “I guess, uh… just come talk to me when you’re ready?”

“Yes! Ah, as long as I can find you.” Deku reminded him. “You just gonna be in this room?”

“Yeah, I wi~”

“Hey!” Camie suddenly interrupted, grabbing Katsuki by the arm. “Well, you three lovelies enjoy your dessert! I know it’ll be up to our Plus Ultra standards!”
And before Katsuki could object, he was being wrenched away, off to the other side of the room, and after a quick nod to Yaoyorozu, out the door.

“Baku!” She whispered, though the intensity could’ve brought it up to a yell. “You- you realize you were practically flirting with him back there, right?”

All the blood rushed to Katsuki’s face at once, and he pulled himself out of her grip before saying anything else. “I- I wasn’t flirting. That was normal conversation, asshole.”

“It stopped being ‘normal conversation’ as soon as you started suggesting to him that you two hang out outside of here! I mean, I know you two are getting closer, but that was like-” Camie’s head shook wildly from side to side. “Here, to here, to here! And once you got past that awkward thing you had going for a minute, it was like– bam! Hello, inner smooth-talker! Where’ve you been when I desperately needed you!?” Camie stopped for just a moment, and a mischievous glint lit up her eyes. “You realized you just scored alone time with him for the rest of the day, right?”

“Huh? Wait, I didn’t-”

Camie put her finger over Katsuki’s lips, silently shushing him. “As soon as he asked to talk later, that was ‘scoring alone time’. Accept it, babe! You’re doing this!” She grabbed Katsuki’s shoulders, and leaned in even closer to his face. “Fine, whatever, maybe it’s not a date, but you’re starting something! This is the next step up from texting random memes at each other like a couple of losers!”

“Scuse you, my memes are great!”

Camie rolled her eyes, but didn’t comment. “Anyways. I’m just- I’m so proud of you! Oh my god, my boy’s growing up! Maybe you do have a shot at getting something other than just that dildo in your ass!”

Katsuki groaned, and immediately shoved her away at that comment. “I’m fucking delightful. ‘Course I’m gonna get more than just silicone and sunshine. But fine. Yeah. See, I’m doing great!”

“You really could work on your conversation starters, though.” Camie commented. “I know we didn’t have a whole lot of time, but I expect at least a little more from you! Good news is, Valiant isn’t exactly a pro at the whole talking thing either. Be thankful he’s as awkward as you are.” She clasped her hands together next, and nodded. “But okay, we’re at stage two now. You remember what we talked about?”

“Take him around to the fun, interactive booths?” Katsuki questioned. “Get, uh… get him to stay close to me? You were saying, go to something like General Studies’ haunted house thing, right?”

“Exactly!” Camie grinned. “You get him to go with you to the haunted house, you get close to him when he starts freaking out, and he goes all like ‘Oh Kacchan, you’re so amazing! Why don’t we go find a back closet and fuck?’ Perfect, right?”

Katsuki sighed. “We are not gonna fuck. S’not even going on your plan, asshole. But… yeah, okay. Haunted house. I can do that.”

Their conversation quickly turned from that to peering back on inside the classroom to see Deku finishing up with his cupcake, looking- if he had to admit it- fairly happy.

I missed his smile so damn much.

Then-
Really, when... when did it go away?

Katsuki told himself, again, to not worry about that for now. Just for a little while.

“Oh, oh! He’s standing up!” Camie exclaimed, watching from the exact same spot as Katsuki was. “Oh, Baku! I think you did something right, he looks so excited!”

Okay, yeah, I’ll take credit for this one.

Deku finally got up from his seat, and for a moment, Katsuki thought he saw him struggle a bit. Uravity seemed to notice his hesitance too, however, and moved closer to put an arm under Deku’s for a little bit of support. Seeing him lean into the grip with such a natural movement and familiarity really made Katsuki start to think.

Sure, okay... maybe I can make him happy, but can I give him that? Am I... is that something I’m capable of doing?

It was only a few seconds they were like that, but Deku looked all the more relieved when she backed off and let go. Katsuki could see that each step he was taking to start was more hesitant, more uncertain, so much more different than that complete and utter confidence he’d radiated back at his rescue and that first training session. Quietly, Katsuki bit down on his lip and reminded himself that one day, he’d see Deku at full strength again, even if that day wasn’t today.

Deku quickly caught sight of him right outside the doorway and scooted over to him fast, but not too fast.

“Ah, Kacchan!” He started, a smile blossoming through that field of freckles. “That was hands down one of the best cupcakes I’ve ever had. That mint with the chocolate- just, so good.” Deku laughed. “Ah, did you really remember that that was one of my favorite flavors, too?”

“Course I did.” Katsuki huffed, but the fondness in his words was unmistakable. “I ain’t stupid.”

“Never said you were stupid.” Deku snorted. “I just- well, uh… really appreciated that.”

“The cupcake?”

There was a brief pause, and-

“...more the being remembered, I think.” He said, a bit softer than before. “Well, uh... sorry. I don’t wanna get all down today. Was there somewhere you wanted to go first?”

Yes!

“Yeah.” He glanced up. “You like scary shit?”

Deku paled just a little. “...mind if I ask what kind of ‘scary’ you’re talking about?”

Oh, is he not good with...?

Katsuki felt a smirk start to crease his lips, and grinned. “How about I show you?”

He’d planned with Camie a few days prior about how to get Deku to go off alone with him if he didn’t make it simple- nothing awful, and nothing forceful, but just a few distractions or purposefully planned words and phrases were going to be doing the job if they didn’t have an easy route in. Katsuki was ready for the long game- Deku couldn’t possibly make this whole thing easy for him, after all, with his status and friendships. But, for whatever reason-
Some sort of surprise seemed to dawn over Deku’s face, and he nodded right back with another one of his sweet smiles. “Then lead the way, Kacchan.”

_He’s gonna be the death of me…!_

Camie seemed to be a bit surprised too by his immediate compliance, but took it in a little more stride than Katsuki had. “Well, I guess I’ll leave you two be! Have fun, boys!”

Just before leaving to return to her position in their class bakery, she gave Katsuki a knowing wink and thumbs up, almost in a ‘you got this!’ sort of way.

_Yeah, I… I got this! Okay._

“I like her.” Deku remarked as she disappeared. “Is, um… you two are good friends, right? You seem really close.”

Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Putting it that way might be pushing it a little bit, but… eh, she ain’t bad. Could be worse, I guess.” He paused, and caught sight of her and Yaoyorozu talking a bit inside. “I think she’s cooled off a little since she and her girlfriend got together, though.”

“O-Oh…! She, uh, has a girlfriend!” Deku stammered, as if he’d had some strange revelation. “That’s great! I, well, hope they’re very happy together. And that they, uh, stay together for a very long time!”

He snorted. “Yeah, yeah, they’re doing fine. Wanna get going?”

One quick sigh of what might’ve been relief from Deku later, and they were off. Slowly, of course, because Katsuki wasn’t in the mood for Deku to accidentally strain something he shouldn’t during the one chance they really had to spend time together. But even just walking down the hall he walked down every day felt different with Deku by his side.

_Back there… was he thinking that I… that me and Camie, of all fucking people, were together? Shit, I should clarify things a little._

“Deku.” He started, still walking. “You know I’m not with anyone, right?”

Deku gave him a short wheeze, but nodded. “Ah, well… I know now, I guess. Why, did you have some girl you’re interested in? I-I mean, ah, really, has no one asked you out?”

“Asked me out? And I accept!?” Katsuki nearly choked on his own laughter. “Oh, god… fucking hell, no. Well, I mean, yeah- people have tried, but I don’t even like girls!” He paused, and- “Not like there’s anyone in this damn school I’d wanna date anyway. I ain’t interested in anyone here.”

“Oh, ah… really?” Deku’s words were hesitant, all too careful, but there was something, just _something_ hiding in them. “I didn’t know that.”

“S’cause we’ve never talked about it before. Dumbass.” Katsuki replied, still trying to decipher the strange lilt to his earlier response. “But, uh… yeah. Destination’s right outside, on the left. Gen Ed set up this whole maze of tents and shit to put this on.”

The topic of relationships was dropped for the time being, and it was only a minute or so more before they were out the door again and met with the growing crowds of people in the area.

“Oh, wow… there’s a lot more people here than there were when I came in.” He murmured, scanning the space outside. “Agh, also, I’m sorry if anyone wants to come talk to me. I’ve been
trying my best to keep a low profile while I’ve been out, but… I know the press isn’t completely unavoidable, even here.”

“Then let’s hide out in the attractions.” Katsuki grinned, and poked him gently in the side. “Look, see that big thing set up over there? That’s the haunted house. And to the side of that…” He reached out, pointing towards some large area crowded with chairs and a platform. “Class B’s doing some big play thing, too. We can check it out later if you want?”

Deku nodded. “Yeah, that would probably work. But man… there’s so much going on here. I forgot how hectic these festivals can get.”

Oh, right. “S’been a while since you’ve been out to something this big, hasn’t it?”

“Ah, yeah…” He paused. “And, um, sorry if I’m kinda out of it today. I mean, you know how little I’ve been out of my apartment. Everything seems so much more… I don’t know, overwhelming? Than it used to be.”

Though he clearly wasn’t upset, there was no doubt so much of the confidence Deku used to radiate had drained away, and now, everything was just starting to be built back up.

“Don’t worry about it.” Katsuki shrugged. “S’no problem. We can take it easy.”

“You’re right, you’re right.” Deku bit his lip, and nodded. “Ah, well, let’s go to the haunted house. We can get away from everything else for a while!”

‘We’ can get away. Huh. I think I can get on board with that.

There wasn’t much of a line when they arrived, and though Deku got a few awed stares from people as he arrived, nobody pushed the topic of his accident or his current state of being. Katsuki thought he might’ve gotten a few stares too from just being with Deku, but that… that was something he was fine with handling.

“They really did a nice job of making it dark in here.” Deku commented when they walked in, glancing around at his surroundings. “I’m impressed- this is really cool!”

“I’ll be impressed if they manage to scare the shit out of me.” Katsuki gloated, stepping forward with confidence. “I mean, hell. It ain’t like some jumpscare are gonna make me-”

And the moment the words left his mouth, someone dropped down from the ceiling, head and wild hair combined with a screech from the actor, and echoed in full from Katsuki himself before he found himself stumbling back just a little and nearly falling into Deku’s waiting arms.

“Kacchan, you okay?” Deku asked as the actor disappeared back into the ceiling, and Katsuki wished he could make the goosebumps on his arms calm down just a bit. “You, uh… you seemed pretty startled there.”

“I’m perfectly- perfectly okay!” He announced, hoping the last tremors of nervousness in his words had left. “I ain’t scared. That one was a fluke.”

Deku snorted- snorted! “Yeah, okay. Let’s see how the rest of this goes then, hm?”

Katsuki grit his teeth, and vowed to himself to not act that jumpy anymore. “Fine, then.”

He’s supposed to be the one jumping into my arms, dammit!
That being said, Katsuki stuck a little closer to Deku’s side on their trip down the dark maze, trying to pretend that he wasn’t as freaked out as he was.

*I’m not good with creepy shit. I know I’m not good with creepy shit. Why the hell did I let Camie convince me this was a good idea!?

After the third cheesy jumpscare, Katsuki found himself grabbing Deku’s arm and praying for the best. Deku had simply pat him gently, and helped him calm down a little bit more than he had been before.

That being said, he couldn’t say he was happy about leaving Deku’s grip when they left that cursed tent. All of General Studies was now firmly seated on his shitlist, for nothing more than making him look stupid in front of his crush.

“Why’d you ask me if I was gonna get freaked out?” Deku laughed. “Kacchan, come on. Jumpscare? I was thinking more like, some psychological horror stuff. These aren’t that spooky!”

“Shut up.” Katsuki muttered, and shoved his hands in his pockets and turned away before Deku could see the embarrassment rising up on his face. “What next?”

Deku shifted beside him. “Well, it is around lunchtime, but I also had that cupcake from your class’ event earlier. Are the smaller activities nearby? Maybe we could just do some short games, if you want?” He sucked in a breath. “Well, anything that doesn’t involve too much extra walking. I, uh… we’re still working on my stamina.”

Katsuki nodded, still trying to recover what little composure he had left. “I think they’ve got some ring toss set up on the other side of the field? And some beanbags and shit, that sorta stuff. Whaddya think?”

“I think you should lead the way, Kacchan!”

*I’m never gonna get used to hearing him say my name like that. God, he’s too fucking cute.

And this time, before just walking towards their next stop, Katsuki grabbed Deku’s arm and hauled him along at a brisk, barely-running pace. He knew Deku’s limits, knew that too much action wasn’t good, but-

Katsuki swallowed, hoped to the high heavens that everything would be okay, and let his hand slide down a little further, just past the hem of Deku’s sleeve and onto the pale skin of his wrist.

*We’re not holding hands. Nope. But just this much…

Katsuki glanced back at Deku to see him looking content, and happier than he’d remember seeing him in some time.

*This is this okay, right?

Ring toss wound up going better than expected. Despite Deku’s current conditions, that game could be played with arms alone. They’d been neck-and-neck, point-for-point the whole round until Katsuki made one fumble with his release and Deku continued to hit the goal right on point, earning him that round.

At some point afterwards, Deku had asked him if he wanted to hang out with his other friends, to which he just answered with a shrug and a where to next?
I don’t really want this day to end… texting, hell, even calling is great, but…

Katsuki swallowed, and took another look at Deku, his bright smile enough to light up even the darkest of days.

It’s not the same, is it?

Later, during Class B’s play, Katsuki tried to pretend he hadn’t scooted a little closer to Deku than he probably should’ve.

“That… what on earth did I just watch?” Deku asked, choking back a laugh. “I’ve seen a lot of weird stuff, and I mean, my class didn’t exactly fall on the ‘normal’ end of the scale either, but that… that was by far the strangest mashup I’ve ever seen.”

“You were laughing.” Katsuki reminded him, only to be met with a light elbow to his side.

“I mean, it was kinda funny? At least, in the same way that a confused herd of animals running around is funny.” Deku snorted. “Well, it was a change of pace from the other kinds of shows I’ve been seeing lately, anyway. You know, uh, Pro Hero Earphone Jack? We’ve been hanging out a bit more, just for coffee or lunch sometimes, but she holds a lot of music gigs, too! I’ve been going to a lot of them lately. It’s so fun watching someone perform when you just know they’re into what they’re doing.”

“Kinda like how you are with hero work?” Katsuki asked.

“Ahh, maybe… I don’t know, I’ve never really thought about my work as being entertaining or eye-catching.” He shrugged. “What, is that how you think about what I do?”

Watching you move around the battlefield is enough to make me bust a nut, so yeah, maybe?

“Kinda.” Katsuki mumbled, not meeting his eyes. “I mean, hell. Your movements are always so smooth. It’s easy to tell you know what you’re doing. You make it look… easy.”

“Easy, huh?” Deku murmured, and pulled his arms closer to his chest. “It’s… well, one of the easier things these days.”

Shit, Deku…

They continued walking away from the remains of the stage, and out of the corner of his eye, Katsuki caught sight of a group of reporters only a short walk away. Yet, one quick signal to Deku later had them speeding off to go back inside the school and away from them for just a bit. It was as if they were on some sort of stealth mission, watching their backs and checking around corners before finally finding somewhere a little more isolated.

“Um, Kacchan…” Deku started, and it was only then that Katsuki noticed he was leaning against the wall a little more than before. “Mind if we sit down for a few minutes?”

“Shouldn’t even be a question.” Katsuki gave him a sharp glare. “Sit your ass down, Deku.”

Deku’s mouth fell open in fake-shock. “I thought I told you not to say that, didn’t I?”

“You said it shouldn’t be the first thing that comes out of my mouth.” He grinned. “Come on, Deku. Get with it.”

Teasing aside, Deku sat down against the bare wall, just the two of them alone in the hallway. Aside
from the somewhat-distant voices, it seemed like they were the only ones in that side of the building. It wasn’t as if it was the first time they’d been alone together today, but it was the first they’d seemed so close. But it was obvious Deku was getting tired- the slight heave of his chest and the noticeable drop in the energy levels of his voice were a dead giveaway.

I’d imagine he’s gonna leave pretty soon.

But they stayed quiet for a minute like that- just sitting, breathing, resting, recovering.

“...today has been really great.” Deku started. “I, um... I know it’s probably pretty weird to wanna hang out with me instead of your friends, but... I really appreciate it.”

“I get to see those dumbasses every day.” Katsuki scoffed. “Not you. Hell, I mean, ‘course I’d wanna see you after we’ve been talking so much.”

Deku managed a short laugh. “Yeah, that’s fair. But, speaking of seeing you, uh...” He chewed his lip for a moment, and continued. “I know you mentioned training sessions in your letter a while ago, and I know that I’m not exactly in the condition to spar right now, but... I was just thinking, and, uh... what would you think about just commentary and correction until I’m healed enough to fight again?”

Wait... wait, really?

“You mean like, I train and you watch? Like coaching?” Katsuki asked, excitement rushing into his words.

He nodded, some more of that familiar light coming back into his eyes. “Yeah! Exactly like coaching. We could figure out a schedule after I get back home tonight? Or, uh, tomorrow? Whatever's easiest for you.”

“Sure. Yeah, uh, tonight works.” Katsuki fumbled through his words, trying to hold back most of his excitement. “This sounds like it’ll be fun.”

“Hopefully informative, too!” Deku added. “I mean, hell. I didn’t start gaining rank for nothing. As far as technique goes, I’m sure there’s some stuff I can help you out with.”

Too bad he ain’t in good enough shape to be physically working with me in training. Ah, well, this is a start!

“Count me in.” Katsuki agreed. “I mean, I wanna learn from the best, and you’re pretty up there.”

“Was pretty up there.” He sighed. “Ah, well. I’ll gain rank back eventually. But thanks.” Deku pursed his lips. “It’s the one accomplishment I can really call my own, for the most part. Uh, anyways! Yeah, let’s figure out logistics tonight.”

A part of him couldn’t believe this was happening, that Deku had even remembered his offer, but he wasn’t about to let this chance slip past him.

“Sounds good.” He agreed. “I’m excited.”

Katsuki wasn’t sure what all it was he was seeing in Deku’s eyes- it was some mixture of excitement, relief, maybe even fear, but-

“Me too, Kacchan.” Deku smiled, and let some of that lingering worry wash away. “More than you know.”
More than I know, huh?

Inwardly, he let himself smile a little too.

Well, right back at you.

Chapter End Notes

we need to be able to have fun sometimes. happy new year to all yall!!

My twitter is aeronines!!

edit: for the sake of me being able to finish up a few things soon here, im gonna be skipping a chapter upload next week! it'll be back around jan 15/16, so keep an eye out!
It was five o’clock on a Thursday afternoon. Warm, glowing sunlight trickled down onto low, crystalline waves, bathing the whole area with a soft aura. They’d picked a good day for this, really. The temperature had been dropping, but Izuku had just pulled on a thin jacket and a pair of sweatpants before heading out to the beach and was feeling fairly comfortable.

Two weeks after the culture festival had passed, Katsuki had finally been freed from schoolwork and practice to have enough time to go out and train with Izuku. Scheduling had been a bit difficult as of late- finals had taken up the majority of Katsuki’s time, but now, he was finally free from school for a few weeks.

He should be here soon… he told me he was on the way. And I can’t imagine it’ll be too hard for him to find this place.

Being back at Dagobah beach after years of visiting almost seemed like a bit of a dream. He was glad to see that not much had changed- though the spot was a near trash-magnet, Izuku had seen organizations and events in the past dedicated to keeping it clean after he’d managed to clear the whole thing so many years ago.

At least this hasn’t been left to rot in my absence… but shit. Has it really been five years? Six?

Izuku’s fingers tightened, gripping his sweatpants.

Times… times were easier then. I think.

It was getting easier to get up in the morning, easier to at least go out and take care of the things he needed to do, but even so.

Ah, well. At least I have this to look forward to. And I… I can’t be all down when Kacchan gets here.

Izuku sighed, took a deep breath, and slowly, slowly, let it out. There wasn’t time to sink too deep into those unwanted thoughts now, not when Katuski was relying on him to be there, be present, and be helpful. And as calming as sitting on the beach was, he wasn’t sure how much longer he wanted to be alone.

But to his relief, a familiar voice shook him from his thoughts not a minute later.

“Oi, Deku!”

Izuku’s eyes shot open and he turned around to see Katsuki walking towards him, decked out in casual workout gear. Sweatpants much like Izuku’s own hung from his slim waist, complete with a
too-tight, long-sleeve compression shirt hugging his upper half.

Oh no. No, no no. No thinking about just how great his chest looks in that, nope, nope. I can’t afford to deal with another boner right now.

“Hey.” Izuku started, fighting back a too-big smile. “How are you looking- er, doing?” He stammered, hoping Katsuki didn’t catch his slip up. But there was undoubtedly a slight humor twinkling in those red eyes, and though it obviously hadn’t been missed, it didn’t seem as if Katsuki minded all that much.

“Y’know. I’m fine.” Katsuki shrugged. “Having school off is alright, but, eh… s’ kinda boring to not have practice.”

So dedicated. I love it. “Well, I can try and help you out a little bit with that now.”

“Yeah. I’ve been looking forward to coming out here all day.” Katsuki sighed. “Ugh. The old hag made me go buy groceries this morning. Had to do some cleaning and stuff too.”

“Oh no. Not responsibilities!” Izuku teased, and Katsuki just groaned. “I know, I know, it’s not fun. But just wait till you’re on your own. Then there’s even more stuff to take care of!”

Katsuki scoffed. “Psh, I know. But at least I’ll be able to manage my own schedule. Won’t have to run on someone else’s time.”

“Fair enough.” He nodded. “Well, wanna go ahead and get started?”

“Hell yeah.” Katsuki stretched out, arms above his head, shirt stretching too much over taut muscle. “I jogged from my house to here to warm up. Didn’t realize this place was so close.”

“I’m glad it wasn’t too much of a hassle for you to get to. And hey, I guess that means we don’t live too far apart, then?”

Katsuki raised an eyebrow. “Huh, true. I’m about two miles away. You?”

“South side of town.” Izuku confirmed. “It’s a bit further, though. Walking took about an hour.”

And as soon as the words an hour left his mouth, Katsuki stopped, stared, and half-glared at him.

“You tellin’ me you walked an hour to get here!?” He clenched his fists, took a few steps closer, and though the mild frustration in his eyes was certainly not fun to meet, Izuku could hardly take him seriously with those sculpted pecs hovering so damn close to his face. “Deku, you really-”

“It’s fine.” He interrupted. “Seriously. I can be out for longer now. Physical therapist said that as long as it’s not super strenuous, like going up a bunch of hills or running or biking or anything, I can walk as long as I sit down when I’m tired.” With that, he gestured to his current position, cross-legged on the beach. “See? I’m good.”

Katsuki still didn’t seem totally pleased by that explanation, but didn’t push the subject. “Whatever. Just don’t be stupid.”

“Wanna stretch first?” Izuku started, getting to his feet. “I can do it with you.”

“Mm. Sure.”

He watched as Katsuki fell effortlessly into a smooth stretch, arms up and over his head again. Izuku followed, and though working his arms way easier, when Katsuki switched into doing legs he had to
actually try harder, wincing as pain began to trickle up the rest of his body. It was embarrassing, really. He was the adult here. He was supposed to be the one in charge. But when Izuku had to break out of the stretch early and steady himself, it was all he could do to ignore the worry in Katsuki’s too-knowing gaze.

*I’m getting better. Things are improving. I’ll be back at full strength soon enough.*

And as hard as it was to remind himself that there was at least some hope for the future, it was getting easier to do so.

That being said, taking a step back and looking up towards Katsuki graced his vision with a view of taut, lean muscle, bare skin from his shirt riding up on his stomach.

*God, it almost looks a size too small… am I really gonna complain, though?*

Yeah, maybe he really *shouldn’t* be looking at a high schooler in this way, but sometimes, the pictures Katsuki sent and the clothes he chose to wear during the few times they’d spent together almost led him to believe he was doing it on purpose. If there was anything he’d come to learn over the time they’d been talking, it was that Katsuki wasn’t exactly… subtle. Not that he was any better himself. But at least Izuku had refrained from asking too-revealing questions and texting him overtly sexy selfies on occasion.

*Dunno why he’d even want me, but… god, Kacchan. You’re really hard to ignore.*

“‘Kay.” Katsuki announced after a minute longer, shaking off a bit before turning back to Izuku. “I’m done. You all good?”

“Ah-” He started, and tried not to stammer when Katsuki took a step closer, barely two feet away from him now, and ran a not-so-hidden hand from his shoulders, across his chest, and all the way down to his hips. “I. Yeah. I’m done.”

“Awesome.” He grinned, and if Izuku didn’t know better, he could’ve sworn there was a hint of redness over those sunset-lit cheeks. “Where should we start, boss?”

*Oh, don’t you dare go calling me that!*

“Well, uh.” Izuku swallowed, trying his best to ignore the fact that the crisp, chilly air was causing Katsuki’s nipples to perk up under that far-too-thin fabric. “Maybe before we get started, you could, um, remind me of the specifics of your quirk again?”

Katsuki nodded. “Sure. I mean, you know the basics. S’my sweat and all.” He hugged his arms around his chest, just underneath his pecs. “It can be tough to get going in the winter cause of the weather, but that’s what gear is for. My winter costume helps me keep my quirk functioning at a normal level.”

*Kacchan, I’m gonna die if you keep trying to show off your tits.*

A part of him wanted to call the training quits right then and there and go home before his dick got too excited, and yet that deeper, more primal part of him wanted to pin Katsuki to the glistening sand and fuck him for how damn distracting he was trying to be.

*That- no. No no no. You’re gonna be a goddamn mature and in control adult, and you’re gonna get through this practice with your dignity intact. Masturbation can wait!*

“Yeah.” Izuku said, taking a deep breath and trying his best to level himself. “How precise is your
control of it? I’ve seen your wide blasts, but I really haven’t seen a whole lot of the smaller stuff up close.”

There was some sort of mischievous smirk that rose up on Katsuki’s face at that question. “Lemme show you.”

It was a relief to finally have Katsuki take a few steps back, but Izuku watched carefully as he raised up a palm and curled the other one into a circle in front of it, and released a thin, striking explosion that must’ve gone at least ten feet.

“I came up with a new move.” He explained. “Kinda, uh, modeled it after your pressurized air blasts. Call it my AP shot.”

Modeled… after me?

“Looks effective!” He praised. “Can it break through stuff like concrete with pinpoint blasts?”

“Mhm. Sure can.”

Izuku thought for a moment, mind running through all the various uses and possibilities for having those smaller impacts, when he suddenly came across into a slight problem. “Can you reduce the impact at will, too? For non-lethal use?”

Some sort of surprise came over Katsuki’s face, and he shook his head. “I, uh. Didn’t really consider that, to be honest. Lemme try.”

Katsuki got back in his stance, narrowed his eyes, and shot off another blast. Not perfect, but not nearly intense as the last one either.

“That’ll take some getting used to.” He sighed. “Eh. Something to work on, I guess.”

“Yep.” Izuku agreed. “See, with a more destructive quirk like yours, I bet it’s gotta be natural to move more towards just winning fights, right?”

Katsuki nodded, lips pressed and pensive. “For sure.”

“But the other important part of being a hero is making sure that the people around you are safe, too.” Izuku moved closer. “If you need to get someone out of the way, or if you need to be able to apprehend a villain without causing them too much pain, then getting that strength under control is gonna be your biggest challenge. There’s a lot that can be done with just a little force.”

“Just a little force, huh…?” Katsuki murmured, slightly confused. “I guess I’ll try and focus more on that. We haven’t done a ton of rescue stuff, but…” He sighed. “Yeah, I guess it ain’t my best point. But hell, I’ll make it better. You are a good fuckin’ rescue hero, and I’d be stupid to not take your advice.”

Take my advice, huh…? Hah. It’s like I’m actually able to be useful right now.

“I’m just telling you what’s worked for me.” He shrugged off his jacket, and stretched out his worn right arm to Katsuki. “See this? These scars?”

The slightly confused look on his face was hard to miss. “Yeah. I mean, I saw some at the culture festival, but you never show ’em on camera. Except for that one photoshoot you did a while ago.”

He grimaced. “That… ugh. Don’t remind me of that shoot. There’s a few reasons I really don’t like
showing them on camera, but… these scars aren’t due to anything but my own power. They’re not from any villain, nor any physical external injury. I tried to use too much of my own strength, and until I was able to learn to control it better, I wound up hurting myself a lot. Going back down to a lower strength and figuring out how to harness each level of power was really helpful for me.” There was a short pause, and before he could think twice, Izuku took Katsuki’s arm in his hand and ran light fingers up to his wrist. “You’ve got a lot of potential, Kacchan. Really. But I don’t want you thinking that you’ve gotta go full power one hundred percent of the time.”

Izuku didn’t realize he had been near caressing Katsuki’s hand since he’d taken it. But then, only seconds later-

“Your scars are kinda hot.”

Wh… what the fuck!?

“Kacchan!” He yanked his arm away, nothing but panic and warmth and unwanted fondness surging through his veins. “You- you don’t just say that! Were you- were you even listening!?"

A thick stroke of red painted Katsuki’s face in a wide, fast movement, and he flinched too. “I- uh-”

Izuku’s heart was racing, and he wasn’t sure he would be able to make it stop so easily this time.

Do you… do you realize what you do to me, Kacchan? Oh my god, I…

“You just- you seemed kinda self conscious about them.” Katsuki quickly recovered, rubbing the back of his head. “I mean, I’m sure there’s plenty of people who like them. S’nothing to be embarrassed about.”

“I’m not embarrassed about them, it’s just-”

And before he realized what happened, the tables had turned.

Am… am I embarrassed about them? Ashamed?

“I just… I don’t wanna be seeing you talking bad about yourself cause you hurt yourself. S’all.” Katsuki continued, hands shoved in the pockets of his sweatpants. “If it’s a sign of where you started, then do you really wanna hide away your origins? How far you’ve come?”

Oh… oh, this is how you’re trying to play it off, isn’t it?

“Someone’s a smooth talker.” Izuku snorted. “Sorry for freaking out on you. It’s fine, I just… didn’t really expect that.”

Katsuki paused- tilted his head, and might’ve run that pink tongue over his lips. “You don’t like surprises?”

He’s flirting with me. Oh my god, he’s actually trying to flirt with me.

“I, uh…” Careful with your words! “I mean, I don’t… usually mind them. But, ah-” Something caught in his throat. “I don’t really wanna talk much about my body right now. With everything that’s been going on, I…”

How much do I wanna tell him?

“It’s just hard.” Izuku admitted, forcing the answer out. “I’m sorry.”
And for some reason, he found himself hurting more than he thought he would.

*Months ago, I would’ve been okay with him just seeing me just for my body. Now, though… am I looking for something more?*

“Don’t apologize, dumbass. Shouldn’t have said anything.” Katsuki hesitated, and then- “But I don’t want you feeling like you look shitty or anything. You- you really are more handsome than you think.”

But that right there changed everything. *Again.*

*Kacchan, I… god, I wanna kiss you.*

“Ah, thanks.” Really, it was all he could say. “You wanna, uh, get back to training?”

There was quick consent from Katsuki’s side, and soon enough, they returned to a more standard session. It was good once they got more into it, and more than a little refreshing for Izuku. Yeah, maybe he really couldn’t do much demonstration, but it was nice to be actually able to use his training and accumulated knowledge to help someone else out. Especially someone as quick and keen as Katsuki, who seemed so eager to jump at everything he suggested and put into practice what he’d learned.

It was only when the sun began to set over the horizon that they called it quits, tired and definitely sweatier than before. Katsuki looked happy, though, if the grin over his face said anything.

“Thanks.” He started. “Seriously. That was really, really great.”

“Glad you got something out of it.” Izuku chuckled. “I wish I could’ve been more hands on with you, but… oh well. Next time, maybe?”

“You’d be willing to help me out again?”

And if he wasn’t sure before, the eagerness in Katsuki’s slightly-awed voice was enough to convince him. “Of course. I mean, this is fun for me too, y’know!”

Katsuki looked away, a little sheepish, and nodded. “Ah, yeah. But get better, you hear? Don’t go pushing yourself. I- I wanna be able to see you really going again.”

*I guess I do look kinda pathetic right now… “I’ll- I’ll do my best, Kacchan.”*

The sky really was growing darker, nothing but the last rays of the setting sun illuminating their space. Katsuki’s hair near reflected those vivid oranges, and his eyes bloomed with the brilliance of the deeper reds.

*If we could stay like this… just, stay here a while…*

But the illusion broke not a moment later with the awkward shuffle of Katsuki’s feet in the sand and a few steps towards him. “I’m gonna get going before it gets dark. Would you wanna, uh, schedule another session later?”

He wasn’t quite sure why Katsuki was so hesitant now, slightly more nervous than before, but he definitely didn’t want to see him feeling that way. “For sure! I’ll text you when I get home?”

“Works for me.”

But just before they split off, Katsuki took a deep breath, wrapped his arms around Izuku’s waist and
hugged him tight before he could do a thing about it.

“I… I’m glad you’re doing better.” Katsuki whispered, and Izuku could’ve sworn his voice cracked just a bit. “Deku, I-”

He cut himself off with a sharp hiss. Izuku could feel him take a deep breath against his chest, and it was all he could do to just pull Katsuki closer and hold him, just hold him.

This is okay… this is okay.

“I-I was scared.” So small, so breathless. “When I heard about you… I… I-I just…!”

“Shh.” Izuku hummed, and tried to stay as steady as he could. “I’m here now, right?”

“Yeah. You are.” Katsuki repeated, but it felt almost more for himself than for Izuku. “Do… do you mind if I just, um, hold you for a minute?”

There were no verbal answers- there didn’t need to be. Izuku just pulled him closer, one arm around his lower back and the other buried in strangely soft hair, pressing Katsuki closer against his chest.


And yet, somehow, it was the most natural thing they’d done all day. Katsuki fit perfectly in his arms, head tucked just under Izuku’s chin, fingers grasping at his jacket. It was quiet. Still.

The sun’s going down. We can’t stay for long.

But then a trembling, almost incomprehensible whisper met his ears.

“…I can feel your heartbeat.” Katsuki shuddered, sinking further against him. “It’s so fast…”

Holy… holy shit.

“K-Kacchan, I-”

“Be quiet.” He pushed. “It’s nice.”

“…okay.”

Katsuki’s eyes were closed, face more content than Izuku had ever seen.

Don’t leave. Please.

Sadly, though, all good things had to come to an end. But when they finally pulled apart this time, neither of them felt quite as awkward as before.


“You too, Kacchan.” Izuku echoed, and somehow, something felt different than before. “Be safe going home, okay?”

After a quick acknowledgement from him, they finally parted ways. Despite the setting sun, the streets were well-lit on the way back to Izuku’s apartment. It would be an easy trip for him, and for how close Katsuki lived, he wouldn’t have any issues either.
The only real problem now was that lack of Katsuki’s presence near him.

I really, really hope we can get together again soon.

After walking for a solid ten minutes, Izuku realized with sudden alarm that he might’ve, just maybe, gotten hard during that too-long hug. Following that was realization number two, consisting of an oh god, did Kacchan feel my dick!? 

It was in that moment that he resigned himself to another wet dream that night, probably on a beach, and likely featuring Katsuki grinding against his leg and rubbing his face against Izuku’s chest.

What the fuck has my life come to. Why isn’t this as shocking anymore!?

The answer was simple.

You’re gay. Really, really goddamn gay.

Thankfully, his phone buzzed in his pocket and pulled him from (most of) his thoughts. Not that the sender particularly helped- Katsuki’s name was bright and bold against his lock screen, and with a quick swipe, he pulled up the message. Nothing but a simple I’m home, but enough to return him to those warmer, not-so-horny feelings towards him. But just after a quick response, something in the corner of his vision caught his attention. A small shop, and in the window, a row of nice looking winter clothing.

Kacchan likes being warm cause of his quirk, right?

The itch to go inside and look around got the better of him, and before he knew it, Izuku found himself wandering into the small shop and in front of a line of nice, soft, yet comfortable looking winter scarves.

Hm…

One more question.

[Izuku] hey, kacchan

[Izuku] whats your favorite color?

It wasn’t an invasive or prying question. If anything, he was surprised he hadn’t asked before. But there was a quick reply from the other end.

[Kacchan] orange

There was no more sign of typing, to his relief. Katsuki didn’t push, and with that small bit of information, Izuku pulled one of the orange scarves, patterned with gray, and bought it before thinking too hard about what he was doing.

He’s gotten me enough things. I wanna be able to do nice things for him, too!

Now, the question was just when.

The trek back to his apartment was a little easier then. A little lighter, a little happier, and a little more life-giving than before. He’d even remembered to stock the fridge with leftovers before going out, half-surprising himself.

Maybe I really am getting better at this whole adulting thing after all.
And yeah, maybe he’d allowed himself a nice masturbation session in the shower that night after tending to his plants, too. Ochako and Kirishima had been around less since he’d begun to be able to function more on his own, and though adapting to that had taken a bit of a mental toll at first, there were certain benefits about it—item A on that list being the ability to moan out his crush’s name without shame, and item B, the freedom of walking around without pants (and boxers, if he was really feeling lazy). It was the small things he hadn’t taken full advantage of before his accident, so really, this was all just making up for lost time.

That being said, he’d decided to wear at least something while cooking after one sad incident involving grease and his crotch.

After he got out of the shower and managed to dry off, Izuku saw his phone light up with a new notification. Probably from Katsuki, but he wasn’t quite sure why he’d be texting him this late in the evening. Nonetheless, he grabbed the phone and sat his ass down on the toilet to read it, smudging fog from the screen with a quick swipe of his thumb.

[Kacchan] hey so uh

[Kacchan] i dunno if ur gonna have time on christmas or if u have plans or anything

[Kacchan] but my friends are all. Uh. Spending time with each other on christmas cause theyre dating and uh

[Kacchan] will u hang out w me so i dont have to babysit todorokis frosty ass

Hope flared in his chest, and with a flurry, he sped to open his calendar to check to make sure he was open, only to almost immediately have all of that longing crushed. He’d planned to visit his mom again on Christmas, and meet up with friends for the evening.

Dammit… no romantic Christmas then, I guess.

Turning down Katsuki hurt worse than it should’ve.

[Izuku] agh, im sorry. I scheduled some stuff a while back :'(

[Izuku] i wish i could though. trust me

[Izuku] seeing you today was really nice though:

Seeing Katsuki’s hurried reply didn’t help, either.

[Kacchan] dw. It;s fine. Figured u were probably busy anyway

[Kacchan] but uh. Yeah. seeing u was rlly nice too

[Kacchan] and. I’m sorry if I made u uncomfortable

[Kacchan] I didnt mean to just talk like that abt u and hold u like that but it was uh

[Kacchan] gtg shower

[Kacchan] bye

There was certainly something off about those last few texts, but at the same time, Izuku could’ve sworn that maybe, just maybe, it was from a bit of nervousness towards him.
It’s not like him to be nervous… but he was more open than usual today. I guess it’s just that, then.

That in mind, and seeing that Katsuki didn’t ask anything else in the next few minutes, Izuku threw on a fresh pair of boxers and crashed in bed, but made sure to mentally catalog away Katsuki’s request before he fell asleep.

“A-Ah, Mom! I’m not gonna be able to eat anywhere near all this.”

“Then just finish what you can, okay?”

Izuku swallowed, a slight chill running down his spine just from that kind, yet more than a little forceful glare from his mother across the table- a sharp contrast from the warm, caring smile on her face.

“...okay.”

It wasn’t often Izuku got to visit his mom ever since she’d moved out to a small, rural town about a two hour train ride from him, but there was no way he’d miss Christmas with her, especially when it was just the two of them together. There were no formal gift exchanges, no big traditions aside from home-cooked food and maybe a cheesy movie or two.

This year’s visit in particular, though, was important. Inko had cried upon seeing him walk through the door in one piece, and it had taken a solid five minutes at least for them to separate and actually make it *into the house*. That said, it was nice to see her in person again after so much distance. Despite her support for Izuku’s success, there had always been that tension between them regarding it. She sent cards, when he was injured, they called every once in a while, but hero work was never one of the big topics at play. Some may call it strained- for them, though, it was the best scenario they could’ve wound up with.

*Distance makes the heart grow fonder, after all.*

But their holiday lunch went by well, both of them finishing up full and warm and happy. They did do some gift exchanges- Izuku had bought her a nice necklace he’d found, as well as some soft blankets. In return, he wound up with a comfortable new jacket.

“Are you doing anything else for the day?” Izuku asked as they washed dishes, and in response, received a more enthusiastic nod than he’d expected.

“Yes, actually!” Inko started. “I have some friends down the street who wanted to hang out and celebrate for a while… you know, just talking and spending time together. This town is far more social than everything was out in the city.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it, then!” Izuku smiled. “I mean, ah, I know moving to someplace like this was a huge change, but I’m still glad to know it’s all working out.”

“Me too, me too.” She hummed, and began to put away the things Izuku had washed. “But really Izuku, I’m glad to see that you’re a little happier now too.”

Huh?

“Um… what do you mean?”

Inko shrugged. “It’s like there’s this sort of energy around you. I mean, before your accident, you just sounded so tired every time we talked. I know, you don’t want me to worry, but… even though
you’re far away most of the time, you’re still my son. I care about you.”

...oh. Yeah.

“I… I’m sorry for not calling much lately.”

“It’s okay.” Inko assured him. “I know you’ve had a lot going on, and I know that things must be really tough right now, but… I just don’t want you to forget that I’m here too, okay? And you’re more than welcome to come visit whenever you want. But I’m just so, so glad you’re alright.”

Me too.

They finished up the dishes quietly, and Izuku made a promise to himself to keep in touch more from then on.

“Did you want to watch anything?” She asked him afterwards, but by his slight hesitation, seemed to realize there was something else going on. “Ah. Actually, was there someone else you were wanting to see today?”

“I- huh?” Izuku flushed. “I-I mean, I have the party my friends are hosting to go to tonight, but I haven’t made any other…”

Well, I… I wanna see Kacchan. If he’s still even up for it.

“Sounds like there’s someone you’d like to visit.” She laughed. “Did you meet someone, Izuku?”

“No!” He sputtered, trying to pretend his face wasn’t as red as it probably was. “I-I didn’t- I’m not dating anyone!”

And yet, all he got in response to that was an eye roll. “I won’t pry. It’s your life. But if you wanna get going a little earlier, it wouldn’t be an issue at all.” She chuckled. “Ah, I’m not that interesting to be around! Go do what you’d like to do. I’ve got people around here I can spend time with, after all.”

...maybe I could see him, then. Not cause we’re dating. Not for anything romantic.

That said, he had tucked away the scarf he’d bought a week ago to give to Katsuki in case he wound up seeing him by chance.

Izuku made up his mind.

“...you sure that would be okay, Mom?”

The look she gave him was full of undeserved warmth, comfort, and sheer support. “Of course. Go have fun, okay?”

“I- I will!” Izuku promised, and yet the rush of heat under his skin despite the chill weather was undeniable. “And I’ll, uh, call you again soon!”

Though those last few words and last few hugs were laced with goodbyes, there was an undeniable sense of stability that Izuku had lost somewhere along the way.

I’ll be better. I’ll keep closer contact. I promise.

There was a train leaving not ten minutes after he arrived at the station, and with a renewed sense of excitement, he boarded. But it was an hour into the trip that he remembered to actually text and let
Katsuki knew what was going on now.

[Izuku] kacchan!!

[Izuku] if you wanna hang out still, ill be in your area in about an hour and a half!!

[Izuku] i snagged some free time before my party this evening:D

Half an hour later, he got a response.

[Kacchan] sHIT deku rlly?

[Kacchan] if why didnt u tell me earlier!?

Izuku frowned. Was it really that much of an issue?

[Izuku] im sorry, i didnt think id have a chance to come by at all until a little bit ago. is it okay?

[Kacchan] i mean yeah but

[Kacchan] gah wtr just tell me the details

He still wasn’t quite sure why Katsuki sounded mildly pissed about it, but his answer wasn’t a no. With a frown, he sent off the rest of the information. It was only another fifteen minutes before he’d arrive at the stop closest to Katsuki’s place, and instead of meeting up at his front door, they decided to go down the street to the small park nearby. It wasn’t as if they’d have a lot of time to spend with each other, but still, it was something.

I’m just happy I get to see him again.

The air was crisp and cold by the time he got off the train, but his newly acquired jacket fought off the worst of the chill. And Katsuki let him know he’d be waiting out near the park for whenever he arrived, too.

Will we be able to walk close together? Will he hug me again? Will he lean against me if we sit down?

Izuku was past the point of denying the fact that he wanted more, but still hesitant about acting on anything. Katsuki was still sixteen, and despite his somewhat high maturity and perception, he couldn’t forget that.

I… I won’t push for anything right now. I can’t. Even if he wants it… no kissing till he’s seventeen. And if we even get that far, no sex til he’s eighteen.

He swallowed. That last part, anyways, was more for his own sanity than anything else. It wasn’t as if he’d stayed a virgin till then, but his own struggles in high school led him to what he knew now was an unhealthy dependence on sex.

I just don’t want him to wind up like me. I wanna keep him safe.

Izuku shoved away those thoughts for the time being and resigned himself to dealing with what he had right now.

At least I get to see him. It’s more than I could ask for, really.

The trip to the park couldn’t have been any more than ten minutes, and by the time he got there, an
all-too familiar face was waiting for him. Izuku practically ran towards him, and with dramatic poise, puffed up his chest and announced his arrival with a slightly cheesy *I am here!*

“No shit. Took you long enough.” Katsuki smirked. “And to think that I was the one with the time crunch.”

“I gave you like twenty minutes, right?” He rolled his eyes. “Doesn’t take long to pull on clothes and get out the door.”

“Maybe if you don’t care what you look like.” Katsuki raised an eyebrow. “Come on, Deku. Have some class.”

“Excuse you, I have *class!*”

Katsuki stopped, turned, looked him up and down. “…sure.”

Izuku huffed. “You can be a little shit sometimes, you know.”

“And yet, who keeps replying to my texts and answering my calls?”

At that, Katsuki found himself on the receiving end of a pointed stare from Izuku, but followed only by a gentle sigh. “Just cause you’re a little shit doesn’t mean I don’t like spending time with you. Wanna walk a little?”

“Mhm. Sure.”

Izuku couldn’t have been more thankful for the new jacket. Katsuki had come appropriately dressed, too, though it was pretty clear he’d tried to make himself look a little nicer before rushing to arrive. A slim, but warm coat hugged his chest and waist, sleek and probably having been the highlight of some men’s fashion lines for the season. He’d coupled it with a pair of skinny jeans, and despite his legs being nowhere near as muscled as Izuku’s were, managed to make them look *damn* good with the rest of his winter ensemble.

And suddenly, he found himself slightly worried that Izuku’s choice in gift wouldn’t be up to his fashion standards.

Katsuki pointed out to a small, vacant bench not ten feet away, and in silent agreement, they went to sit down. Only then did Izuku realize just how close they’d been walking, how they’d been a paper-thin distance away from holding hands.

“So, uh, how’s your day been?” Izuku asked, needing to incite some sort of conversation. “Did you wind up hanging out with- you said it was Todoroki, right?”

“Mm. Yeah, for a bit.” Katsuki sighed. “Did some stuff with the family. Camie and Yaoyorozu went off on their own to do some couples shit. Todoroki was just kinda… eh. There. I dunno, we talked for a bit. Wasn’t *bad*, but it wasn’t…”

*You.*

Katsuki turned a little redder- Izuku blamed it on the cold. “I- uh, anyways. You?”

“I visited my mom!” He smiled. “I don’t get to see her much… I told you that, right? She’s like a two-hour ride from here. It was nice. Pretty casual, but nice.”

“I like casual.” Katsuki shrugged. “I mean, hell. S’better than your parents dressin’ you up for family
photoshoots every year. Pictures are one thing, but when your parents are in the fashion industry, it’s a whole nother deal.” He scoffed. “It’s so fucking tedious.”

Izuku frowned. “But I mean, I bet the pictures come out nice?”

“Oh, they come out looking goddamn fabulous.” He muttered. “But hours of time for it? Really? I’m like god, Dad, I told you I ain’t going into modeling as a side gig. Cut the crap.”

“Modeling, huh?” Izuku grinned, and nudged Katsuki. “Ah… but I can see it now! Strong, handsome Pro Hero Kacchan on the cover of every magazine, a two-for-one powerhouse both striking looks and striking blows!”

“Oh, shut up.” Katsuki groaned, and buried his head in his hands. “Gah, photoshoots are annoying. My parents made me do a few when I was a kid and couldn’t really object, and I hated it. Sure, whatever, maybe I look good, but I can show my stuff on the battlefield and not behind a camera.” He sighed. “I wanna take your approach when I go pro. Y’know, lay low on media stunts, stick to my job, maybe do a shoot a year.”

My approach, huh…? Well, it has its upsides…

“Well, guess we have that in common then, huh?” Izuku laughed. “But hey! If you still become my hero partner, we could do one together. That might be fun? Or at least, not as awful.”

Katsuki’s eyes went wide, and for a split second, something like shock might’ve flown through them. “‘Course I’m gonna be your partner. And well, uh… yeah, I could get on board with that.”

My partner. God…

“I’m so excited to actually be able to spar with you again.” Izuku continued, pushing that idea of togetherness just a little more. “I mean, just coaching is always fine, but there’s just so much more you can learn from practice!”

“Definitely.” Katsuki nodded, more confidence behind that. “Agh, I wanna train with you too. When are you going back on duty, anyways?”

Izuku rapped his finger against his leg. “Ah, well… I’m gonna be able to start more intensive physical therapy after New Year’s, including more typical training exercises. I’ve been doing some, but it’s still hard. My stamina’s been reduced a lot, aha… but! With any luck, I’m gonna be back on part time duty by the end of January. I have been picking up a little desk work lately, though.”


“Really now.” Izuku snorted. “I still don’t know what you see in my fights, Kacchan. I’m not even in the top ten.”

“Not yet.” Katsuki reminded him. “I mean, you’re like spot thirty-three, right? That’s high as fuck for only being pro for a year.”

“It’s gonna drop at New Year’s.” He paused. “I’ve been out for months, Kacchan. God, I mean… I’ll probably hit fifty if I’m lucky. I’ve lost so much time and opportunity because of this injury.”

Izuku didn’t notice until he looked down and saw the hand running over his thigh, just touching, feeling.

Kacchan…
“What does it look like?” *Low, quiet.* So much more serious than just moments ago.

He swallowed.

“That’s not pretty.” Izuku mumbled, fingers curling in on his palms as he watched Katsuki’s hand move back and forth, back and forth, so gentle across his jeans. “They’ve healed as much as they will, but… I scar easy. They’re big. Ugly.”

*Not something you wanna see in bed.*

“Why are you always so embarrassed about these?” Katsuki clenched his teeth. “There’s nothing wrong with scars. Shit happens.”

“I know, I know, but it’s just. Weird, I guess?” Izuku flushed. “I-I mean, it’s… not like I’ve been with anyone in years, but like… um. Nevermind.”

*Not talking about my sex life with Kacchan! Nope!*

“...I don’t think it’s weird.” Katsuki admitted. “I- I mean, I know what I said last week about, uh, finding them hot, but it’s not… definitely not weird. S’just a part of you.”

Katsuki scooted in a little closer and leaned against his shoulder, so close, so *comfortable.* And it was almost like second nature, really, when Izuku pulled his arm back to instead wrap it around his shoulders instead, holding him, being *with* him.

“Do you mind?” Izuku whispered, naught but a small breeze threatening to break the space they’d created. But Katsuki just pressed in further against him, eyes shut and a thin smile over his lips.

“You’re warm.”

Finely honed self control was the only thing keeping him from tilting his head just a little and kissing the crown of Katsuki’s own. They didn’t need that constant verbal dialogue- each time they met up, something more was being built. Brick by brick, stone by stone, that reassurance and knowledge of each other had formed *something.*

*Kacchan… how many more ways am I going to fall for you?*

“I got you a little something for Christmas.” Izuku murmured, squeezing Katsuki’s arm. “Wanna see?”

Katsuki bit his lip, not meeting his eyes. “I… I wanted to get you something. Didn’t think I’d see you until after the new year, though.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it.” Izuku promised. “I- I mean, you keep giving me things. About time I return the favor, right?”

He sighed beside him, but didn’t object. “You don’t owe me a thing. But if you did, uh… yeah, can I see?”

It was a damn shame Izuku had to pull back from Katsuki to open his bag up and retrieve the scarf, having tucked it in a small, simple bag earlier that day. There were no formal words, nothing but Izuku just handing it to him and waiting, hoping that the reaction wouldn’t be repulsed or disgusted or any sort of resigned *thanks.* So he clasped his hands together, waited, and hoped.

“I still have the receipt if you don’t like it, ah…” Izuku mumbled, but fell silent after a quick moment
when Katsuki’s eyes lit up, the soft scarf in his hands already looking so nice against the rest of his getup.

“This is why you asked me my favorite color then, huh?” Katsuki asked, a grin peeking at the edge of those lips. “Keep your damn receipt. I love it. Feels comfortable.”

He unraveled the whole thing just to quickly loop it around his neck in a practiced fashion, and Izuku could’ve sworn it had been made for him.

10/10, purchase of the year, would buy again.

“Seriously, Deku. Thanks.” Katsuki finished, still touching the fabric and playing with the gentle folds. “I didn’t have a scarf that I liked. This one’s great.”

Izuku hadn’t realized how nervous he’d been about it until he heard the reaction from Katsuki’s own mouth. “That’s- ah, that’s awesome! I’m glad you like it.”

But only seconds later, he realized that he was probably going to be late to the party if he stayed out here much longer.

_Usually I wouldn’t care much, but they’re doing group events all throughout… gah, and I do need to spend time with my friends and the other heroes._

“I, um…” He started, obvious frustration pulling down his voice. “I think I need to take off. My stuff in the evening is starting soon, and…”

“Go ahead and go.” Katsuki nodded. “S’all good. I mean, I wasn’t even expecting to see you in the first place. But… one more thing?”

“Yeah?”

Katsuki shifted flush against his side again, but before Izuku could really do anything, his face was near his own and nothing but warm, rosy cheeks filled his vision.

“I figured out what to give you for Christmas.” He murmured, and in a split second, brought his hand up to Izuku’s head and pulled him down right before pressing a small, light kiss to his cheek.

And in that moment, every inch of Izuku froze.

“Text me when you can.” Katsuki called, and when Izuku came back to focus, realized that he’d somehow managed to make it twenty feet away without him noticing a damn thing.

_Holy shit. Holy fucking shit._

He brought a violently trembling hand up to his cheek, far too shaky to pretend it was just from chills.

_Kacchan… oh my god, Kacchan…!_

Izuku tried to steady his breathing, relax, but every inch of his brain had zeroed in on the spot where… _where–_

_Kacchan kissed me._

There was the inevitable panic. And fear. And worry, anxiety, shock- but more than anything else-
He feels the same. 

Absolute, and undeniable relief.

Chapter End Notes

highkey i was cryin writing these scenes my poor gay heart is too weak i just love them so much

and thank u to my wonderful beta @aetherlite, and if u wanna come yell at me, my twitter is aeronines!
I figured out what to get you for Christmas.

No turning back now. One step, two steps, then out and away.

He’ll see how nervous I am. Was.

He couldn’t afford to show that weakness now- no, not after he’d dared to do what he’d done.

But holy shit. Holy shit, what the hell did I do?

Katsuki ran off after he’d managed to get a decent ways away from that bench, from Deku, and didn’t look back till he got home.

I kissed him. Sorta. Kinda. Does that count? Probably not, but it’s something, right?

It was all he could do to breathe, to try and relax.

He didn’t stop me. He didn’t push me away. He didn’t seem like he didn’t want it.

There was no resting, no stopping to really think more about the whole situation until he was inside his room at his parent’s house with door firmly locked behind him. And before he could stop it, a sharp, nearly giddy laugh rose from what could’ve only been himself.

I kissed Deku. I kissed Deku.

It was on the spot and it wasn’t. Katsuki had gotten the idea in his head after their last practice session on the beach- between Deku’s blatant interest in his physical form (he’d said a small thanks to Camie for her advice on his clothing choice afterwards) and his starting to open up more, to let him in so close, Katsuki figured that he might have a shot.

I’m glad I took it.

And yeah, okay, feeling Deku’s very obvious erection against him back then helped too. What he wasn’t particularly looking forward to was asking Yaoyorozu for a personal favor when he got back to school after having gained this new insight. That said, it probably was time for an upgrade.

But before wandering downstairs to engage in ‘family time’ again, Katsuki treated himself to one more round with his dildo.

But what if he texts? Calls? Or is he gonna be too busy tonight at his party? Is he gonna get drunk? Does he drink? What’s he like when he’s drunk? I bet he’s cute. Deku’s so fucking cute. So hot. Ugh. I want to get him out of that goddamn shirt in front of me. Even though he’s been out of
practice lately, he’s still so hot.

Breathless and sweaty, Katsuki rode out the rest of his orgasm with Deku’s name on his lips and the new scarf pressed against his nose, hoping he wouldn’t get cumstains on it after only a short thirty minutes of ownership.

Coming down from that post-orgasm high, though, was more intense than he’d imagined it would be. When he crashed, he crashed- falling, tumbling down, completely and utterly overwhelmed from everything that had just happened in the past hour. That Deku had talked to him. Held him. Made time to see him.

Katsuki couldn’t believe just how lucky he was.

And when he finally managed to get up and clean himself and his dildo off, he noticed the familiar glow of his home screen alight with a few new texts. No time to waste now- after a quick run over to where he’d dropped it on the desk, he opened it up and realized that the most recent messages were from Camie, not Deku.

Dammit.

But right below those, coupled with a timestamp of five minutes ago, was a series of texts that sent his heart nearly soaring from his chest.

[Deku] hey

[Deku] i uh

[Deku] that was

[Deku] um

[Deku] nice

[Deku] im sorry i gotta go

[Deku] we can talk later if you want

[Deku] thanks for spending time with me

[Deku] <3

It was only upon the realization that he would’ve been able to answer had he not been in the midst of getting off that Katsuki cursed his insatiable horny energy. Masturbating to Deku was great and all, but talking to him? Yeah, that won every time.

Despite the circumstance, though, Katsuki’s palms were sweating again upon just reading those texts, near evidence of the chance that Deku returned his feelings.

He sounds nervous. Why is he nervous? He wasn’t the one who kissed me.

Katsuki screenshots all the texts in case he needed to consult Camie later. For once, this hadn’t been her idea. He tossed around the idea of calling her, but was snapped out of his hopes not seconds later after a call from his parents to get his ass downstairs and ready for dinner.

I’ll save it for later, then. Maybe Deku will be available too.
At the very least, he was glad that his boner was gone.

“I was starting to think you were gonna lock yourself in your room all night.” His mom greeted, that ever-so-fond tone in her voice. “Don’t let the food get cold now, okay?”

“Yeah, yeah.” Katsuki grumbled, but couldn’t say he didn’t appreciate home cooking. The school’s food was fine, but there was something about the stuff he’d grown up with that never left him. He joined his parents at the table, already loaded up with holiday food, and just hoped he’d be able to avoid any unnecessary conversation.

Yet, not one minute later–

“So, Katsuki, where’d you run off to earlier?”

_Wow. Disappointed but not surprised._

“Outside.”

His mother sighed. “Incredible answer. Why’d you head out?”

“Cause I wanted to.”

“I, ah, think she’s asking what you were doing out there…?” His dad started, rubbing the back of his head.

_Both of you. Shut up._

“Just seeing a friend.” He grumbled, shoving food in his mouth. “Nothing much.”

That sent his mother leaning forward, and Katsuki inwardly groaned at the devilish curiosity resting in the crease of her lips. “Oh? I thought you said all your friends were busy?”

“Well, he became not-busy.” He retorted, pointedly ignoring meeting either of his parent’s eyes. “Got a problem with that?”

“Oh, Todoroki?” She pushed, and Katsuki was about ready to walk upstairs. “Or did you make friends with another guy?”

_Not having this conversation! “Not Todoroki.” He grit out. “Why do you care?”_

“Well, I don’t know.” She rolled her eyes. “Maybe I’d like to be sure you’re safe? Not being an idiot?”

_I think I’m spending time with the safest person I possibly can. Thanks for asking._

“I’m fucking fine. Doesn’t matter.”

He should’ve known that wouldn’t get him anywhere. “Then what’s all this defensiveness about? Is it someone from school? Someone you like?”

“Shut up!” Katsuki finally shouted, trying not to slam his hands down on the table. “It doesn’t matter. Leave me alone.”

_I don’t wanna tell them about Deku. Can’t tell them about Deku. Don’t want to get him in trouble at all._
His mother looked ready to keep going, but it was only after a few words from his dad that she finally began to cool off. Being on break was alright, but now that he’d experienced the real freedom of a dorm- or, at least freedom from the place he’d grown up- he’d begun to miss that slight independence more that he thought he would.

*I’m ready to go back to school.*

And thankfully, she relented.

“Alright, alright.” Mitsuki sighed. “Well, I guess you’re okay at taking care of yourself. Just don’t be stupid, Katsuki.”

“I ain’t stupid.”

From there, though, the conversation dissolved into something a little easier to be around. Katsuki rambled a bit about the training he’d been doing over the break, his friend’s relationships, and of course, got to endure the usual complaints from his parent’s jobs. Boring, but not invasive. Nothing that would make him reveal what more he’d been up to.

*Nothing that would make me tell them I kissed him.*

“Are you ready to head back to school, Katsuki?” Masaru asked- the first question Katsuki had a truly enthusiastic answer to.

“’Course I’m ready. Being back in this shithole has been killing my goddamn soul.” He said, ignoring every bit of salt in his mom’s eyes. “I’m ready to get back to running on my own time.”

“Can’t say that’s much of a surprise.” His mom rolled her eyes. “You at least gonna miss our cooking? Not having homework due?”

“Homework is a small price to pay to get outta here.” He fixed his gaze on his mother from across the table. “We’ve got nothing around here. I miss my workout equipment. Fuck, I even miss training with Todoroki. That clear it up enough?”

*Not that he’s bad company. A little weird at times, but at least a good sparring partner.*

“It’s natural that you’re wanting to go back.” His dad offered. “Independence does that… once you’ve got a taste of it, you want more, hm?”

Katsuki shrugged, nodded, and shoveled more food into his mouth. Thankfully, the dinner wound up ending not long after that discussion and Katsuki was able to busy himself with the dishes while his parents continued conversation in the living room. He’d never minded simple house chores too much- as an only child, many of the tasks were already put on his shoulders from the start. He’d learned to cook, clean, and keep shit together on his own for the most part. Admittedly, a lot of that was probably due to the fact that he’d made sure his parents didn’t touch his space or his stuff for years, leaving organization and cleanliness to fall on him alone. But basic, mindless tasks like this- washing plates, bowls, pans- were to some extent, relaxing.

*I wonder what Deku’s home life is like? I’ve barely seen any of it, aside from bits and pieces in the backgrounds of selfies and that one video call we made…*

With a flurry of nerves and giddiness, he realized that maybe the chances of seeing it in person weren’t as far off as he’d first assumed. And when he finally retreated to his room again, might’ve spent just a little too much time staring at that all-too-revealing series of texts from his- friend? Crush? Potential partner?
Don’t think too hard right now. I’ll figure out more when he’s actually available.

But the next day, Izuku was silent. No texts, no calls, no replies to Katsuki’s brief response to his original comments. And yeah, it was possible he was busy. He was a hero with a life. But still—something about the silence was oddly uncomfortable and unnerving.

I just wanna talk to him more. Wanna see him again. Wanna feel him, wanna hold him, wanna kiss him.

Two days after Christmas, Deku called.

Katsuki nearly missed the final ring, but managed to pick up as soon as he caught sight of the caller ID in a desperate grab for his phone. He steadied himself, hands trembling around it as he sunk back into his bedsheets, trying his best to relax.

‘...hello? Kacchan? Ah, shoot, can you hear me?’

‘I’m here.’ He swallowed, heart pounding in his chest. After coming down from the high of the thrill on that first day and enduring Deku’s forty-eight hour silence, the possibility that he’d done something wrong had only been growing. The chance that Deku wouldn’t want him anymore. Would think he was weird. Invasive. Strange.

But, no- the only thing he heard in Deku’s voice was nerves, a bit of curiosity, and maybe, just maybe, a bit of hope.

‘I’m here.’ He said, and just the sound of a relieved sigh from the other end was enough to fluster him more than he would’ve liked. ‘You okay?’

‘Yeah, I… I’m okay.’ There was a slight pause, and what might’ve been a hint of a cough from the other end. ‘The party on Christmas got a little wilder than I expected, and, uh… well, apparently alcohol isn’t great in combination with my medication. I’ve just been sleeping a lot, kinda sick, but… y’know. Feeling better than yesterday.’

Dammit, Deku…!

‘Why’d you call me if you’re feeling so shitty, then?’ Katsuki scowled. ‘Rest up, asshole. How many people need to tell you to relax?’

‘I- I’m okay! Seriously!’ He insisted, and though there was a distinct rasp in his voice, it wasn’t terrible. ‘I just wanted to talk to you. I-I mean, if you’re busy you can hang up, but I just…’

The line fell silent.

‘I, um… wanted to make sure that you really did like that scarf.’

Dumbass. Don’t act like that’s why you called.

‘Won’t you trust me already? I told you, I like it a lot.’

Just like how I like you.

Deku went quiet again, and Katsuki still couldn’t quite figure out why he was so goddamn nervous.

‘…that’s. Uh. Yeah, that’s good.’ He started, followed by a string of unintelligible mumbling. ‘So, is school starting up again soon for you?’
“Change of pace, huh?” Katsuki said. “I wish it was sooner, I wanna go back to regular training.”

“Oh, I bet!” Deku laughed, almost a little too excitedly. “A-Ah, yeah… I mean, I was always dying to train back in school… well, I guess not much has changed for me in that regard, aha! Oh, man… well, what else have you been doing lately to keep up with exercising? I know over the breaks I had my own routines, but everyone’s different, you know?”

*Definitely trying to change the subject. Guess he doesn’t wanna bring up what I did.*

“Lots of running.” He responded, shoulders slumping every so slightly. “I haven’t done much quirk stuff aside from when we were at the beach, but I’ve been working on some of the mental things you were telling me with the whole “less can be more” thing. Your advice has been really helpful. Seriously.”

“Ah, I’m glad… it’s the least I can do.” Deku chuckled. “Actually, speaking of you…”

*Is he gonna ask about my kiss? Confess? I dunno, show some reciprocation?* 

“…when’s your birthday, exactly?”

*Dammit.*

“April twentieth.” He said, but couldn’t hide the mild frustration seeping out in his voice. “Why?”

“You’re turning seventeen then, right?” Deku continued, as if he hadn’t heard that last question. “I’ll have to try and do something for you. It’s not too far off now.”

“Not far off?” Katsuki groaned. “If that’s what four months is to you, then sure. Feels like ages from now. I’ll have started my second year of school by that time, and hell, I haven’t even begun my third semester of year one yet.”

“It’ll go by faster than you think it will.” He assured him. “But thanks! I was curious. I knew it was kinda close to the beginning of the year, but was never sure exactly.”

Deku was starting to get on his last nerves, darting and jumping all around the subject like this. Yet, just when he was about to say it himself, at least *bring up* the topic, the phone crackled again.

“I’ve gotta go in just a second, but… Kacchan, I care about you. And, um… I. I’m not gonna ask you why you, uh, y’know. Now just… isn’t. When I wanna talk about all that.”

*Oh, god… his voice is shaking. I can hear it through the fucking cell line.*

“I- I’m sorry, I know I’m not awesome at talking or anything, but… I didn’t hate it. I liked it. I think. And I just need time. That’s, um. That’s all.”

“It’s fine.” Katsuki said, words out of his mouth before he realized it himself. “Don’t worry about it.”

“…you sure?”

He couldn’t remember ever hearing Deku so nervous, so uncertain before.

“Positive.”

“…Kacchan, I… I really wanna hug you right now.” Deku mumbled, and Katsuki almost thought he was *crying*. “Thanks.”
“Me too.” He admitted. “Maybe, uh, we could meet up again before I go back to school?”

“We can talk about that in a bit, if that’s alright. I, um… I’m gonna go back to sleep.”

*Right, right. He’s feeling shitty. Don’t push.*

“Get some decent rest, okay?”

Deku chuckled. “I will, I will. I’ll talk to you later.”

...*y’know, I like having there be a ‘later.’*

The line went dead before Katsuki could give him any final-final words, but now he at least knew that there was something, yes, something more there.

*I’m ready when you are, Deku. Just say the word.*

Katsuki had been standing there for five minutes. Going over to the girl’s side of the dormitory had been nerve-wracking enough with the circumstance taken into account- but now, faced with the door itself and the thought that he’d have to actually *knock* at some point was only serving to heighten his anxiety to unprecedented levels.

*Come on, come on! Don’t back down now. You can do this.*

Trembling hands balled themselves into a tight fist, nails digging into his palms so hard they could bleed.

*You made it all the way here. Just do it. Do it!*

Katsuki bit his lip, raised a clenched fist up to the door, and tapped on it probably a little too gently. But right now, it was all he could manage.

“Hm?” The door cracked open, and Katsuki couldn’t meet Yaoyorozu’s eyes staring back at him. “You need something, Bakugou?”

“Can I come in for a second?” He mumbled, hoping his face was less red than it felt. “Just, uh… one quick question.”

“Sure, sure, but-” Katsuki pushed past her before she could finish her sentence, shutting and locking the door almost immediately behind him. “Bakugou, what’s going…?”

“I, uh.” *Get it out. Get it out.* “If it’s not a problem, do you think I could get an- an upgrade?”

Katsuki’s heart sunk to the pit of his stomach when Yaoyorozu tilted her head just a bit, clearly confused. The last thing he wanted to do was spell it out for her right now.

“An upgrade? What for?”

Coming here had been a mistake.

“Well, I… kinda got too used to the first one, and I think I need more practice on something with a bit more length, and…”

*I’ve only been back at school for three days. Is it too soon to ask for this?*
But upon recalling just how big, how thick Deku had felt just through his pants, Katsuki made up his mind.

“...how much can I pay you to, uh, make me a new dildo.”

Silence.

Yaoyorozu flushed all the way to the tips of her ears, frozen for a moment before burying her head in her hands. “Oh, god… I- I know I offered a while back, but I honestly didn’t expect…”

“I-I mean, I can try and find something online if you don’t wanna-”

“No, no, it’s fine!” She stuttered, flailing her arms out front. “I admit, it’s more than a little weird to think about you putting something I made… up your, um, ass… but I know it’s just to help! I made something for Camie and I to use the other day too, so…”

“Mm, was that your Christmas gift to her?”

“...look. You tell anyone else about it, I’m telling the class you get off riding a Valiant-themed dildo.”

Katsuki managed to crack a small smile. “I hope you guys are had fun.”

“Yes, yes, we did. And maybe one day you’ll find someone to fill your needs at some point so that I don’t have to be your- your dildo dealer.” She sighed, crossed her arms over her chest, and seemed to accept the position she’d been put in. “Just- did you bring the first one?”

“Yeah, yeah. Cleaned it and everything.”

“...dear god, I hope so. Let me see it, and, um… tell me how much bigger you’d like the new one.”

If nothing else, he was thankful Yaoyorozu was relatively relaxed about the situation. More so than he’d anticipated. But between the constant remarks in regards to his masturbation habits and the blatant comments about his feelings towards Deku’s extremely handsome body within his friend group, it wasn’t as if this sort of discussion was off the table.

Katsuki dug his dildo out of the backpack he’d brought with him, and before he handed it to her, rolled it over in his palms and squeezed tight.

You’ve served me well. Maybe you’ll meet my ass again someday.

“Here.” Katsuki murmured, sending his silent tribute to the skies. “And, uh. I don’t think I ever thanked you the first time.”

“...it’s fine. How long do you want it?”

He’d written it all down beforehand after a bit of research and comparison. Chances are Deku was still bigger, better, but this would do for now.

“First one was like, five and a half… if you could bump that up to seven, that’d be great.” Keep it clinical, keep it clinical. “Could you make it another half inch wider or so, too?”

“Same color scheme?”

“Yeah. Please.”
It’s the closest I’ll probably get for a while, even with how much I have been coming onto him. Oh well. At least it’ll keep me busy for a while.

“Would you mind looking the other way?” Yaoyorozu asked, breaking him out of his trance. “It’s strange enough pulling an anal dildo out of my arm as it is without extra eyes on me.”

Katsuki did as he was asked and honestly tried not to think too hard about what he was doing. What they were doing. But when Yaoyorozu stepped back into his field of view to hand him the product of her work, there was no denying it any longer.

“You, uh… this is kinda different from the last one.” Katsuki squinted, and turned the dildo over in his hand. “Is the base a suction cup? Why’s it got these ridges?”

“It’s just a more emphasized natural texture rather than the smooth one I made last time. I thought you would’ve done enough research yourself.” Yaoyorozu rolled her eyes. “And really, I can’t imagine the use for that base will elude you for too much longer.”

He frowned. “S’not like I can really stick it to my bed, though.”

“Try the wall instead. About waist level should work for you.” She sighed. “Bakugou, I’m a lesbian. So trust me when I say I know better than you about how important the art of oral sex is. Your boyfriend will appreciate it.”

Wait, my- “I don’t have a boyfriend!”

“Not yet.” Katsuki received nothing but a simple shrug in response. “But by the sounds of it, if you play your cards right you may soon enough.”

Oral sex… this dildo… wait, like practice sucking dick with it?

It was only then that Katsuki realized he really had no idea how his gag reflex was. God, the last thing he’d wanna do was throw up on Deku’s dick if— no, when— he got on his knees for him for the first time.

Oh god. I- yeah, I need practice! If I’m gonna be the best damn partner, I gotta be the damn best at sucking dick, too!

“Yeah, yeah, you’re right.” Katsuki pursed his lips. “I’ll figure this shit out. Get better.”

I’ll make him mine.

“Well, good luck.” A hint of a smile crossed over her lips. “And work on yourself too. Just don’t show up to class late tomorrow cause you stayed up too late, okay? We’re going over some important things.”

“Mm. Internship stuff, right?”

“Right. Don’t forget to do some basic research, too.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m not an idiot.”

Yaoyorozu laughed. “No, not an idiot. Just horny. It’s okay, I know it can be distracting.”

A sharp growl rose from his throat as he shoved the new (and old) dildos back into his bag, and got to his feet. “You know what, I’m gonna get off extra hard tonight for that. And show up bright spankin’ early, too. Horny doesn’t mean stupid.”
“No, but you are stupid horny.”

Katsuki grit his teeth, hefted his bag over his shoulder, and left before he got into another argument he’d inevitably lose.

_Her power is too strong._

That said, Katsuki showed up to class the next day just before the bell and tried to pretend he hadn’t rushed out of bed after accidentally sleeping in too late. Oral practice had been a failing effort for hours, and he hadn’t realized quite how late it was until he finally started looking into his internship information and saw the bright numbers blinking with a telling _two o’clock_ on the corner of his laptop. One hour later, he’d given up and gone to sleep.

“How’d you sleep, Baku?” Camie asked, leaning closer than she knew was good for her.

“Fi- Fine.”

And it was only then that Katsuki realized that maybe, just maybe, his throat had gotten a little sore from repeatedly shoving something thicker than he was used to down it.

_Oh... oh no._

“How, someone’s a little hoarse.” She continued, squeezing his shoulder tighter than she should’ve.

“Having fun with your new toy?”

Katsuki gave her a middle finger in response. But to his relief, Aizawa arrived just before she could pester him further. They’d been going over internship things in more detail in class lately- though they wouldn’t be picking one up until their second year, now was when they’d be securing the internship itself and its respective time period. In some previous years, students had taken on earlier internships due to a higher level of crisis and villainy on the streets. Two years ago, though, things had finally started to become more stable again and the need to be sending overworked and under-trained heroes to the front lines had become less of a necessity. There was certainly a need for good heroes, yes- but nothing that would warrant an absurdly early start.

After the lecture, Katsuki was finally handed the sheet he’d been waiting for- the official roster of the agencies that would be accepting students, ranging from newer to older and across every type of terrain and focus imaginable.

_We’ve still got time to decide, but... I think I’ve got a pretty good idea of what I’m looking for. Deku told me I needed to work smaller. Figure out true finesse with my body and my quirk. So in order to do that, I need something more like close-combat training. Precise and fast movements with more of my body and less of my quirk._

From there, the question was just identifying which one. Aizawa released the class to look through their packets for the rest of the lecture, and it wasn’t long before Katsuki broke out exactly four highlighters, a pen, and two pencils before heading off on a rampant search for the right place. Each page, each agency was treated with meticulous care and analysis, but after another hour he finally managed to narrow it down.

“You done yet, Baku?” Camie slid into the seat next to him, squishing herself closer than almost anyone else was allowed to. He’d moved to working in the cafeteria after class had ended, the white noise from the crowd nothing but background music. “I don’t think I’ve seen you look up from that packet since you got it.”

“At least I’m trying to put some thought into this whole thing.” Katsuki scowled. “Unlike _someone_ I
know.”

_Dammit, I’m still raspy as fuck._

Camie rolled her eyes and pushed herself even more into Katsuki’s space, elbows on the table while half-shoving his stuff onto the floor. It was only after a hiss and a scramble to secure his writing utensils that he finally looked up and saw the humor in her eyes for the first time.

“So, are you only spending this much time going through these because your first choice wasn’t an option?”

“First choice? I never had a–”

“Oh yes you did,” Camie grinned. “Let’s see, I think his name starts with a ‘V’? But from what I hear, you might know it better by ‘D’. That right?”

Katsuki’s mouth fell open, aghast. “I wasn’t planning on- on _interning_ with De- Valiant!”

“Really now?” She paused. “You weren’t planning on getting him to take you under his wing, to try and get him alone for a bit, maybe blow him under his desk or let him fuck you on patrol?”

...I mean, I wouldn’t be opposed to it, but–

“He’s in no shape to take on an intern right now.” Katsuki narrowed his eyes. “And if I really want to improve, I’m going to need to work under someone who’s not gonna be so damn distracting.”

_I did learn a lot from that one training session we managed to do, but... things are a little different now. I think. I’m not sure._

They hadn’t had a good chance to meet up again before Katsuki had to go back to school. It’d been another two days after their phone call that Deku started feeling back to normal again, but he’d had a slew of appointments and rigorous physical therapy that had been leaving him too tired to leave his apartment. Katsuki wasn’t sure what it was he was doing for those other ones- despite his occasional questions, Deku never went into much detail for anything but the physical side of things.

_And we haven’t talked about Christmas at all, either... is he scared of something? I don’t know, really._

Though it’d been incredible to be so damn close to Deku during that training and actually feel him, hold him, show off what sex appeal he could muster, there was so much newness and uncertainty in the air surrounding what feelings Katsuki might’ve begun to unravel.

“It’s a shame.” Camie sighed. “You were doing so good during that training you guys did from what you told me... and I’m so glad you finally listened to me in regards to what you were wearing. Like, babe, you saw how flustered he got, right?”

_You don’t even know all of it. You don’t know that I kissed him._

For some reason, the thought of telling Camie of what had happened on that Christmas day felt like it violated some sort of secret he and Deku now kept.

Katsuki swallowed and hugged his arms close to his chest. “I-I mean, yeah. And it was great, but... what if that’s not what he wants?”

“Oh, _please_. He’s twenty! And I know he’s got all sorts of energy and a very healthy libido.” She
assured. “You’ve got assets, Baku. And I know you can use them well- what you were doing back there? That was perfect. He’s gotta be dreaming about your chest all the time now.”

Dreaming about me… I mean, it’s not that I don’t want that. I want him to love my body just as much as I love his. But–

“That’s exactly why I can’t intern with him.” Katsuki mumbled. “I know he’d be too much of a distraction. If I’m gonna be the best hero, be the best partner, I need to focus on all the hero stuff, too. Not just seduction.”

That’ll… that’ll have to come later.

And for some reason, Camie wrapped an arm around his shoulders, and just pulled him in close. “I gotchu, babe. Alright. Wanna go over who you’re looking at right now?”

Katsuki raised an eyebrow. “Lemme guess, you’re interning with Uwabami?”

“Nope, actually.” She shrugged. “Believe it or not, I wanna take this seriously too. And I’m already confident with my skills in front of the camera, you know?”

One quick glance over at her was enough to prove it to Katsuki, and if he was being honest, he was impressed. “Makes sense. Who are you looking at, then?”

“Mm, I’m thinking Ryukyu!” Camie’s eyes lit up. “I mean, come on. Gorgeous, strong, and confident? That’s the kind of person I want to intern with.”

Huh. She… really has put thought into this, hasn’t she?

It wasn’t always easy to see past Camie’s ditzy side, but he’d been around her long enough to really see that heart of gold and determination beneath her glamorous exterior. “That’s cool. Hope it goes well.”

“It’ll be great. I’ll come back even more stunning than before, y’know?”

There was confidence in her voice, for sure, but under that was another layer of wavering courage that she never let the rest of the world see.

“You will.” Katsuki agreed. “You’re an asshole, but I don’t make friends with incompetent people. You’re gonna be amazing.”

There was a new warmth in the hug that followed, but Katsuki could really only embrace it.

“Okay. Well, where were you looking at?”

Katsuki chewed his lip, and flipped his packet over to the second page. “Honestly? I didn’t expect them to be on here, but Uravity and Red Riot’s agency. They’ve been showing up as a great team lately, and I trust their skills. They’ve both got more close-combat technique too. I wanna work on that.”

“Staying in the city, then?” Camie asked, looking over his notes stuffed on the sides of his page, still in a somewhat neat order. “I guess that seems about right.”

“Yeah. I like the cityscape.” He paused. “Lots of high places to get up to, more in the thick of the danger and all that… but, I gotta get more precise control of myself cause of that too. I- I don’t wanna be hurting people on accident if I’m tryin’ to rescue them.”
“Mm, ‘kay. Makes sense! But, you know... I don’t think that you’re the only one in the class looking at that place for an internship.”

*Huh? “Who else?”*

“Well- oh!”

Camie was cut off by someone- no, two someones- joining them on the other side of the table. Yaoyorozu and Todoroki sat down with their food, looking mildly confused as to why Camie was spread out all over Katsuki but not questioning it too much, either.

“Hey, babe.” Camie blew Yaoyorozu a kiss from across the table, only for her to huff and turn a bit red in response. “You’re wanting to intern with Uravity and Red Riot, right?”

“Hm?” Yaoyorozu glanced up, and nodded. “Yes, I am. Why?”

“Well, you might not be alone. Baku’s looking over there too.”

Her eyes lit up at that. “Oh, awesome! That would be interesting. We haven’t worked together in a while.”

“You’re going with them?” Todoroki asked. “I think I’m gonna go to Gale. We’ve both got big range elemental quirks, and I think he’d be good for me to figure out a better way to reign in all of this.”

“And he’s hot.” Camie grinned. “Come on, not even *you* could ignore those arms!”

“Why would I ignore his arms?” Todoroki tilted his head, mildly confused. “I mean, that’s a product of his training. I’m sure the added muscle helps a lot on the field.”

Camie sighed, having been long past the point of being sick of Todoroki’s complete lack of social sense. “Okay. Sure. Just... go with that, I guess.”

They all knew there was no making him see the light of day by now.

“But, anyways...” Katsuki cleared his throat, trying to pretend he less hoarse than he was. “I’d like to work with you again too. I’ve gotten better.”

“You’re not the only one who’s improved.” Yaoyorozu smiled. “I think we could make a good team.”

And finally, his decision was starting to settle.

Lunch finished up in relative peace for once, and after a lengthy study group that evening, Katsuki retreated to his room for a different sort of practice.

*I’ll tame this dildo. I’ll figure out how to give the best damn blowjob eventually. Maybe not tonight, though.*

But just as he was taking it out of his drawer and pulling out the lube and a spare towel, his phone buzzed with a new message. Deku had been busy the past few days, too tired to talk for long, but today...

[Deku] hi kacchan!! if you’re up for a call today i can talk for a bit:)

[Deku] ahhh i miss talking to you, didnt realize how much stuff i had going on
Katsuki swallowed, stared at the seven inches of silicone in his hand, and bit his lip.

He- no. I am not gonna talk to him while getting off with that. He’d hear me for sure! Plus, he might be able to tell that my voice is pretty weak right now… ugh, that wouldn’t be good.

And as much as that kind of thrill was tempting to partake in, there was a part of him that knew better. Their relationship was already in an interesting place, and pushing it too much right now would be...

No. No, I won’t do that to him.

That said, he wasn’t totally sure what he was going to do. It wasn’t that he wanted to turn Deku down right now, but maybe-

[Katsuki] im sorry. My voice is pretty rough today

[Katsuki] might’ve gotten a bit of a cold. Today probably ain’t the best day for me to talk

[Katsuki] i can text if you want

Sweat beaded itself over his forehead as he tugged down his pants, trembling from just the thought of Deku agreeing to talk while Katsuki had a little fun.

[Deku] oh, im sorry! I hope you feel better soon:(

[Deku] but yeah sure, texting is fine! how’s your day been?

He snorted.

Well, it’s gonna be great if this goes well.

[Katsuki] pretty good. aside from the cold

The trick would be to keep Deku talking about himself. Not asking questions about what Katsuki was doing. He popped open a fresh bottle of lube and lay back on his bed, having decided earlier that he was going to be using the dildo for what intended it for today. No more attempting to improve his oral for at least another day or two while his throat recovered.

[Deku] that’s good! do any fun training?

Just running his hands over his new toy, tracing all the natural ridges and imagining it inside was enough to excite him. Fingers first, though.

I ain’t gonna be able to take this unprepared.

It was comfortable enough to lube himself up and get a finger inside and text back while relaxing into his pillows. Really, this was the life. Being able to fuck himself while talking to his crush-slash-hero? Hell yeah.

[Katsuki] eh, not too much fieldwork. I’ve been doing some personal training tho

He couldn’t help but laugh at his own message as he worked a second finger in, the now familiar stretch always so damn good.

I haven’t just taken an evening to relax like this for myself in a while… it’s kinda nice.
[Deku] ooh, cool! whatve you been working on?

Katsuki grunted, pushing in a third while trying to come up with a decent answer to Deku’s question. Saying he’d been working on his blowjob skills probably wouldn’t be well received, but…

[Katsuki] yknow. figuring out tactics to make people feel more relaxed and relieved

[Deku] oh! like when youre rescuing? ahhh, kacchan, thats awesome!!

[Deku] and doing that on your own time too. youre really amazing

Yeah, he might’ve choked a little more than he should’ve at that response. But the praise only served to stroke his ego, and Katsuki knew he got a little harder just reading those words.

[Katsuki] heh. Thanks

[Katsuki] how u been

He had to hold back a slight whimper as he pulled out, fingers still shaky and dripping. But this time he reached out for his dildo and the lube, pouring more over the tip as he tried to get himself into the best position possible.

“Hng… f-fuck.” Katsuki gasped, the tip just barely pressed inside. Already he was starting to see the benefit of the added texture- *god*, it felt good, stimulating what he’d somehow missed before.

[Deku] ah im doing okay

[Deku] better now that i get to talk to you

[Deku] haha

Katsuki’s free hand trembled around his phone as he went to reply again, to ask for more detail, or anything, really

[Katsuki] cute

[Katsuki] u workk hard in pt today!

[Katsuki] ?*

And oh- oh *no*. He hadn’t factored typos into this equation. But it was all he could do to push the dildo in a little further, focus a little more, and just hope it would be okay.

*Thank you, Yaoyorozu… ugh, god, this is good.*

Katsuki’s was struggling to keep his eyes open as he kept pushing, kept going, hardly holding back the moan threatening to escape his throat.

*Please, Deku, talk to me… tell me I’m good, that I’m doing amazing…*

His breath hitched, and as he pushed it in just a bit further, the phone buzzed in his hand again.

[Deku] ah, i tried! its hard

[Deku] but seeing all your hard work is really motivating too

And *hell*, if that wasn’t exactly what he needed to hear. Katsuki pushed it in further, further, and
fuck- the extra width was mind-numbing, the length enough to reach more than he could’ve dreamed of before.

I’ll work hard for you… if I take your dick, take it good, would that make you happy? Would you wanna see me all spread out for you like that?

“Please…” He begged, hushed moans dripping like honey as he thrust in, out, in, out, falling into something of a rhythm. “Deku… p-please, fuck me…”

Fuck me, fuck me good, fuck me so hard I’ll forget everything else.

Katsuki hardly noticed the next buzz of his phone, but through sweating palms and sheer pleasure coursing through his veins, managed to look and respond.

[Deku] kacchan?

[Deku] aha, sorry if that came off weird. but you’re pretty inspiring too

That message alone nearly sent Katsuki coming right then and there.

[Katsuki] ur amzin deku

[Katsuki] h

At this point, Katsuki was almost afraid to look back at what he’d sent once he finished. But did it really matter when he had five- no, six- inches up his ass, and still a little more to go. Katsuki’s toes curled tight, every strained whimper escaping his lips despite frantic attempts to hold it back.

Shit–! Sorry, Todoroki!

Katsuki dropped his phone on the bed, hips arched high as heat thrummed through his body, everything numb but for the single overwhelming sensation threatening to consume him. He kept going, one hand on his dick and the other at the base of the dildo pushing, pushing, pushing so damn good…!

More, more, just please give me more!

“Deku…f-fuck, Deku…!”

He wasn’t sure what sound he made when he came, and at this point, could only hope that he hadn’t woken up the rest of the dorm with his screaming. Katsuki shuddered around the toy at his climax, the last tingling spasms of orgasm rolling through him as he tried to breathe, relax, and enjoy. His towel had gotten extra use today- there was no doubt the spot below him was soaked through with lube and cumstains, and after this, wasn’t sure he’d be able to muster the strength to clean up.

But ho-ly shit. Katsuki wasn’t sure he’d ever felt so damn satisfied in his life. Only then, though, did he look back at his phone to see the series of messages left unread.

[Deku] ah, you okay kacchan?

[Deku] its not like you to uh

[Deku] make so many typos

[Deku] i hope you’re okay. maybe get some rest? its pretty late
“Shit.” He mumbled, still wrung out from that mind blowing orgasm. Katsuki squinted and saw that the last message had been sent not a minute ago- maybe there was still a chance to catch Deku before he left.

[Katsuki] shit sorry abt that

[Katsuki] you uh. Get some good sleep too<3

For a brief moment, he saw the Deku is typing notification at the bottom of his screen- only for it to disappear but a second later.

He’s probably just going to sleep. Eh, whatever. I should too.

It was a tough journey to get cleaned up again and back into a fresh pair of boxers and wipe off his dildo so he’d be able to clean it properly later. Obtaining it had been a tough mission, but getting to use it? Entirely worth the price.

And yeah, maybe he came into class with a limp the next day, but again.

Worth it.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact the events of the next chapter were originally gonna b for this chapter but i recently decided to swap them fsljkfa it works better this way tho rly

Also, today was my first day of this semester at uni!! I’ll try and get around to replying to comments like usual, but just with more going on rn it might not be possible to get to all of them, sorry!!! All yalls words always make my day and i love reading them so much tho like holy moly yalls support has been incredible so far and i just wish i could give everyone hugs

And thank u so much to my beta @aetherlites, and my Twitter is aeronines!
“Hit that landing and balance yourself- you don’t wanna fall over should your opponent suddenly decide to change direction. So like… yes! Just like that, Kacchan!”

Katsuki grinned and wiped the sweat from his brow as steady feet hit the sand just before turning back towards Deku. “Eh? That good?”

“It was great!” Deku applauded. “I’m glad you’re getting the hang of these landings- even since just last month, you’ve started looking so much better.”

“I mean, I ain’t the only one who’s been improving.” Katsuki grinned, only for Deku to groan at the mention. “You know I watch the news. And tell me- who was the one that executed a perfect rescue downtown this week?”

He wasn’t sure he’d ever grow tired of seeing the subtle red flush across Deku’s cheeks. “This lesson isn’t about me and you know it.”

Even so, there was no denying the wobbly smile across his lips. There’d been some sort of shift in him since he’d gone back on duty, some sort of joy, no, life returning. They’d only been training with each other on and off for a few months now, both busy with school or work or whatever else, and yet even so- Katsuki wasn’t sure he’d ever seen Deku as lively as he was these days.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “But don’t go easy on me today, ’kay? I know you wanted to have a practice session for my birthday, but–”

“Excuse you.” Deku stepped closer, arms crossed over his chest with a wry smile on his lips. “You should know by now that I’m not going to go easy on you. But would you rather me help you out with fun training for today, or tell you to drop and give me a hundred?”

I mean, when you’re the one asking it doesn’t sound too bad.

But, still. “…okay, yeah, fun training is fine.”

Deku clapped him on the shoulder. “That’s the spirit. But would you wanna break for a bit? We’ve been going for a while now.”

It was true- though they had more daylight now than just a few months ago, it was already bordering on seven o’clock as the sun set over low, rolling waves. Katsuki had almost grown an addiction to working out at the beach- training on the sandy terrain was certainly different than concrete, and they’d been able to focus in on technique-based things so much more intimately than in a group setting. His progress in class was becoming more and more pronounced by the day just from the stuff he’d learned from Deku, and at this point, he had no intent to quit.
“Sure. I’m down for a break.”

A small bench in the shade of the beachside become their dropping point. Katsuki rested his head against Deku’s chest as a clothed arm wrapped itself around his own shoulder- a position more natural than he ever could’ve expected to find.

*I still can’t believe he lets me do this with him. Fuck, I love it when he holds me.*

“Wanna tell me how your birthday was yesterday?” Deku asked, warm fingers running through Katsuki’s hair. “You said you just hung out with your friends, right?”

“Mhm. Yeah, that’s about it.” Katsuki murmured, eyes falling shut as he relaxed against the steady thrum of Deku’s heartbeat and the gentle touch against his scalp. “Went out to dinner… I thought it was fun. Camie said I was boring. They- well, she- wanted to throw some sort of bigass party instead.”

“You’re not into lots of celebration, then? I get that.”

*Honestly, being here is all I really wanted.*

“My parents got me a new sleeping bag.” He continued, slipping a hand to rest on Deku’s leg. “For camping.”

“Oh, you go camping?” Deku asked. “Is there a certain area you like?”

“Mountains and stuff.” He shrugged. “I like hiking a lot. Haven’t gotten a chance to go in a while, though.”

“Ah, yeah…” There was a brief pause, and- “Well, I’d love to go with you if you ever have time. Maybe over the summer? I haven’t been hiking in forever.”

*Huh… sleeping under the stars, kissing in the forest, fucking me out in the open…*

“Yeah, I’d be down with that.”

“Awesome.”

It was so damn peaceful. No one was at the beach but them today, no one was watching them, wanting to talk to them, and just the distant sound of the ocean was enough to lull Katsuki to sleep.

*It’s just us… me, him, and the seagulls.*

Katsuki could’ve kissed him right then and there.

“…hey, Kacchan?”

The hesitation was new- he hadn’t heard that nervous excitement buried in Deku’s voice in so long.

“Yeah?”

The fingers in his hair stopped, stilled, if only for a moment. “I don’t really have much to offer for your birthday… and if you don’t want to, it’s fine, but…” Deku’s voice trailed off, almost as if he was trying to gather the courage to continue. “…I, uh. Bought some groceries earlier today, and I was just wondering if- if you would wanna come over to my place for dinner?”

...holy shit.
“Fuck yes.” There was no hiding the excitement in his voice now. Katsuki’s eyes shot open and when he met Deku’s again, was near-shocked by the surprise in his face. “When are we leaving?”

“Oh! Um, well… we could take off now if you’re ready?” Deku pulled back his arm, and Katsuki couldn’t help but notice the slight flush over his cheeks. “Honestly, I didn’t think you’d be so… enthused?”

“What, you think I’d turn down dinner with you?” Katsuki scoffed, and got to his feet. “C’mon, dumbass. Let’s go. I’ve been wanting to see your place for months.”

Deku followed him off the bench, still flustered. “I mean, it’s not terribly exciting, just another apartment and all…” He rubbed the back of his neck, but caught up to walk next to Katsuki. “I hope your expectations aren’t too high.”

“I don’t care if it ain’t fancy.” Katsuki snorted. “It’s yours. And I wanna see what it’s like.”

Deku didn’t appear to have a good answer to that statement, and just sighed, pulled his hood up over his head, and carried on. “Well, um… I hope you don’t hate it, aha…”

_Fucker, I wanna live with you someday. Don’t even start with that._

Deku usually walked back to his place, but they decided the train would be best today in order to move a little faster. Even so, Katsuki couldn’t help but notice when pulled out a pair of dark sunglasses before moving out into the more crowded streets despite knowing his reasons.

_He’s a popular pro hero. Hell, at least I ain’t callin’ him ‘Valiant’._

That said, he hated watching Deku try and make himself look smaller while they walked to the station. The hunched back, hands in his pockets, and resigned frown over Deku’s face was hard to watch. Katsuki knew it was necessary, but it still hurt.

_Am I gonna have to sneak around like this someday, too?_

Deku was quiet when they got on the train. There was no eye contact, much less any physical contact between them here. And due to the distinctive scars on his hands, Deku couldn’t even show them in public without risk of being prodded and questioned.

And for as much as he wanted to be with him, there was no chance they’d ever be able to really go out in public without unwanted media attention. Too much was on the line for the both of them.

_I don’t like thinking about it, but… I am still in high school. Deku would probably be in major trouble if they saw me with him like this…_

A near missable nudge from Deku alerted him that they were at his stop, and even after they pushed through the worst of the crowds, there was no change in his behavior. Cautious, always cautious. Katsuki could only follow into another populated street and then finally, down a quieter one.

_“It’s right up ahead.” Deku murmured. “The small complex on the left. I’m up on the third floor, but we can just take the side stairs instead of going through the lobby.”_

_No wonder he never invited me over… there’s just too high a risk of being seen._

The complex seemed nice enough, though. Katsuki trailed Deku around the back of the building all the way to a smaller and more hidden set of stairs. After one quick run up the short stairs, Deku pulled down his hood, took off his sunglasses, and lent Katsuki a small, apologetic smile.
“Almost there. Sorry about having to hide like that.” Deku sighed. “I-I mean, you know why… I don’t like it, but…”

Katsuki shook his head. “Don’t worry, I get it. Which one is yours?”

He was led a little further down the dim hallway, just until Deku stopped in front of a door and fumbled through his pocket for a key. Quiet, secluded, private- it was as much as any pro hero could ask for.

_If I lived with him out here someday… I don’t think I’d mind that too much._

“Alright, come in.” Deku said, pushing the door open. “Here’s the place. Sorry if there’s stuff lying around, you can move it if you want. Make yourself at home.”

_Make myself at home, huh?_

Upon first glance, he couldn’t believe just how utterly _ordinary_ everything was. He shucked his shoes off onto the small red rug in the doorway just before wandering into the rest of the cozy apartment. A small couch sat to his left, and to the right, the kitchen. Small and compact, but not confining. And instead of a proper dining table, stools around the kitchen bar appeared to serve the same purpose.

_Makes sense since he’s living alone._

“Ain’t bad.” Katsuki remarked, still looking around as Deku moved past him and into the kitchen, opening up the fridge to grab some stuff out. “Could use a little air freshener, but you should give yourself more credit.”

“Pfft. You shoulda’ seen it last year.” Deku mumbled. “Couldn’t walk two feet without tripping over garbage. We, ah. Cleaned up.”

“Gross.” He rolled his eyes. “If that’s the case, I’m glad I missed it.”

Deku had his head buried in the fridge, pulling out an assortment of ingredients, but there was no missing the slump of his shoulders or slight hesitation in his words. “I… it was bad. I’m sorry, I, uh. Shouldn’t have said anything. Don’t wanna talk about that right now.”

_A year ago… was that around the time of your accident?_

Katsuki swallowed, unsure of what to make of Deku’s sudden mood drop. There was history in this place, and by the sound of it, care had been taken to disguise whatever had happened in the past. It had been a while ago now, but trying to think back to his first school exam brought back memories he couldn’t forget.

_On his birthday last year, he didn’t look… good. I wonder if that had anything to do with all this…?_

“A-Anyway!” Deku pulled his head out of the fridge to turn back towards him. “Um, is curry alright with you? If you don’t mind staying a while, anyways. Oh, and I have leftover gyoza I made last night too!”

“Sounds good.” Katsuki joined him in the small kitchen. “Make it extra hot for me?”

“Oh– right, right, you like it spicy. Got it.”

Katsuki grinned. “What, you don’t like it like that? C’mon, s’just a little heat. You’ll be okay.”
That only lead Deku to fix him with a determined glare, eyes narrowed and showing no sign of weakness. “Oh, Kacchan. I’m stronger than that. I can take it. This is gonna be the best curry you’ve had all year.” He cracked his knuckles. “I’ve been learning how to cook, y’know. Better be ready.”

_That’s the spirit._ “I’m always ready. Show me what you’ve got, Deku.”

And holy fuck, he did not have to pull off his sweatshirt right then and there just to flex in front of Katsuki. It was unfair, so damn _unfair_ that his t-shirt hugged his body so tight, those finely toned arms made even more gorgeous by the taut fabric.

“Well, feel free to look around if you want. You can turn on the TV too, remote’s on the table. Not too much to see here, but… eh, just ask if you need anything.”

Deku turned back to the counter to reheat the gyoza, but just before leaving the kitchen, Katsuki caught eye of a few sticky notes stuck to the fridge. They were mostly just scribbles, notes to go get groceries or reminders to get things done, but one in particular stuck out to him.

_therapy 1-2 tues. dont forget to pick up meds_

But Deku had been out of physical therapy for some time now. There was no way it was an old note either by the looks of it.

_What… Deku, what is this? You’ve never said anything…_

Katsuki tried to remind himself that Deku didn’t need to share every bit of his life with him, wasn’t obligated at all to let him in on anything that was going on in his life. Sure, they texted and called a lot, but…

_What all is he hiding from me? How well do I really know him?_

He bit his tongue, didn’t push, and left the kitchen to see what else he could learn from Deku’s home.

The living room was fairly well put together, but it was clear there hadn’t been a whole lot of thought put into the decor as a whole. Chances are Deku had been shopping for cheap furniture when it was set up and hadn’t upgraded since, despite likely making more than enough to do so now. An assortment of cooking and hero magazines were strewn across the small coffee table alongside a few self-help books. Poorly cleaned coffee stains littered the carpet beside the couch, and with a snort, Katsuki couldn’t help but wonder how clumsy Deku was off the field.

_It’s different seeing this, but… it’s all him. This is his space._

That said, the short stack of dirty plates cluttering the tiny side table and the pants strewn across the floor only served to emphasize his bachelor status. It being his space meant that he was the only one there and subsequently, the only one looking after his own tidiness.

_Maybe I can clean up a little. It’s the least I can do._

But as soon as he went to pick up the plates from the side table, something else caught his eye. Off to the other side of the living room was a burst of strong, flourishing plants, a product of obvious time and care.

_Wait… did Deku grow all these?_

Katsuki took a closer look, and sure enough- there was a planter box hanging off the outside of his
windowsill, and one resting on a thin table on the inside. A thick manual sat to the side of them on a small table along with basic gardening tools and supplies. He’d never been one for plants himself, but there was a sort of respect he had to give Deku upon seeing all of this.

*Is this what he was doing when he was all cooped up in here? Hell, that’s… that’s pretty cute, if it’s true.*

He ran his fingers over a few of the leafy plants, a strangely familiar one catching his eye. A vivid orange flower, blooming above most all the rest like some sort of authority.

*Wait… is this…?*

“Kacchan! I warmed up the-” Deku called out, but stopped upon seeing where Katsuki was standing. There was an undeniable smile across his face and a hint of embarrassment, too. “Oh, um…”

“You grow these?”

Deku paused, let out a small, nervous laugh, and nodded. “Yeah… yeah, they’re mine. I know, maybe it’s weird, but like-”

“Basically, you’re saying you’ve got a green head and a green thumb.” Katsuki grinned. “Good to know.”

“Kacchan…!” Deku’s face went bright red, freckles almost invisible against it. “I- well, um… I mean, I guess? Got a problem with that?”

“S’cool. Never said it was a problem.” Katsuki looked him up and down, laughing a little to himself. “It’s kinda neat, honestly. You’re out here saving the lives of plants and people. But, uh- where’d you get the orange one?”

“Hm? Oh, that one?” Deku came a little closer, some sort of fondness falling over his face. “That one was actually the first. It was the only one I brought home from the hospital, and… I dunno. It’s always been my favorite, and made me realize that something like gardening might be kinda fun, y’know?”

_You’re shitting me. Should I tell him?_

He couldn’t manage any more than a short, nervous laugh. “I actually- um, I think that that’s the one my class sent. I remember one of my friends asking me about it a while back.”

Deku’s face turned nearly as bright as the flower upon that sudden realization. “Oh…! Well, um… your friend has good taste. That’s pretty crazy.”

*And this was the only one you brought back? Either Camie’s got some wild perception skills I’m not aware of, or we just got lucky.*

*Why… why’d she choose this one, anyway?*

“And this was the only one you brought back? Either Camie’s got some wild perception skills I’m not aware of, or we just got lucky.

_Why… why’d she choose this one, anyway?_

“Anyways, the gyoza’s ready if you want some. I’m getting stuff out for the curry right now.”

_Redirecting the conversation? I mean, that’s fine, but… I feel like I’m missing something._

Nonetheless, he nodded—there was no real choice but to go along. “Sounds good. Where’s the bathroom? I wanna wash my hands.”
Deku pointed past him, towards the door Katsuki assumed led to his bedroom. “Right in there, left side of my room. I’m pretty sure I bought more soap? If there’s none on the counter, check the cabinet above the toilet.”

“Got it, thanks.”

He’d only ever seen very brief pictures of Deku’s room— that was where he slept, changed, kept the things most important to him, probably— but Katsuki knew better than to rummage through his drawers and find where he kept the lube.

_Heroes get off too. I wonder if he ever uses toys?_

Katsuki could admit daydreaming about Deku’s sexual preferences on more than one occasion. There wasn’t anything on record stating anyone he’d dated, nothing to indicate he swung one way or another. And over his time as a hero, Deku had been clear as can be about his reluctance to get into a relationship. That said, Katsuki would be _shocked_ if he wasn’t attracted to men when considering just how interested his dick was after their first training session.

_Fuck. I’m never gonna forget that._

But Deku’s room was just as ordinary as the rest of the apartment, with the addition of slightly less organization and slightly more dirty laundry scattered over the floor. This included, but was not limited to— several pairs of boxers, a few t-shirts, one towel, and far too few pairs of pants.

_How does he wear pants around the house!? Wait, is he naked when we’re texting? Calling? Is this why he doesn’t do video calls?_

Katsuki bit down hard on his lip, forced himself to look away, and went through the bathroom door. Not that being there was much better, really. The shower was simple enough with a small sliding glass door as opposed to a curtain. No bath, but that was alright. It was easy enough to conjure a gorgeous mental image of Deku getting off in the shower, both steam and moans of pleasure curling up around him as water dripped into every curve and crevice of his body.

_Why haven’t I spent more time thinking about him after a shower? Fuck, I know he’s gotta be hot._

The realism of the situation came crashing back down, though, upon seeing the slightly-crusty tips of the shampoo bottles and stray hairs on the scraggly bar soap.

_Okay, so maybe realistically it’s not as hot. That’s what fantasies are for, dumbass._

At the very least, Katsuki refused to let his mind drift towards anything involving the toilet.

There was a razor next to the sink— cleaned, probably regularly used— and for whatever reason, a hairbrush. Katsuki wasn’t totally sure _why—_ after all, it appeared that Deku’s hair had a mind of its own aside from the short undercut.

But alongside all that was something else. A plastic per-week pillbox lay casually next to the sink, minding its own business on the counter.

_Wait, I thought he got off medication from the accident months ago? And those don’t really look like vitamins…_

The soap was missing from the counter company, so he did as instructed and opened up the small cabinet above the toilet. Sure enough, there was another bottle of soap, but right next to it—
Katsuki swallowed, grabbed both the soap and the bottle of pills next to it, and froze when he saw the label.

*I… I know what these are.*

Katsuki swallowed, tried to ignore the shiver down his spine as something empty and hollow opened up in his chest.

*Why… why is Deku on antidepressants?*

His fingers were stiff around the bottle, rereading the label over and over and over again as if something would change the longer he stared.

*I shouldn’t be here. I shouldn’t have looked.*

This was Deku’s *very private* space, his personal medical history, and Katsuki was an unwanted, uncalled for intruder. He shoved the medicine back into the cabinet, washed his hands, and left before he could find anything else. And as much as he didn’t want to, as much as it hurt, his mind set to racing and cobbng together pieces he’d hardly considered before.

*That- that note. That wasn’t for physical therapy. Deku’s- he’s–*

Deku was a hero. A damn good one, at that. He smiled for the citizens he saved, for the camera, for Katsuki–

*Last year. His accident. He said his apartment was a disaster. He seemed kinda distressed on his birthday last year. Really sad. He was massively overworking himself. He’s been so hesitant to show me his space. He never told me about those appointments he had outside of physical therapy.*

There was hardly any denying it at this point, though.

*Shit, Deku… I didn’t know you were… you have…*

Katsuki forced the thoughts away, hoped he didn’t look too pale, and joined Deku in the kitchen again.

“T ook you long enough.” Deku chuckled. “Get lost? I know, I know, this place can be so confusing.”

“No, I- I found everything.” He got out, but even just looking at the bright smile across Deku’s face was tough now. “Your soap was in the cabinet.”

“Ah, cool cool. Glad you got it.”

Before he really realized what was going on, Deku placed a small plate of gyoza and sauce on the counter next to him. “I got all the ingredients out for the curry, and ah, I’m excited! I think it’ll be good.” He said, a little too much cheer in his voice.

Katsuki hoped the smile on his face wasn’t too terribly strained. “Yeah. I’m sure it will be.”

The room fell quiet again, just before Deku let out a long, low sigh. “…ah, guess you saw what else was in that cabinet. I’m sorry, I forgot to put it up…”

*Huh? Wait, what is he-*

But before he could say anything, think any further, Deku was beside him again. “It’s, um. It’s okay.
I know it might seem kinda strange? Maybe? But... you can ask if you wanna. It's- it's fine.”

And when he looked up at Deku again, eyes clear and warm but with a hint of resignation in them, it was as if he was seeing him for the first time.

He swallowed.

“You, uh... you have depression?”

Katsuki couldn’t believe just how small he sounded.

“Yeah. And, uh, anxiety.” Deku leaned back against the counter, though he didn’t sound upset, or angry, or... much of anything, really. “It’s okay, really! It’s more manageable now. Promise. S’just a thing.”

Deku picked up his chopsticks and started eating alongside Katsuki before he continued. “I just- I didn’t want you to worry, y’know? That’s why I never said anything.” He paused and let out a short, breathy laugh. “I’m, ah. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you. I was going to at, well... some point. Just never came up.”

Why... why are you...

“Why are you apologizing, idiot?” Katsuki stared at him, and he wasn’t sure quite what the combination of shock and confusion and acceptance running through his veins was. “It’s just mental stuff. You ain’t obligated to tell me anything, but like...” He bit his lip. “Nothing weird about it. Wrong with it. You’re just- you’re just you. And hell, I’m glad you’re getting help!”

And Deku only nodded. Agreed.

“I- I’m glad too, Kacchan.” He paused. “Well, um... I’m sorry, this probably isn’t the best birthday conversation... I think I might get started on the curry, if that’s okay.”

“Okay? ‘Course it’s okay.” Katsuki said, but not before stepping a little closer and wrapping his arms around Deku’s waist, head tucked just below his chin. “Thanks for uh, just. Inviting me over.”

It... it makes sense, I guess. But people don’t ever see anything but the heroic side of him. He’s so, so human too.

“No need to thank me.” Deku murmured. “It’s the least I can do for you, really.”

And when he pulled Katsuki closer to his chest again, so close, he realized that Deku’s hands were shaking.

“You mean a lot to me, Kacchan.” He murmured, so quiet, gentle. “More... more than you probably know. I’m just, um... I’m glad you’re in my life.”

Shit, Deku...

“Well, thanks for saving my life back then.” Katsuki said, and to his relief, Deku laughed. “I’m serious! Who knows what the hell would’ve happened if you hadn’t.”

Deku squeezed him tighter, the mood so much lighter than before. “We don’t need to worry about that, do we? It happened. We’re here now.”

“Right, right. Focus on the present.”
“Can’t change the past.” Deku nodded, and let go. “I’m gonna start cutting up stuff for the curry, okay?”

“Can I help?”

“Kacchan, it’s your dinner–!”

“And I like cooking.” He crossed his arms over his chest, leaned back against the counter, and smirked. “Since it’s for my birthday, you’d let me help out if I wanted, right?”

Deku groaned, but didn’t push it. “Fine, fine. If that’s what you want. Let’s get going.”

Katsuki started on the potatoes after leaving Deku to the onions, chopping them into neat, precise sections. It didn’t take long to finish them up and move onto the carrots, but just as he did, something odd stuck out from the side.

*Oh, geez…*

“Deku, what the *fuck* are you doing?”

He jumped a little, startled. “Huh? I’m cutting this up?”

“Is that what they call it these days?” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “God, Deku, hand me the knife. This is sloppy.”

“Sloppy!? I- well, they’re a *little* lopsided, but it adds character!”

Katsuki squinted and raised an eyebrow. “Yeah, no. Just- ugh, lemme show you.”

He shoved himself into Deku’s space, grabbed his hand (albeit carefully), and tried to guide him. “Focus.” Katsuki instructed, directing him with intense precision. “Here, try and keep it even. You’re holding it steady, right?”

“Yeah- yeah.”

“You sound stressed.”

“I’m not stressed.”

“Relax, then. It’s easy.”

He felt Deku take a deep breath beside him. “Sorry, ah… I thought I was doing alright. No one’s really ever taught me how.”

“That’s okay.” Katsuki slid his fingers across the back of Deku’s hands, trying to correct the slight mistakes. “I don’t mind teaching, you know.”

When he felt the tension finally loosen in Deku’s hands, Katsuki moved a little more now, able to maneuver him into the right position. From there, it was easy. One cut, two cuts, smooth and even and precise.

“Just use your knuckles to guide you… like this, now.”

“Uh huh, okay…”

Having his hands there, teaching, guiding- had never felt more natural.
“See? S’not that hard.” Katsuki said. “Kinda get it now?”

“Ah, I think so.”

Katsuki let go, warmth bubbling up through his stomach upon seeing the near-giddy smile rise across Deku’s face as the slices came out so much more even and precise than before. It was as if something had clicked- now, he was almost satisfying to watch.

“Looks good.” He started, trying to focus on Deku’s hands rather than the wonderful curve of his ass just below. “I’ll get the rest going.”

And as he finished up the carrots and moved onto the beef, Katsuki couldn’t shake the sense that everything about this- being with Deku, working together like this, quiet and yet at so much peace- felt so right.

I wish I could stay here.

It was so different from spending time with any of his friends. Camie was a constant bundle of energy, Yaoyorozu a calm and cool force to work with and be around, and he and Todoroki’s relationship existed between physical training and snarky back-and-forth comments.

Deku, though–

Deku was grounding.

I don’t wanna leave.

“I’m done with the beef. Did you finish up the mushrooms?”

“Yeah! I can get you a pan for the beef, and I’ll go ahead and and start the rest of the curry if you want?”

“Works for me. Just don’t forget to make it spicy, dumbass.”

“Oh, shut it. Like I’d forget something like that.”

Some way through the process, Deku turned on some music. Nothing loud or invasive, just a little something to liven up the atmosphere.

I can almost pretend we’re together.

And after a bit more preparation, Deku slipped the lid on top of the pot and set a timer. “Alright. This needs to simmer for a while, would you wanna watch a movie or something? I’ve got some classic All Might features if you’re into that.”

Dinner and a movie? Camie would be proud as fuck.

“I’m down.” Katsuki nodded, and they moved the short distance to the living room to get it going. Deku shuffled through his collection for a minute, pulled out the one he wanted and shoved it in. But when he decided to sit on the other end of the couch for no particular reason, Katsuki knew he had to remedy it. As the opening theme began, Katsuki not-so-subtly scooted over to Deku’s side and leaned up against him.

“A-Ah, Kacchan, um…” Deku looked down, no hiding the flush on his cheeks from that short distance. “You sure you wanna—”
“It’s my birthday, ain’t it?” He grinned, and only moved in closer. “I can do what I want.”

There was a soft, punctuated laugh from his side just before Deku’s hand moved up over his shoulders, fingers weaving themselves in his hair. “Alright, alright. This okay?”

“S’perfect.”

The movie started up, intro flaring to life in front of them. It was hard to focus when all he had in front of him was Deku, though- when those comforting hands ran through his hair so gently, so carefully, so naturally. And all he could do was breathe, rest, and relax.

_I want you. I want to know everything about you._

“Your hair is softer than it looks.” Quiet, curious. “I kinda like touching it.”

“Kinda, huh?” Katsuki teased, but made no effort to halt him. “I kinda like how it feels. Don’t stop.”

“Mm, wasn’t planning on it.”

He’d seen the movie before- it’d come out when he was a child no older than seven or eight, but was a classic that’d been passed down and replayed for years. Deku had been much the same, closer to ten or eleven, but there was no doubt each scene had been inscribed stone-deep in his head like so many other kids back then.

“...hey, Kacchan?”

“Yeah?”

“You sure this is what you wanna do for your birthday?”

_Oh, for fuck’s sake._

“Wouldn’t wanna be anywhere else.” He reached for Deku’s free hand and tugged it onto his lap. “Besides, we gotta wait for dinner to finish up, right? Guess I’ll have to stay a while.”

“It’s not too long a wait or anything?”

Resisting the temptation to kiss him on the cheek again right there was hard enough. “No, it’s all good.”

“Awesome.” Deku chuckled. “I’ll be honest, I don’t mind the wait either.”

_Can I please kiss you, Deku?_

He couldn’t keep his eyes off of Deku’s lips- not when they were so close, so tempting. But he was lucky enough to have even gotten this far with him, and what they had right now was so much more _intimate_ than he ever could’ve asked for to begin with.

_I won’t push this. Can’t push this. He’s already letting me do so much..._

Katsuki settled for Deku’s free hand instead, tracing gentle lines down his fingers and over his knuckles, all the way to his wrist. At some point, he turned it over to knead into the creases of his palm, mapping out each and every part of it.

_Crooked fingers, crooked hands... but fuck, they’re still gorgeous._
“What are you doing? You’ve been at it for a while now.” Deku asked, no higher than a whisper. Katsuki didn’t look up to meet his eyes—didn’t need to, really.

“Dunno. Touching you?”

“You don’t mind the scars?”

Katsuki smirked. “Don’t you remember? I told you a while back that they’re hot.”

At this point, they both knew they weren’t watching the movie.

“Ah… actually, I’ve been trying to wear my gloves less around my office.” Deku paused. “I, um… I mean, I’ve gotta wear them on duty, but since you told me that I’ve been trying to be a little less discreet about them. Like, not wearing long-sleeved shirts everyday, not hiding my body near as much…”

“Really?”

He sighed. “Yeah. It’s been alright, but y’know… people stare. Even when I’m just out getting groceries, I hear talking… gossip and all that. About my status on duty, about my body, about how… how weird I look with all of these. I just… I dunno. I don’t like it.”

Katsuki caught a glimpse of Deku’s sad smile before he continued. “I love being a hero, Kacchan. I really, really do. There’s no position I’d rather be in. But, like… it feels like most citizens don’t see me as just a person sometimes. There’s this mask I’ve gotta keep up, the face of a strong, confident hero, but I just can’t be that all the time. And it’s– it’s hard, you know? I’m anything but unbreakable. I have things I deal with too.”

Shit, Deku…

“Do you, uh… have you ever felt like that’s how I see you?”

“No. Not once.” Deku’s fingers curled tighter in his hair, just enough that he could feel the tension. “From the moment I met you, I never felt like you saw me as unreachable. You remember what you told me back then, right?”

“You thought I’d forget? Who do you take me for, hm?” Katsuki squeezed his hand. “One day I’ll make it. I’ll be your partner.”

“Gonna stand by my side?”

“Gonna stand the fuck by your side. We’ll be the best damn team they’ve ever seen.”

And before he really realized what he’d done, Katsuki’s fingers slipped between Deku’s own and held tight.

“Your hands are so small.” Deku snorted, but for whatever reason, closed his fingers around Katsuki’s too. “Kinda sweaty, though.”

“Hey- hey!” Katsuki protested, glaring daggers at him. “Look, it’s not like I can just stop it! It’s just my quirk, assho–”

“Oh, please. I don’t care. Just as long as you don’t blow up on me, okay?”

“You shit, I have perfectly good control over it!”
And when Deku laughed- that real, honest, full laugh- it was as if every hardship he’d ever faced crumbled to dust. “I know, I know. I trust you, even if you’re a little shit sometimes.”

“You callin’ me little? At the very least, I’m gonna be the biggest shit around!”

Deku stopped, stared, and broke into a full-on cackle not a moment later. “Kacchan- holy shit, Kacchan, please tell me you–”

“Hah? You laughing at me!?”

“No, never, I’m just–!”

Katsuki lunged upwards with Deku’s hand still in his own and pushed him back onto the couch cushions with a vicious passion. “Huh? Got something to say for yourself, dumbass?”

There was a hidden glint in those warm eyes, and before he could react, Katsuki found himself flat on his back with his hands held tight above his head and well-muscled legs straddling his own. Deku leaned in close, mere inches from his face, and grinned.

“Oh, do I have something to say for myself?”

Katsuki writhed against Deku’s weight to no avail, nothing but sheer muscle and strength towering over him now.

“Don’t worry- I won’t dislocate your shoulders this time.” Deku breathed, so close and so heated. “Do you have something to say to me, Kacchan? Any last words?”

You’re hot? Handsome? I like it when you manhandle me? Will you kiss me? Fuck me?

“You’re-”

And just then, before he could finish his goddamn sentence, the fucking kitchen timer went off.

_Dammit._

Just as well, Deku seemed to realize the mildly compromising position he’d managed to get them in and immediately flushed a bright crimson.

“I, um, should go check on the curry.”

Yet five seconds later he still hadn’t moved, staring into Katsuki’s eyes with some sort of wonder and heated curiosity.

_I want more, Deku. I want everything you’ve got._

“Yeah, uh. Probably.”

_Are his eyes dilated? That’s a thing, right?_

Deku bit his lip, still unmoving.

“Dammit, Kacchan…” He started, naught but a whisper. “You’re cute as fuck.”

And then, he was gone. Removed himself from Katsuki before another word could be said and ran off towards the kitchen, leaving him to sit up and process what had just happened.
I... holy shit, he–

Does he really feel the same?

Still dazed, still shocked, he got to his feet and stumbled back towards the kitchen with the hope that he didn’t look too terribly out of it.

“I think it’s ready.” Deku announced, peering into the pot. “Ah, doesn’t it smell good?”

Katsuki sat, stared at the pot, and nodded dumbly. “Yeah. Um, it does.”

It wasn’t long before they both had food in front of them and were back at the kitchen bar, eating side by side and possibly a little closer than before. The food really was good- Deku seemed elated by the results, apparently not having gotten it to this standard before. But there was something more in the air now, unsaid words hanging in the atmosphere with every laugh, every quip, every bite- and neither was sure who would give in first.

“Oh geez, I didn’t realize how late it was…” Deku frowned. “And you need to travel back to U.A., don’t you?”

“That was the plan, anyway. Tomorrow’s Sunday, but… yeah.”

Deku forced a smile and a shrug. “Look, staying here probably wouldn’t be the best idea. And you don’t have any overnight stuff with you, either… maybe, uh, some other time?”

It hurt, but Deku was right. “Another time would be nice.”

Would you let me sleep in that nice bed of yours too? Even if there’s no sex, can we just cuddle or some shit? That’d be fun. Right?

“Do you need any help finding your way back to the station?” Deku asked, no shortage of concern in his voice. “I don’t want you to get in any trouble, ah…”

“I can handle it.” Katsuki assured him. “Seriously. I have maps on my phone and I’m good with the trains. I’ll be alright, I promise. You don’t need to be crawling around with me this late anyways.”

I don’t want him feeling like he has to protect me.

“As long as you’re sure.” Deku narrowed his eyes and shoved another bite of curry in his mouth. “Don’t be stupid, okay?”

“Says you.”

“Oh, shut up!”

Even so, finishing dinner carried with it some sense of finality. Deku refused to let him do the dishes despite being perfectly capable at doing so and ushered Katsuki out into the living room instead.

“You got all your stuff?”

“Didn’t bring anything but my school ID and my phone. I’m good.”

It was so damn tempting to ask to go watch TV again, cuddle again, wrestle again- anything, really. Katsuki was in no way ready to leave now, not when there was still so much they could do. But the reality was that he had homework to do. Friends to see. Schedules to follow.
And sadly, Deku’s schedule was in no way his yet.

“Will you text me when you get home?” Deku asked, obviously trying to hold back lingering worry. “Just so, uh, I know you got back safe.”

“Sure, yeah, s’no problem. As long as you don’t trail me to the station, anyways.”

“Kacchan, I wouldn’t do that!”

“...sure, Valiant.”

Deku crossed his arms over his chest and sighed with more than a little dramatic flair. “You are impossible. And- and to think I thought of something to get you for your birthday!”

_Huh?

Katsuki tilted his head, confused. “Wait, I thought this was your gift?”

But Deku only stepped closer, a little more confident now, and shook his head. “Well, some of the best gifts are surprises, right? It shouldn’t take long. Promise.”

*What are you talking–*

“Just please- stop me if I’m wrong, but-”

His heart was threatening to beat out of his chest when Deku leaned down a little, one arm reaching for the back of his head while the other wrapped around his waist, pulled him closer, and–

“I think you missed last time.”

Deku’s lips were on his own before he could move, head tilted in his best attempt to slot them together as he– as he–

*He’s kissing me.*

It was all Katsuki could do to try and follow suit, his own hands curling into the swell of Deku’s hair and attempting hang on to what little reality was left. But only seconds later was the contact gone and anxious, hopeful eyes met his own.

“Was- was that okay?” Deku whispered, shaky, trembling, but so certain all the same.

*Holy hell, why are you even asking?*

It was all he could do to manage a nod, a silent plea, and try and return to his senses.

*Deku- Deku, please–*

“That’s, um, that’s go–mph!”

Deku’s words were cut off with a muffled gasp as Katsuki yanked him down by his shirt collar, needing more, wanting more, more contact, more movement, more lips on lips and mouths on mouths and _don’t stop, Deku. Kiss me. Kiss me like you mean it!_

“K-Kacchan, you–”

“Shut- shut up. Don’t stop.”
“More?”

“Yes, more–!”

Messy. Desperate. Needed. There was no pace, no rhythm, just simple movement and hope that this was right. Deku only pulled him closer to his chest, held his head tighter against his own, and let nothing but strained gasps and soft, breathy whimpers come between them.

“So long.” Deku rasped, just as frantic as Katsuki was. “You- oh my god, Kacchan, you have no idea how long I’ve wanted you...!”

“Then shut up and kiss me, will you?”

*Kiss me. Kiss me. Kiss me.*

“Follow my lips, Kacchan- easy now, easy, just like this...”

And *fuck,* he could stay there all day and listen to Deku’s directions and guidance. So confident, so unwavering, yet so vulnerable too.

“Hng, Deku- you feel so- so fuckin’ good, *I–!*”

They finally managed to find some sort of balance, and when Deku’s lips finally slid smoothly onto his own, Katsuki could’ve sworn he’d grown wings and learned how to fly.

*I love you. Fuck, I love you.*

He wasn’t sure how it happened, but somewhere in that frenzy of passionate contact a low, pleading moan escaped his lips before he was able to reel it in. But Deku didn’t seem averse at all to it, not if the ferocity with which he grabbed Katsuki said anything.

“*Shit,* Kacchan…” Deku breathed, just before kissing back even harder and breaking any sort of rhythm they’d established. “You- you don’t know how *good* you sound right now.”

*Good, huh?*

It couldn’t have been more than a minute. Two minutes. Three was definitely pushing it, but by the time they had to pull back for air, to breathe, to *process* what was going on - it felt like nothing short of an eternity and no longer than a millisecond. Deku’s shaking hands moved back the hair from Katsuki’s forehead, kissed it, and hugged back before letting go.

“Kacchan…” Deku’s voice trembled, so close to breaking. “I- I’ve wanted to do that for…”

“Me too.”

Katsuki went in for another one, but Deku didn’t let him get further than just a quick, chaste kiss before pulling away.

“Please, we- we can’t.”

“One more?

“You… we don’t know what’ll happen.” Deku swallowed, and held him against his chest instead. “You know you can’t stay, Kacchan.”

It was all he could do to push closer, to bury his face against Deku’s chest with a desire and comfort
he hadn’t known in so long.


“I don’t wanna go.” He begged. *“Please, Deku, can I–!”*

“Stop. Don’t– don’t make me tell you no again. You don’t know how hard it is, Kacchan.”

*His voice is shaking.*

Katsuki had never known how hard it was to let go after getting a taste of just what could be. Somehow, though, he managed to let go as hands fell to his sides in clenched fists.

“I’ll- I’ll go.”

*He’s already done so damn much…*

And despite circumstance, a small, pleased smile sat so near to bursting across Deku’s freckled cheeks. “Happy birthday, Kacchan. Hope- I hope it was a good one.”

*Taking my words, huh?*

“*Good?* Shit, Deku. Seventeen ain’t an important year or anything, but… you’ve fuckin’ made it something to look forward to.” Katsuki bit his lip, trying to hide the fact that he was close to tears. “Please- please, can we do this again?”

Deku stood back, mildly aghast. “What, was that not a given?”

“I mean, I was just makin’-”

“I know, I know. You’re cute.”

He huffed, eyes narrowed. “What’s up with all this ‘cute’ from you?”

“Wasn’t that obvious, too?” Deku’s head tilted just a little, almost as if examining him. “You’re just cute. The way you talk, move, kiss-” The laugh that followed was so much freer than ever before. “It’s cute.”

“Pfft. Really?”

“Yes, really. And you’re gonna get your cute self out the door, aren’t you?” Deku crossed his arms over his chest, and somehow, the mere *presence* he radiated struck Katsuki with some sort of indescribable force.

*Yeah, uh… I need to go.*

“I’ll text you when I get back.”

“Mm, that’s what I like to hear.” Deku opened up the door for him. “Be safe, alright?”

“Yes, yeah. I’m gonna-”

Those lips shut him up as Deku gave him one last kiss before stepping back again, leaving Katsuki nothing short of flushed and sweaty. “For good luck. You know.”

*I… I’ll take it.*
“I- yeah. Thanks.”

Katsuki stepped outside but turned back almost immediately and craned his neck to watch Deku a little longer, a little more as the door shut. Physically, everything was the same. Same apartment, same weather, same town. But when Katsuki boarded the nearby train and sunk down into a seat on the near-empty car, pulling out his phone to see new notifications from Deku carried some new weight with it.

[Deku] we can make out on my couch next time. its a lot more comfortable

[Deku] that way you wont have to reach up for me

[Deku] and i wont have to bend down

[Deku] haha im sorry. im just so happy

[Deku] i cant wait to see you again

He stifled the sob in his throat, tried to push back the heat rising in his chest.

[Katsuki] sounds fun:)

[Katsuki] u gotta teach me how to kiss good

[Katsuki] maybe uh

[Katsuki] we could find time for a special training session tomorrow?

[Deku] i think i could clear my schedule:)

[Deku] i only take on those with the most potential, you know

[Deku] and kacchan, i think youve got what it takes

There was no hiding the redness of his cheeks nor the giddiness in his texts, but Katsuki had flown miles past the point of caring.

We’re… we’re doing this. This is real.

He wiped a hand across his face, tried to pretend there wasn’t a recognizable wetness on his knuckles, and smiled for no one but himself.

Deku, I…

[Katsuki] i won’t let you down<3

Chapter End Notes

yall i cried real tears when i finished writing this. This scene has been planned since like the beginning of last fuckin september ive been waiting so long and heck i hope u enjoyed bc i certainly did

Thank u so much to my wonderful beta @aetherlite, and as always, my twitter is
@aeronines!
We kissed.

It was dark by the time Katsuki neared U.A.’s gates– cold, crisp, chilly air heavy even at the end of April. No clouds in the sky, not even so much as the subtle chirp of cicadas greet him.

We kissed.

Katsuki’s hands lay heavy in his pockets, one curled close around his phone while the other fumbled with his school ID. It wasn’t that there was anything wrong, not even that he’s anxious. Everything right now was just a product of highway energy speeding down the streets and leaving only trembling legs and a racing heart in its wake.

We kissed.

It was a short walk to the dormitory once he got back on school grounds. Quiet, so quiet, illuminated only by a half-moon and the low glow of streetlamps lining the sidewalks. He’d never minded this time of night so much– really, it was something he eagerly anticipated. No one to disturb him, no one to comment or talk to him or tell him what to do.

Katsuki grabbed the doorknob, twisted it open, and stepped inside.

We—

“You’re back late.”

Dammit.

“You’re up late, asshole.” Katsuki grumbled, only for Todoroki to keep his eyes fixed on him. “Aren’t you supposed to be getting your beauty sleep?”

“Bakugou, that was only funny the first time.” Todoroki deadpanned, but with a second glance up and down Katsuki, raised an eyebrow. “What’s up with you? Looks like you just won the lottery or something.”

“Huh? No, dumbass.” He scowled, realizing that he probably needed to escape this conversation as quickly as possible. “I’m going to sleep.”

“So Valiant, then?”

Katsuki clenched his teeth and tried to keep from turning a stark red again. “Course it was Valiant. I told you we were going training tonight, didn’t I?”
“When you’re training, you’re usually back closer to seven rather than ten.”

*Why, you little-*

“No my god, did I hear the ‘V’ word?!”

And from out of *fucking* nowhere, Camie appeared with a slightly confused but resigned Yaoyorozu in her wake. “Oh- oh my god, Baku.” She started, some sort of god-awful realization rising up over her face. “Have you been out with him the whole time?”

“Where else would I have been?”

Camie took a step closer, eyes furrowed with some sort of determination and curiosity just before reaching up to grab Katsuki’s face, tilting it up and down and side to side in what had to have been her form of investigation.

But, still.

“Camie, what the *fuck-*”

“Something’s up with you.” She inferred, and let go. “Hm… yeah. My room?”

*Oh my god, I am not getting dragged into this.*

Three minutes later, he had, in fact, been dragged into it.

Katsuki still wasn’t quite sure *how* he wound up sat on Camie’s desk chair, surrounded by his friends who glared at him with nothing but inquisitive stares and curiosity. He felt something akin to a test subject- at this point, it wouldn’t surprise him if Camie pulled out a clipboard and a pen and set to an interrogation on the spot.

Turns out, it was much more straightforward than that.

“So, you went to the beach to train.”

“We always go to the beach to train.”

“And then, he asked if you wanted to come over so he could make you dinner?”

“Didn’t you hear me the first time?”

“Ugh, just cooperate, ‘kay?”

Camie rolled her eyes and leaned in close as Todoroki and Yaoyorozu sighed. Yeah, so maybe Katsuki wasn’t the only one that’d been dragged into this whole thing.

“What’d he make for dinner?”


“Mm, that so, huh?” Camie noted. “Domestic. Curry takes a while, right? How’d you pass the time while it cooked?”

“How much more information do you need?” Katsuki groaned, and buried his head in his hands. “Just- what are you trying to get at? What do you want from me?”
“Wasn’t that obvious?” She started. “Baku, you haven’t looked this happy, like, ever. You should look in a mirror, babe. Everything about your face, your words… you’re glowing. You two did something.”

Oh, fuck you.

Katsuki’s nails dug into his sweatpants, loose fabric bunched up between his fingers. “And if we did?”

“Then babe, I’d- I’d be so proud of you!” Her smile wobbled, and Katsuki could’ve sworn there was mist in her eyes. “I know we’ve got a lot of tactics to work on cause you still need a lot of practice, but if- if you did do something with him, then maybe you’re better off than I thought.”

“Better than you thought!?!” Katsuki’s mouth fell open, absolutely aghast. “Well, if making out counts as better than you thought, then yeah, maybe I am doing okay!”

The room fell silent, and it was only moments later that Katsuki realized what he’d blurted out. Hell, he’d hardly told Camie many details of what happened at their training sessions, much less about his forward action on Christmas. But this- shit, this-

“You kissed him!?"”

For whatever reason, hearing someone else say it was more grounding than just thinking about it himself.

“I- I mean, yeah!?” Katsuki swallowed, but there was no prying the embarrassed smile from his face now. “Well, he kissed me first, but-”

He kissed me.

Every eye in the room was on him- shocked, amazed, astounded.

“You’re- you’re telling me that Pro Hero Valiant- that he kissed you?” Yaoyorozu started, floored. “Bakugou, oh… oh my god. You’re serious, aren’t you?”

“He’s not a liar.” Todoroki shrugged. “Congrats. That’s what you’ve been wanting, right?”

Katsuki could only nod, fumbling with his fingers in his lap. “Yeah, it was… it was really nice.”

He felt so good, so damn good, and I just… he just...

He made me feel so good, too.

And here he was, trying not to cry again at the thought that it had happened, that his feelings weren’t so unrequited, that Deku felt the same way and wanted him just as bad. What he didn’t notice, though, was that Camie had been frozen in place since her initial outburst.

Yaoyorozu seemed to be holding back tears too if the look on her face said anything. “He’ll be good to you. I’m- that’s really amazing, Bakugou.”

“I mean, it’s not like we’ve said we’re dating or anything, but he did-”

But before he could finish, Katsuki was cut off by Camie’s arms thrown abruptly around him, yanking him into a tight hug as she buried her head into his shoulder.

“Baku, I-” She started, breaking off into a hoarse sob. “I’m- holy shit, I’m so happy for you…!”
Katsuki wasn’t sure if he’d ever heard her as genuine as she sounded now. All he could do was hug her back, but it didn’t feel like enough.

*Not after everything she’s done for me. Not after what they’ve all done for me.*

“You’ve- you’ve got us behind you for every step of the way though, you hear?” Camie’s voice broke. “I know- I can feel that this is going to be good. Everything’s going to be great, babe.”

She pulled away after a minute, tears running a bit of the perfectly-applied mascara down her face. “And if you ever need any help for anything, and I mean anything, I’m right around the corner. ‘Kay?”

“I know, I know.” Katsuki assured her. “Geez, it’s not like I’m going anywhere. Just cause I might- we might be something now, I… I’m just me. He’s just him.”

*And he’s so, so much more human than you’d ever know.*

“Still. I’m here.” Camie continued, the sheer joy across her face something Katsuki hadn’t ever remembered seeing before. “God, I’m so happy for you. I’m glad it’s working out, even if this all is just a start.”

*Deku… I wish I could see you again already.*

“Me too.” He mumbled. “I- he said we could plan something for tomorrow, that I could probably come over again and we could- y’know, hang out. Make out.”

“Tomorrow, huh?” She started. “Well, I can’t say I’m surprised. I know, I know that the first few days-”

“It was weeks for you.” Yaoyorozu smirked, and Camie turned more than a little red in response. “But, yes. I imagine you’ll be wanting to be see him a lot for the first little bit.”

“Yeah, yeah.” He sighed, but couldn’t deny it. “But it’s not like it’s weird to just wanna, have him hold me ‘n shit. That’s normal.”

“Fuck, you’re so cute.” Camie said, only to receive a sharp glare from Katsuki moments later. “What? It’s true.”

He scowled. “S’weird when you’re the one saying it and not Deku.”

“You’re really just driving it home at this point.” Todoroki shrugged. “Well, I’m gonna go to sleep. I’m glad everything’s working out for you, Bakugou. Don’t know that I’d be much help with… any of this, but. I’m glad you’re happy.” He cracked a small grin. “Even if you’re an ass.”

“Oh, fuck off. You’re too tired to be throwing insults.” Katsuki snorted. “Go to sleep so I can have an even match with you in practice tomorrow, ‘kay?”

“Hm. You better sleep too, then. Wouldn’t want my favorite sparring partner to be exhausted.”

“Oh, I’ll sleep twice as hard as you, shithead!”

“Then prove it. Come on, let’s go.”

Todoroki was right, but Katsuki didn’t leave without a few last hugs to Yaoyorozu and Camie first. There was no reason for him to hide all this from them, really. They’d been by him this whole time, seen his affections grow and rise and change. And now, to witness this next step-
I’m glad they’re with me. All of them.

It was a short walk back to his room. Todoroki accompanied him up, and gave Katsuki one last sorta-hug before disappearing into his room and leaving him to his own devices. But even after he closed the door behind him and saw his toys laying out on his desk, he knew that right now there was no need. Months ago he would’ve thought his first reaction to Deku doing any of that with him would be to get off- but no, not yet.

That night, he felt.

I miss you, Deku. I want more of you. And hell, I... I wish I could’ve stayed.

Katsuki wasn’t sure when he was able to sleep with as much as his mind was spinning, but for the first time in so long, he knew that there was something different about his longing than before.

I can’t wait to see you again.

Izuku’s shower that night lasted forty-five minutes. Three for getting off, five for washing up, thirty-five for crying, and two for getting off again.

We kissed.

Then, ten to dry himself and throw on some boxers.

We kissed.

Fifteen to sit and cry on the toilet seat.

We kissed.

And one more to finally make it to bed, bury himself in his sheets, and imagine what it would be like to have Katsuki next to him.

He liked it. He wanted it.

Izuku wasn’t sure how long it’d take to fall asleep, but hell. He was in no hurry. That whole action-talking, kissing, just going for it- was done in the heat of the moment. There was never a plan to kiss Katsuki, to even attempt it, but when Izuku realized that maybe, just maybe it was okay to try after being around him and holding him and feeling good with him for so long, that maybe it was… maybe it was okay.

And he’s seventeen now. That’s fine, right?

Katsuki wasn’t a good kisser, no. They’d have a lot to work on. But just the fact that they’d started, they’d tried, well- that was more than he could’ve ever asked for.

And he’d wanted more. Genuinely wanted more. Wanted me.

What. The. Fuck.

He had work bright and early tomorrow as per usual, but simply thinking about what had happened just behind his goddamn door over and over and over again was almost too much to handle. How well Katsuki fit in his arms, fit on his lips, and pushed back just as much as he had if not more. Izuku knew well enough that Katsuki couldn’t be someone he relied on for every comfort, but just that little bit alone would be enough to tide him over for who knows how long.
And he’s probably gonna come over at some point tomorrow. Holy shit.

Izuku wished he could stop crying, but at the same time, the sort of cathartic release that came with it was so damn worth it. He’d contemplated telling Kirishima and Ochako- just a hey, look, we’re doing something, but had never gotten around to picking up his phone and attempting to fumble through an incoherent message. But his pillow served as comfort enough, one in his arms and another under his head.

*If this is a dream, don’t let me wake up.*

Already he was running through plans- maybe make dinner again? Buy takeout? As much as he disliked it, they’d have to stay in Izuku’s place for a while. It wouldn’t do for the media to take an interest in Katsuki while they were out and spread gossip about Izuku possibly being in a relationship after his vows of disinterest had been publicly expressed so many times. Really, it wasn’t just the press that he was concerned about, though. Marking Katsuki as someone close to Izuku, close and more vulnerable than Izuku would easily make him a target for villains trying to strike back at him.

*For his own safety, we can’t… we can’t do this outside. He should understand.*

But something told him that Katsuki would be content on his couch for a while- from just his display of sheer enthusiasm with those first kisses and his desperate begging to stay, Izuku was sure letting him explore and learn for a while would be good enough.

*Maybe I’ll try and find him something special while I’m out tomorrow, though. Even if it’s just a little.*

That said, making tomorrow happen required sleep. There was a world of possibilities to explore the next day, and all the ones to followed. What mattered was that there was a start.

*I’ll make sure he’s happy. Make sure he’s safe. Make sure that he’s okay with everything.*

There wasn’t anything much in their way now. Next steps would come when they did. No rush, no worries.

*We’ll take this slow. Take things as they come.*

Izuku curled tighter against his pillow and shut his eyes.

*I miss you, Kacchan. But things are going to be okay now. I’ll see you tomorrow.*

It was sixteen past midnight when he falls asleep, and fourteen till two when he was woken by the sound of an all-too familiar, all-too worrisome ringtone. His agency had two numbers in his phone- one was the normal, everyday line. The other, though…

*Why the hell are they calling the urgent number this late?*

Izuku managed to heave himself up from his bed and reach for his phone with clumsy, sleep-ridden movements. It’d been so long since he’d heard the sound of that line- two months, at least- and even that incident hadn’t been nearly as bad as first interpreted. Realistically, he might have drag himself outside, deal with some problem, and go back to sleep in a span of an hour.

That in mind, Izuku picked up the phone and answered.

“Pro Hero Valiant.” He mumbled, still rubbing the sleep from his eyes. “What’s the situation?”
The operator on the other end took too much time to reply, and Izuku was getting more than a little pissed off.

*I wanna go back to sleep. Leave me alone.*

Another minute, and he finally received a reply.

“Sir, we’ve, um…” The operator hesitated, and Izuku was getting more irritated by the second.

“Hurry up.” He hissed out. “Why’d you call the emergency line if there isn’t a damn-”

“Sir- just, give me a second.” The operator paused, huffed, and continued. “We’ve- we’ve been receiving reports of extreme seismic activity along the northeastern coast of the mainland. There’s been a massive amount of damage done to the surrounding areas. What we need to do is-”

*Wait… no, no, you’re…*

“I’m sorry, you said *seismic activity*?” Izuku’s breath got lodged in his throat, and anything that would’ve come next vanished. “You’re telling me there was an *earthquake*!?”

Silence.

“…yes, sir.”

*Please, please, you’ve gotta be…*

“As fast as possible, hero agencies nationwide are sending heroes out to handle rescues and damage control. Thousands of people have been displaced, and we… we’re counting on you to be among the team that handles much of the search and rescue portion of it.”

Numb.

“…as fast as possible, huh?”

Cold.

“Yes, that’s the plan. We’re currently arranging transportation for a select number of heroes to be a part of the first response team, and considering your skill and your quirk, you were assigned almost immediately.”

Empty.

“Where- when and where do I need to arrive?”

*Please… god, please no. Not tonight, not now, please! Just give me one more damn day!*

“We’ve found a train that will be departing from the southeast station of town in about an hour. It’s about a two-hour ride by train, and from there we’ll be transferring you and other parts of the team to your disaster site via car. It’s another two hour’s drive out, and since the cell service is nearly all gone, we’ll be providing detailed instructions in person at the temporary headquarters when you arrive. Understand?”

Izuku’s body was stiff, unmoving, too warped from sleep deprivation and pure shock to respond. Nails dug into calloused palms, barely denting skin that had broken too many times over.

*Kacchan, I… please, please-*
“I… I understand.”

Please realize that I don’t have a choice.

There was a brief moment of silence on the other end as the operator acknowledged his words. “I’m sorry to wake you up like this, Valiant. I know you’ve only been back on full-time duty for six weeks, but… you’re one of the best equipped to handle this.”

Is that supposed to make me feel better!?

“Tell me how long this assignment is supposed to last.” He grit out, needing to know at least that much.

Tell me how long I have to be away from Kacchan.

“Uh, sir, we don’t currently have a clear estimate, to be honest. We’ll know more in the morning once the sun comes up and we can assess the damage further, but for now… we’re looking at a minimum of a month. Likely more.”

No… this can’t possibly be…

“Got it.” Izuku’s voice cracked. “I’ll- I’ll be at the station on time.”

“Thank you, sir.” The operator finished, and the line went dead.

I… I don’t have time to be upset right now. I-I need to prepare things, empty the fridge, get clothes and meds together…

Izuku stared at the phone in his hands, and with a trembling finger, opened up his contacts.

One ring.

Two rings.

Kacchan won’t be up at this time.

He called again. Again.

I know he won’t pick up.

When the call failed to be answered on the third try, Izuku let it go to voicemail.

What do I even say?

After a minute, he managed to stumble through some sort of goodbye- more of an apology, really.

You deserve so much better… I’m… I’m sorry.

Izuku forced himself to shove the phone in his pocket, smeared the tears across his face a little too roughly, and stood up before he let himself think any further about the situation.

This is for work, and I can’t… people’s lives are on the line here. He’d understand. He’ll understand, right?

It was only a smack to his own head that got him to stop thinking so much about Katsuki and to get on with preparations. Lifeless, automatic movement had him emptying a backpack to fill with what
little he’d be able to take- nothing more than basic bathroom supplies, a few extra pairs of socks, 
some boxers, and his medication. Admittedly, he was a little nervous about his current supply. His 
prescription was already about half-empty, and if the assignment really did go much longer than a 
month…

*I don’t have time to get a refill. I… I just have to assume I won’t run out.*

Emptying the fridge was easy enough for the most part. But seeing curry leftovers that wouldn’t be 
eaten, vegetables he’d bought just to prepare something for Katsuki hurt worse than it should’ve.

*Stop thinking about him. Please, please, there’s so many more serious things to deal with than my 
budding love life. I need to be a hero. I have to be.*

*…but, how wrong is it to wanna be a little selfish?*

There were thirty minutes left before Izuku had to be at the train station when he finally shut the 
apartment door behind him and locked it. At least now he had time to prepare before abandoning his 
home, unlike after his accident. With his hero suit in one hand and a backpack in the other, he 
managed to make it down the stairs, out the gate, and into the dimly lit streets. Four A.M. was never 
a fun time to be walking around at, but at the very least there were no pestering fans on the streets or 
media crews harassing him for an interview. He wondered how many people had gotten word of the 
earthquake at this point, but silent roads gave him no answer.

When he finally arrived at the station, though, someone familiar greeted him.

“They called you out, too?” Izuku started, catching his friend’s attention. “Hah, I… guess it makes 
sense.”

Kirishima’s arms were crossed tight over his chest, and all he could seem to give was a short nod. “It 
was gonna me or Ocha, and… well, we figured she’d be better with covering the upcoming student 
internships. Wasn’t- wasn’t an easy choice, though.”

There was no missing the way his voice broke, nor the simple strength he tried to force into every 
word. His hair fell unstyled, loose around his head under the hood covering up so much of it. Dark 
circles ringed tired eyes, and somehow, he heard those unsaid words in every wrought crease of his 
face.

“Gotcha.” Izuku dropped his stuff and leant back against the column Kirishima had found himself 
on. “I… I’m glad to see a familiar face, though.”

“Shit, me too. Wasn’t really sure who else they were sending out.” He grit out, and Izuku could’ve 
sworn there were dried tear tracks on his cheeks too. “Didn’t think it was gonna be serious when 
they called with the alarm. Thought it’d just be a one-and-done, y’know?”

“Disaster duty was the last thing I expected.” Izuku sighed, then came to a halting realization. 
“Shoot. Agh, all my damn plants are gonna die.”

“Hm? Oh, right… well, Ochako still has a key. Might be able to pick one or two of ‘em up.”

*Oh. True. Even if she could just keep the orange one alive, I’d be happy.*

He sent a quick text to her to ask, but shoved his phone away before he could even dare open up 
Katsuki’s messages again.

*Make conversation. Stop thinking.*
“The train should be here soon.” Izuku started. “Think we might be able to catch some sleep on the way to the transfer point?”

“Hell, I hope so.” Kirishima grumbled. “Otherwise I’m not gonna be able to walk two steps after we get there.”

“Same. Barely got two hours before they woke me up.”

“Ugh, that’s rough. Closer to four for me, but…” Kirishima’s lip twisted up at whatever was coming next. “Didn’t- didn’t wanna wake up and get in a shouting match with my girlfriend. Didn’t wanna wake up and figure out which one of us had to take off and leave.”

In the short time they’d been pros, no situation had arisen where they’d needed to take an extended leave. This was new to him and Kirishima, and for as much as it sucked in every way possible, there was no real getting around it.

“I’m sorry.”

“S’fine, it’s what it is. Can’t say I’m excited to be without cell service for a month, though.”

Kirishima swallowed. “Our anniversary is only a few weeks away, and I… I was planning stuff, y’know? I wanted to make our first year special.”

**It’s been that long already?**

“A year, huh?” Izuku paused. “That’s pretty crazy. You said you guys moved in together a couple months ago, right?”

“Yeah, but that’s the other thing. She moved into my place, and now, I’m not…” Kirishima bit down on his lip, fists clenched tight. “I- I don’t wanna talk about her right now. Sorry.”

“S’okay.”

“I get it.

The train showed up not a minute later, and they hauled themselves and what little belongings they had with them. Izuku tried to get comfortable in the seats, but nothing felt right. How could it, really, when he was leaving one heartbreak to go handle another?

Kirishima had pulled out his phone to occupy himself with texting Ochako as they took off from the station. His own burned a hole through his pocket- when Katsuki woke up, saw the mangled voicemail he’d left, saw the news and his name scrolling across headlines, he’d be upset. Probably.

But shortly after, Kirishima wound up on a quiet phone call beside him, trying to keep his voice from breaking. It was the least he could do to turn away and give him some privacy when Izuku noticed messy tears glistening at the corners of his eyes and the intense shaking of his quirk-hardened hand.

He… he really loves her, doesn’t he?

Five minutes later, Izuku pulled his own phone out of his pocket and opened up his last texts with Katsuki- nothing but flirtatious banter and light words dripping with joy and mutual affection. Not even he could doubt that Katsuki was happy with what had happened.

*I already tried calling him. He’s not gonna pick up this time.*

He wasn’t sure how the phone wound up against his ear again, ringing once, twice, three times.

*But I’m probably not gonna be able to talk to him for a month. I… I just wanna talk one more time.*
Just wanna hear his voice again.

“Hey- hey, you okay?”

No. No, I’m not.

Izuku shut off the call before it could go to voicemail again and shook his head as a familiar, trembling hand came to grip his shoulder. Kirishima said something, got his attention, and tried to force a weak confidence.

“Come here.” He murmured, and Izuku was pulled into his arms. “We- we gotta stick together for a bit. S’gonna be okay eventually, but…”

Kirishima was warm, sturdy, and more comforting than he expected.

“You can let it out, buddy.”

Izuku shuddered against his chest, glanced out around the empty car, and let himself sink a little lower, a little deeper.

“I had a friend come over yesterday.” He mumbled. “We… w-we were gonna meet up again tonight. Can’t even tell him that I’ll be gone now, he’s gonna have to listen to my voicemails, and I’m just…”

It’s not fair. None of this is fair!

“Hey, I’m sure he’ll understand.” Kirishima tried to reassure. “But shit, I’m sorry. None of this is easy.”

There was nothing more to say. Izuku let Kirishima hold him for what might’ve been too long and yet not enough- but ten minutes into the ride, the two found themselves trying to rest with only the other as comfort.

S’kinda like when we were in high school… me, begging for him to touch me, feel me, and him fulfilling everything I asked for and more.

But looking back, there was hardly a doubt that what they’d had could’ve ever been something greater than friends with benefits. Kirishima was comforting, well-meaning, and looked out for him more than Izuku ever thought he deserved. But it wasn’t love. Just teenage hormones and an outlet for everything he tried to shove in the furthest corners of his mind.

Sex wasn’t love. He’d learned that the hard way.

And that’s why we can’t build a relationship on it. Me and Kacchan. If we want this to last, then... we can’t do that.

He didn’t manage anything but fitful rest on the train, ins and outs of sleep that hardly served to give back any of the life he’d had yesterday. Kirishima wasn’t much better. Several times Izuku caught him cursing, scrolling back through his own text history and checking through the small calendar on his phone far too many times.

I hope that Kacchan isn’t angry when I get back. I hope he’s not too upset. God, I just hope he understands.

No matter the amount of times his brain cycled through the he’ll get it, he wants to be a hero too, truly convincing himself of that fact was so, so damn hard.
Sunlight finally began flickering over the horizon when they transferred into the off-road vehicle assigned to carry them the rest of the way. Heavy silence fell between the both of them as they boarded, the driver only breaking it on occasion to inform them of their current location status.

“...hey, look outside.” Kirishima nudged him, and Izuku blinked away hazy sleepiness to see bits and pieces of rubble begin to appear, cluttering the area with too much waste and ruin. “Shit, dude… even just this, on the fringe of it all…”

This is bad. God, this is awful.

It didn’t get any better the further they went, collapsed buildings and caved in homes becoming more and more of the norm. Stragglers roaming dusty streets only served to highlight just how horrible this all was, so many people displaced and desperate after just one terrible night.

How do I even have the right to be upset about Kacchan after seeing all this?

Thirty minutes later, they finally parked in front of a small, low-roofed building that seemed to have survived the worst of the tremors. No time for tears anymore- no, now he had to be strong, be there for all of the victims. One last look between him and Kirishima told him all he needed to know.

At least we’re together, for now.

A woman met them outside the building and quickly introduced herself as the emergency director of rescue operations before they were led inside and shown a small room to drop their things. Sure enough, one glance at his phone reminded him of the nearly nonexistent cell service and the fact that they were essentially stranded, isolated from most everything else.

“You ready?” Izuku asked, and Kirishima could hardly laugh.

“Don’t have a choice, do we?”

But before they were about to walk out of the cramped room and into the main part of the building, the director caught them and told them to change into their hero costumes.

“The media wants a word with you two before we get started.” She sighed. “Best get it over with quick. We don’t have time to waste.”

They did as they were told. Nothing worth arguing with right now.

This is my job. I can’t be weak right now.

“My hair look okay?” Kirishima asked, having pulled it back into a tight, high ponytail. It had been a while since Izuku had seen it down rather than up, but considering the circumstances, having it constantly spiked wouldn’t work at all.

“It’s nice.” Izuku nodded. “Ready?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be. Wait-” Kirishima stepped forward and brushed a bit of Izuku’s hair back. “Was in your face a little. We gotta look okay for the camera.”

“Ah, thanks.”

“No problem.”

We’ve gotta look out for each other right now.
The media crew wasn’t much more than a cameraman and a single reporter. They’d been doing a bit of coverage on the overall destruction and condition of the area, and though Izuku would usually be put off by reporters, this situation was different. This was his chance to make that first impression, to broadcast some sort of hope.

“Red Riot.” The reporter greeted. “If you don’t mind, we’d like a statement from you first. You’re up after that, Valiant.”

Izuku nodded. “Got it.”

Kirishima’s statement was short, simple, and to the point. He’d be doing his best to give it his all and stay strong for the people who needed it. There was an undeniable confidence in his words, but to the trained ear, Izuku could hear the slight exhaustion in it, too.

Then, he was up next.

“Pro Hero Valiant. We’ve got a couple questions for you.” The reporter began. “This is your first major assignment since coming back on full time duty. Do you feel like you’ll be capable of handling this situation when considering how poorly you dealt with the incident that led to you being injured?”

Wha- wait, what? What kind of accusation is that?

“They sent me out here for a reason.” He narrowed his eyes. “I have no doubt that I’ll be able to do my job to its full extent. There’s people to save now— like, right now. I don’t have time to live in the past, nor would I want to.”

And before the reporter could open his mouth again, he continued.

“Look around you. Do we have time to be throwing words like that? I’m here to do my job. I’m here to save. And I’m going to do my damn best to make sure that we get through this disaster as best as we possibly can.” He crossed his arms over his chest, stared down the camera, and twisted a tough smile over his face. “I’m a hero before anything else, and I’m going to do everything that I can to help. That’s all.”

Quit asking me about my accident. Leave me the hell alone.

The camera crew let him go after that statement, and when he turned back towards Kirishima, saw nothing but sympathy strewn across his face.

“I wish they’d stop with the harassment.” Kirishima scowled. “They don’t know a thing about you.”

“It’s whatever. I’ve gotten pretty good at avoiding them.” Izuku muttered. “Let’s- let’s just go get orders and start.”

But when they stepped back inside headquarters, they were met with a familiar form. Inasa towered over most of the people inside the small building, and yet even his usually friendly face had been smudged with a grimace.

“You joining us in this section?” Kirishima asked.

“Yeah, they had me take a different train out here because I was further away from you guys. But now that we’re here, we’re going to do our best, right?”
Izuku nodded. “Mhm. You know it. But- wait, weren’t you taking on an intern soon from U.A.?”

“It’s been delayed till I get back.” Inasa shook his head. “But they told me I’d only be out here for a month max. Oh! I also heard that Jirou and Tsuyu were assigned to another disaster area near here. Tamaki and Mirio too. We might run into them at some point, but from the looks of it, we’ve got our hands full with just this place for a while.”

“No joke.” Kirishima sighed. “Glad to see you here, though. Guess it’ll just be us three on rescue duty for a while until other specialized crews get in here.”

“Guess so.” Izuku echoed. “Well, no time to waste. Let’s get moving.”

After receiving instructions, he snuck back into his small room for just a moment to glance at his phone. Still nothing- not that that was a surprise. It was barely past seven thirty, and at best, Katsuki would probably just now be waking up. But even if he had tried calling back, the chances of it actually going through were intensely slim.

*I’m sorry, Kacchan. I’ll be back. Promise.*

Izuku allowed himself one more minute to reminisce before turning, leaving, and letting the hero Valiant take his place.

“Hey, Kacchan… I- I’m sorry. I got a call. There was a disaster a bit up north, several hours away, a-and…”

The line broke off into what had to be some sort of a choked sob.

“They said that I might be up there for over a month. I’m sorry. I don’t wanna go. I don’t have a choice. I have to go. I’m just- so sorry, I…”

More crying.

“They said there’s no service. I don’t know when I’ll be able to talk again. I miss you. I want you. I’m sorry.”

One last deep breath, and-

“I’ll let you know when I’ll be back. Take care of yourself. Please.”

Katsuki stared at his phone, replayed the message once, twice, three times. Couldn’t keep his eyes off of the four missed calls.

Replay.

Replay.

Five minutes later, Katsuki found himself knocking on Camie’s door at six in the morning, phone clutched tight in his hand and wild tears streaming down his face. She let him in. Hugged him close.

“Can- can I stay here for a bit?”

“You don’t even have to ask.”

She let him stay for longer than he could’ve ever wanted, all the way until the first news coverage of the accident came on. Deku was there- handsome as ever, strong and beautiful, but-
He’s been crying.

Katsuki played back the voicemail for Camie to hear. This wasn’t something he wanted to hold onto alone.

But finally, when that final statement from Deku on the news rang out-

“I’m a hero before anything else.”

A hero before a boyfriend, a partner, a mentor. A hero before anything else.

I get it. I hate it, but I get it. I miss you. I miss you so much. But this?

Deku nodded, stood confident as ever, and didn’t waver even in the face of their words. A hero before anything else.

This is the reason I admired you to begin with.

As the television shut off and Katsuki departed to his room to wash his face and get changed, only one last wish crossed his mind.

Come back safe, Deku. Please.

Chapter End Notes

i hope yall werent too shook after all this:) this whole chapter was written with Scared of the Dark on repeat(from the spiderverse ost) so give it a listen if you havent heard for more feels

Thanks to my beta @aetherlite, and my twitter is @aeronines! also, i opened a curiouscat through my twitter, if you have any specific questions i should be able to get to them faster on here!

One more thing!!! I drew a scene from the last chapter, right here!!

edit: LAST THING SDFJ @dextrasinestra on twitter drew a fucking beautiful art for this fic and i cant stop crying go look yall
“Look, you’ve gotta be able to react without your quirk available! Keep your eyes on me- no, not that close! Faster, Bakugou! One step, two- yes, yes, and then-!”

Katsuki’s ankle twisted in his next sidestep, and only seconds later did he find himself flat on the floor with Pro Hero Uravity staring down at him.

“Geez… come on, Bakugou. You’ve gotta watch my legs, my hands, not my mouth.” She sighed, and lent a hand to him. “We’ve gone over this. Something still tripping you up?”

He grabbed what she’d offered, teeth grit as he was pulled up and off the hardwood floor. “Nah, nothing other than what you’ve said. I dunno, I just keep listening instead of watching.”

Uravity nodded and let go. “So when are you going to learn not to? I know you’ve got potential. I don’t want you to be letting it go to waste when people are trying to get you riled up in the heat of a close-combat fight. That’s not the kind of thing you can afford have happen.”

*I know, I know.*

Katsuki shoved his hands in his pockets and went back to lean against the wall as Yaoyorozu took his place. They’d been trading off for a while now like this- ever since they’d realized that Red Riot would have to leave too, the whole internship setup had to change to allow for the new accommodations. And Uravity herself had been taking on more work outside of their internships- with so many heroes gone to deal with the earthquake crisis, the crime rate was beginning to take a noticeable upward shift.

“Remember the techniques we were talking about!” Uravity instructed, easily sidestepping Yaoyorozu just to get a swift, solid grip on her and send her to the floor with the same move she’d used on Katsuki. “You’re leaving yourself too open. I know your quirk is designed more for mid-to-long range combat, but you can’t leave yourself vulnerable if someone gets in close!”

“Right, right… can I get another shot?” Yaoyorozu asked, more downtrodden than usual. Uravity was a great hero and a good mentor, but with the whole outside situation taken into account, it was clear that the frustrations with work and her partner having been away for nearly a month were starting to take a heavy toll on her.

*Can’t really blame her, though. I mean, it’s not like I haven’t…*

Katsuki sucked in a breath, hugged his arms closer to his chest, and swallowed.

*It’s not like I haven’t been missing Deku. He’s sent like, two texts since that voicemail, and I just…*
I hope he’s doing okay.

At the very least, there was no shortage of news coverage surrounding the earthquake relief. He’d had plenty of chances to watch Deku’s heroics again, to study his rescues and practices in that sort of climate. The incident was enough to make disaster rescues more relevant in classes again too- there had been more than one trip down to the USJ to work on those skills in the past month.

However, the most noticeable change was without a doubt, Todoroki’s fucking boredom. He was supposed to be interning with Gale right now, but since he and so many others had been sent out to deal with the rescue operations, he’d been left without an internship until Gale returned. Thus, Todoroki had found there was nothing more fun than bothering Katsuki at all hours, all the time.

Not that he minded. Much.

“Bakugou! You’re up. We don’t have time to be sitting around.”

Right, right, she’s a little snappy right now. For good reason, at least.

The next few rounds went better- each time through, Katsuki got a little quicker, a little faster, a little more nimble and graceful than Deku had ever taught him. He’d mentioned their training sessions in passing, only to find out that Uravity was already well aware of them, and pointed out that what they’d been working on was quite different from the approach she wanted to take. Deku was good with his quirk and treating it as an extension of himself in combat, but with his ability to be more subtle about it, he could incorporate it into even the smallest actions. Katsuki could do the same to some extent, but it wasn’t nearly as easy with the noise and light he generated in doing so. As a result, Uravity’s training was helping- and next time he saw Deku, Katsuki was determined to impress him with this newfound finesse.

I gotta be quick. Fast. Light on my feet and throwing the strong punches where they count.

Actively focusing in the next few rounds on the stuff that mattered made all the difference, really. By the end of the session, he’d wound up on the floor three more times- only once more than Yaoyorozu had.

But now, Uravity seemed to take note of it.

“Mm, ‘kay. Looks like you two really might be starting to get the hang of this, huh?” She grinned, as if their accomplishment was a win for her too. “That keeps us on track, then. Would you guys be ready to start patrolling next week?”

Patrolling? “For real? Hitting the streets with you?”

A thin smile twisted itself over her lips. “Yep. Good practice for you, and…” She faltered, a soft, low chuckle escaping her. “Well, we could use some help out there.”

If the exhaustion in her words wasn’t apparent before, it was now.

It’s been nearly a month, and from what the news is saying, it’ll be a lot longer than they expected to repair the most urgent damages. The heroes back here are nearing their wits end, and Deku...

Katsuki had gotten better at calming down after beating the message into his head time and time again.

Deku’s probably not coming back soon.
“The practice will be better in more urgent situations though, won’t it?” Yaoyorozu brought up. “This might be the perfect time to step into that next level of training. We’re not incompetent.”

“No, not incompetent.” Uravity agreed. “But it’s a different world out there. I’m glad your class has managed to stay safe at school so far, but you’ve also been living in a secure, structured environment. Even these few sessions we’ve had so far have been in the comfort of my agency headquarters.”

“Yeah, well. We gotta start somewhere.” Katsuki crossed his arms over his chest. “I can handle stuff, and Yaoyorozu ain’t half-bad herself. This is the kind of stuff I came here to do.”

“Oh, trust me. You’ll get more than enough of it.” She paused. “You’ve got a life of heroing to look forward to. Enjoy school while it lasts, okay?”

*Enjoy school… enjoy the safety while I can?*

She didn’t let that thought linger for long before stretching out and directing them to get their stuff together. He and Yaoyorozu planned to head back together, but just before they left, Uravity stopped him at the door.

“Bakugou- before you two get going, can I talk to you for a moment?”

“Huh?” He turned around, confused and slightly concerned he’d done something wrong. “Yeah, sure.”

Yaoyorozu waved it off. “I’ll wait if it won’t be too long. We’ve got time.”

Uravity forced a small smile. “Don’t worry, it shouldn’t be long.”

And once Yaoyorozu stepped outside, the two of them were left alone. Not that it was any less nerve-wracking than before.

“My office is this way.” She started, pointing vaguely to the left. “I got something yesterday that I thought you might wanna see.”

He followed her, still confused but less concerned. “What’s this about?”

“Take a guess.” Uravity answered, like she knew him inside out.

Katsuki hesitated. “…Valiant?”

“Bingo.” Uravity pushed open the small door to her office, the inside filled with nothing more than a desk, scattered papers, and a lone, bright orange flower sitting in the small window.

Holy shit, is that…?

“Isn’t that Valiant’s plant?”

He could’ve sworn he heard a sharp wheeze from Uravity following that comment, but she only nodded. “God, you really are in- uh, yes. Yes it is.”

Katsuki took a step closer and frowned. “It looks like it’s dying.”

“Look, I’m *trying!*”

“Deku’s not gonna be happy if he sees that it’s dead.” Katsuki huffed. “That’s his favorite one, you know.”
And for whatever reason, the room fell quiet.

“You… you really do call him that, don’t you?” Uravity murmured, as if something had finally fallen into place.

...shit.

“I mean, yeah?” He scowled, trying to repress the heat rushing to his face. “I’m allowed to. S’not like he minds.”

“Well, for as much as he goes around calling you Kacchan, I’d say you have the right to.” She snorted. “But, yeah… he texted me last minute. Asked if I could take care of that flower just as he was getting on the train to leave.” She shook her head. “He’s… well, he’s a dumbass, but I miss him. A lot. At the very least, he’s out there with Eijirou- Red Riot- and I know he’ll look after Izuku. Anyways… ah, I don’t wanna hold you up too much. Come here.”

She walked around to her computer, opened up the email, and motioned for Katsuki to come closer. “He sent me a message yesterday. Mostly logistical stuff, which is why he was able to secure a connection to begin with, but… he mentioned you. Briefly.” She scrolled down to the bottom of the message, and sure enough-

“...one last thing, could you do me a favor? I remember Kacchan(Bakugou) saying that he’d be interning with you around now, and I just wanted to see if you could check in on him a little bit. He’s a fantastic student- amazing, really, and I just wanted to make sure he’s doing alright considering the situation right now. There’s so much going on, and they told me the crime rates were on the rise again too, so I just wanted to make sure he’s safe and happy and healthy. And if it’s not too big of a deal, could you tell him I miss him? And that I still want to reschedule when I get back. If he’s okay with it.”

He couldn’t pull his eyes away from the screen, even as Uravity stepped back to take a better look at him.

“I’m going to assume you know what he means by reschedule, because I haven’t figured it out yet.” She paused. “Anyways… you tell me. Are you doing alright?”

But Katsuki’s hands only clenched into tight fists as he stared at the message longer, longer-

He’s trying to protect me right now…? He’s trying to look out for me, even when he’s all the way out there?

He bit his lip.

Shit, Deku…!

“I’m fine.” It was as if a stone had lodged itself in his throat. “I mean, just… I miss him too.”

“If it’s worth anything, I can try to let you know when I get word of him coming back.” She offered. “And, well… I think he’d appreciate it too. Izuku likes having you around.”

Huh? Wait, what all do you know?

“He just- I don’t really know how to describe it, but…” Uravity scrunched up her eyebrows. “He looks at you differently than he does me or Eijirou. His face lights up when he’s talking about you. I won’t pry into whatever personal business you have with him, but you… you make him happy. Really, really happy.”
Katsuki couldn’t shove back the warmth bubbling up in his chest at that simple remark—could only nod, hug himself a little tighter, and reread the email.

_You make me happy too, Deku._

“All right, I don’t want to keep you waiting.” Uravity patted him on the shoulder. “You’ll be by again tomorrow, right?”

“Mhm. Yeah, I will.”

But just as he moved towards the door, one last thing caught his attention.

“Uravity.” Katsuki pointed towards the wilting plant in the window. “Can I take it with me?”

The answer was a rushed and resounding yes, please, and only a minute later, Katsuki had the flower in a temporary box for transport and all the care directions Deku had supplied before he left. Yaoyorozu met him outside the door, and after the short trip back to U.A., Katsuki was able to find a decent spot for the flower on his own windowsill.

_It looked better alongside Deku’s plants, but… this’ll do for now._

“All right, buddy.” Katsuki huffed. “It’s just you and me for now, got it? Deku will be back at some point to take care of you. I’ll keep you alive till then.”

Unsurprisingly, the plant stayed silent.

_Well, fine._

After a quick shower and change of clothes, Katsuki threw himself back on his bed and set to scrolling through the news on his phone for the time being. His homework load had been cut down since internships had gotten started, leaving him some semblance of free time. And sure enough, it wasn’t long till he had one hand in his pants, lazily stroking himself off. Nothing intense, nothing fast. Just a nice, simple, feel-good cooldown to end the day.

_I really should take more time to relax. The dildo is always so nice, but… feels kinda weird getting off with it while Deku’s so far away. Hm. Wonder what he’d think of it?_

That thought, though, was enough to make his face heated and hand move a little faster, a little rougher than before.

_Hm… what would he think, walking in on me using that? Wonder if he’d think it’s hot… wonder if he’d be proud of me for taking it better than anyone else._

Katsuki’s breath hitched, and he didn’t realize he’d stopped scrolling till several seconds later as those vivid, enticing fantasies started to become more than a little intrusive.

_Maybe I should go get it… nah, that’d just be more cleanup. But shit, Deku…_

There was no suppressing the hiccuped moan that followed, nor the tight squeeze of his hand around his dick. Only the thought of what if, what if, what if drifted through his head as he kept going, a pleasant, hazy atmosphere settling over his room.

“Deku… mm, you like this…?” He murmured, drawing out each and every syllable that passed through breathless, parted lips. “You’d like it if I went a little further, yeah? I’d do it just for you, y’know…”
His thumb pressed down on the tip harder, firmer, enough to make his back arch and toes curl into bunched sheets. At this point, he’d shoved his sweatpants down enough to comfortably get his dick out and have more fine control over his movements. Still slow, still nice, but definitely stronger than before.

*I wanna see you, Deku. Wanna lean back in your arms while I’m between your legs, wanna feel your dick against my back, wanna have you touch my chest with those strong hands. It’d be so nice, wouldn’t it? I’d do it perfectly… I’d be the best you’ve ever been with.*

“Touch me…” Katsuki moaned, eyes shut as the world began to fade around him. “More, please, just like that… yeah, that’s so- so damn good, Deku…”

He was quiet, aside from the soft gasps and moans that he was probably doing a poor job of hiding, and far too caught up in how damn good it felt to notice his door being cracked open and someone familiar stepping in.

“More, more-!” He moaned, hips arching forward. “Ha… yes, Deku- feels so-”

Katsuki could’ve sworn he heard Deku’s voice nearby, low but firm, and shit- it almost felt like he really was there.

*Does he like this? Do I look good? More… hng, I just want-*

“Shit-!” Katsuki groaned, bucking up into his hand as the image of Deku came closer, closer. “Fuck me… please, Deku, fuck me…!”

White-hot pleasure shot through his veins, and Katsuki came with a loud and utterly raunchy groan that he could only hope didn’t leave the confines of his room. He panted, hand stilling as sweat trickled down his face and near the small, satisfied smile over his lips. With that, Katsuki sighed, exhaled, and slowly opened his eyes to return to the present.

...only to immediately freeze, stare at the person in front of him who was very much not Deku, and hope to the high heavens that somehow, this was all just a dream and he hadn’t just been walked in on by fucking Todoroki.

“Are you done yet?” His absolute asshole neighbor sighed. “Thought you said we were going out for udon tonight.”

Yeah, Katsuki wasn’t sure he’d ever gone flaccid so fast in his life.

“Wh- why the fuck are you here!?” Katsuki scrambled back and slammed into his headboard, panic flooding through his veins and blood turning to ice. “Holy shit, were you trying to watch me!?”

“Oh, don’t act like I wanted to see that.” Todoroki rolled his eyes. “But one- you didn't lock the door. And two- you act like I don’t hear this same thing every. Single. Day.”

“So-”

“I’ve seen your dick in the locker room. It’s not impressive out there or up close. Plus, I wasn’t sure if the restaurant would still be open by the time you finished.” He deadpanned, and Katsuki’s face only burned further. “Anyways, I’m hungry. Can we get going if you’re done?”

He scowled, shoved his dick back in his pants, and reluctantly agreed. “You’re still a major fucking asshole.”
“Says the idiot who keeps me up at night moaning over his boyfriend.” He paused, and tossed his head to the side. “Your dildos are still on your desk, you know.”

...god dammit.

He buried his head in his hands, knees drawn close to his chest. “You- you are not telling anyone about this, got it?”

Todoroki snorted. “I’m not that kind of asshole. Come on, let’s go. I’m sure you’ll have no problem getting hard again when you come back.”

“Jerk.”

“Loverboy.”

“Shut it, fucker.”

“Your vocabulary of insults goes further and further down the drain each time I talk to you.” Todoroki remarked. “I’ll be waiting outside, okay?”

And with that, he left, leaving Katsuki to figure out where to go from there.

Guess I should change into something different… not that I really feel like looking him in the face right now.

Admittedly, Katsuki was glad it was Todoroki who’d stumbled in on him. Anyone else would’ve been far worse. But that in mind, he slid off his bed and went to wash his hands and find something a little better to walk around outside in. Todoroki was waiting for him outside when he was done, and the slight flush over his cheeks said that maybe he was a bit more embarrassed than Katsuki had originally thought. That point was only proven further when they stepped outside of the building and got into some sort of awkward, mumbled conversation.

“Sorry I walked in on you.” Todoroki sighed. “My bad.”

“Wish you would’ve knocked first, but, eh.” Katsuki shrugged. “At least I wasn’t using the dildo.”

“To be fair, I did knock. Several times, and really loud.” Todoroki said. “You were too deep into your fantasy to notice, I guess. But yeah, can’t say I would’ve been excited to see you getting off with that up your ass either.”

It was more of a mutual whoops, sorry at this point. At least Todoroki was chill for the most part.

I don’t give him enough credit sometimes. For as much as I put up with him, he puts up with my bullshit, too.

The restaurant was only a ten minute walk away once they left school grounds. They’d been there a few times before- and though Todoroki claimed that their soba wasn’t nearly as good as another place closer to his home, he was the one who kept asking to go back. That said, Katsuki couldn’t say there weren’t other benefits to going out with Todoroki.

For instance- his father’s credit card. Katsuki wasn’t sure he’d had to pull out cash the whole semester.

Though small, the restaurant was fairly packed for a Thursday evening. Katsuki hadn’t liked the crowds much at first, but once he’d discovered that it was easy to blend into the chatter, he’d grown
more attached to the idea. A few TVs hovered on the ceiling as a delicious aroma wafted through the rest of the space. They got seats quick enough, ordered, and set to waiting for their food as Katsuki realized that maybe he was a bit hungrier than he’d imagined.

“Glad we could make this work.” Katsuki started, gulping down half his water in one go. “It’s been like what, half a month since we’ve been out here? Right?”

“Yeah, about that.” Todoroki nodded. “I remember trying to get you out here because you looked so depressed after realizing that Valiant had left.”

“Oi, I wasn’t that-”

“It helped, right?”

Katsuki sighed and shook his glass around a little. “Can’t say it hurt.”

If nothing else, his friends had been with him every step of the way since they’d heard the news, so much more than he could’ve ever asked for. It’d been shitty the first week or so, with them demanding every minute of his free time to hang out or tutor or train outside of class, but at some point, he’d realized that it was some sort of a distraction from moping over headlines and waiting for a call back. That wasn’t to say he didn’t try sending messages or stop himself from scrolling through older ones, but it…

It was easier.

“You haven’t been awful in training lately, so I’m gonna assume you’ve been doing at least mostly alright.” Todoroki remarked. “Still waiting for you to come up with a decent technique for opposing my fire, though. I’m getting better with my quirk- you need to keep up, too.”

“Hah? Ain’t like I’m stagnating. At least I have a hero to intern with right now, unlike someone I know.” Katsuki smirked. “Where’s Gale when you need him, huh? You still got that poster up on your wall?”

That earned him nothing but a tight frown. “Yeah, but it’s not like I use it for any masturbatory purposes. He’s more of… I don’t know, a cool hero? There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“Mm, if you say so!” He paused, and downed the rest of his glass, tongue running along his lips as he set it back on the table. “Well, I wouldn’t know. I don’t exactly make it a habit to walk in on my friends while they’re getting off.”

“Thought we were past this by now?”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t think I’ll ever be completely over you walking in on me flat-out moaning Deku’s name with my dick in my hand. And honestly, a part of me hopes you never get rid of the image, either!”

But Todoroki didn’t look terribly offended, or even hurt. “At least you’re not ugly. Lessens the pain.”

Wow. Okay.

“What, am I, gonna be your new jerk-off material, then?” Katsuki raised an eyebrow. “Mm, didn’t know you were into me like that.”

And just like that, there it was. Todoroki’s face was growing as red as his scar by the minute as he
tried to sputter out some sort of composed answer. “Look. Maybe I’m not as insatiably horny as you are all the time, but you’re not the only one with needs!” He groaned. “I’m not into you. But I know you get hard sometimes when we’re training, too! It’s- it’s normal.”

Needless to say, both of them were very relieved when their food arrived and they could shift the conversation to something else.

He’s… shit, I really hope he doesn’t have any feelings for me. That’d be more than a little awkward at this point.

But the food was good, the talk casual, and it wasn’t until a special news report came on with a rather unexpected headline did something more begin to stir. Todoroki was the first to notice- and with a slight point, turned Katsuki’s attention up to the nearest TV.

“Shit, they’re finally sending a wave of pros back?” Todoroki said, more than a little surprise on his face. “Wait, that list up there- Gale’s coming back!?”

“Red Riot, too.” Katsuki added, and kept staring at the short list. “I mean, they were two of the first heroes sent out there, so I guess it makes sense, but…”

The news carried on, listing off one hero at a time, but when the reel came to an end Katsuki found himself left with nothing but sickening realization.

...Deku… Deku isn’t on there.

He clenched his fists, nails digging into his palms, and tried to relax.

Dammit!

“Bakugou. Hey, look at me.”

Katsuki tried to ignore the sudden wave of anger, resentment, utter frustration- and turned back towards Todoroki, sparks flaring from tense palms.

He should be on there. Why the hell doesn’t he get to come back too!?

And all of a sudden there was a hand around his own, squeezing, calming his crackling palms. God, he was pathetic, getting all worked up over Deku staying out there to keep serving and saving everyone else. He was doing his job. Being a hero.

So why… why is this so hard to accept? Why can’t I just get over the fact that he’s working!?

“Sorry, sorry.” Katsuki muttered. “He’s- he’s just doing what he’s supposed to do. And he’s doing a damn good job, too.”

His chest tightened, and for as much as he wanted to blame the heat rushing to his head on the restaurant atmosphere, denying the source wouldn’t make the situation any better. But Todoroki only shifted, released his hands, and kept his eyes on him as Katsuki tried to relax and deal with this new information. And for as much as he hated having his privacy stepped in, this was…

This was different. Comforting. Knowing that there was someone he could fall back on.

“You’ve been looking different lately.” Todoroki started, twisting his fingers together. “Every time he’s been mentioned on the news, or you’re re-reading those texts, you just… get this weird look on your face. It’s not the same as it used to be.”
He shrugged, eyes fixed on his empty bowl. “I mean, I miss him. I’ll admit that much.”

“Yeah, but it’s not- it’s not just that. I think.” Todoroki continued. “You’ve been defending him more whenever his name comes up, too. I can tell you get pissed whenever the news talks about him.”

Katsuki scowled. “Well, maybe that’s ‘cause they’re flat-out wrong almost all the time. Deku’s-Deku fucks up sometimes too! He ain’t perfect, but he’s…”

*He’s… he’s everything I never knew I wanted. But I can’t exactly say that out loud, can I!?*

Sometimes, he’d feel those ghostly touches against his shoulders and start aching when he remembered how Deku’s lips had felt on his own what seemed like so long ago. Now he could see through the disguise Deku wore on all those interviews- he was strong, so, so strong. But there were hairline fractures in his smiles, too-dark creases under eyes, and a soft, relenting lilt to his voice that always seemed to appear whenever he talked about how much he loved work and thrived off of being out there.

There really was no doubt. Deku- Deku was *tired.*

Katsuki could see that now.

*And hell, I have no idea how he manages all his mental stuff too. I guess it’s just something he’s gotten used to, but… god, I hope he’s okay. I miss him. I want him back here again.*

“Getting lost in thought again already?” Todoroki interrupted his trailing thoughts, but Katsuki couldn’t *disagree.*

“I mean, yeah. Nothing wrong with that.” He frowned, and bit down on his lip. “Maybe you’re just jealous that I’ve gotten more action than you, and you’re just- seeing things. Making stuff up.”

*My feelings haven’t… changed. Have they? Why would they?*

“Yeah, I’m not that stupid.” Todoroki rolled his eyes. “Camie and Yaoyorozu have noticed it too. I don’t know, you look- is head-over-heels the right way to put it?”

“Head-over-heels, my ass.” Katsuki grumbled. “I mean, we made out. And I liked it, and he liked it, and we were gonna do it again. We are gonna do it again. So yeah, maybe I’m not *head-over-heels,* maybe I just like him as a person and how fucking *sexy* he is when he’s kissing me!”

*Not just kissing me… touching me, too. Holding me. Hugging me. I just don’t want him to get the wrong idea, I guess… but saying ‘he’s cute when he smiles’ or ‘his voice makes me feel safe’ is probably a little too gay, right? Right!?*

“Why are you so red?”

“Oi, I ain’t red!”

It was clear that Todoroki didn’t believe him in the slightest, but didn’t push the topic. “At the very least, would I be wrong in saying you’re *jealous* over the fact that Gale and Red Riot are coming back and not him?”

Katsuki’s stomach turned just hearing that word.

*Jealous?*
Like it was some kind of disease.

*Jealous…*

Like it was something sent out to haunt him.

*Jealous.*

Like it was gnawing at his bones till they were wrought raw, forcing itself into every vein. Eating him alive till he started to accept that yeah, maybe, *just maybe-*

*I’m jealous.*

“…I- It’s not like I’m- I’m *not-*”

“It’s natural. I think.”

...*huh?*

“When someone you like is gone, it’s natural to want them back, right?” Todoroki repeated, something a little more somber, more hesitant slipping into those words. “I mean, even if it’s for a situation like this- it doesn’t make you selfish. Or weird. Maybe you keep making awkward faces at the TV, but it’s not a *bad* thing.”

“Natural…” Katsuki bit his lip. “I mean, yeah. I want him back. I- I’d rather him be here than out there. There’s a lot of things I’d rather have, that maybe I’m more than a *little* jealous about, but this is just- this is just how it is…!”

There was no hiding the crack in his voice now.

“Maybe I do wanna do more with him! I’ve- shit, I’ve been waiting so long, and as soon as we get started, he’s just fucking *gone!* It’s not fair- god, none of this is fucking fair!”

Katsuki was doing his damn best to not shout in the middle of the restaurant and keep the angry tears out of his eyes, but Todoroki’s concerned face was enough to tell him he was failing on at least some part.


*But- but why do I feel this much? This strong? God, I never thought I’d be the one to wind up like this!*

It wasn’t like he couldn’t manage time on his own- really, that much came easily. He was good at training, good at schoolwork, good at staying on track with his own learning and even spending time with friends lately. Deku’s absence wasn’t the end of him, but at the same time, it felt like something crucial was missing.

*I can live without you, but I want you back.*

*That’s okay, right?*

They paid and left a few minutes later, but the feeling stuck with him all the way back to the dorms. Todoroki was right, for once- there was something more here. Something he couldn’t quite put a name to. Something that sent his stomach lurching and his nerves rattling all the way upstairs and into his room, that had his pulse speeding like a bullet upon just one look at the new addition to his windowsill.
Katsuki swallowed. Got changed. Curled into a tight ball on his bed and opened his phone again, hoped that somehow, just somehow, there’d be an answer.

Deku… god, what all am I feeling? What is all this? I don’t get it, I- I know I have feelings, I know I like you, like being around you, like it when you’re so close to me, but I just…

He almost missed the pale light from his phone when a new notification showed up. No call, no text. Just-

Wait… shit, a voicemail!?

Katsuki pulled his legs to his chest, opened the voicemail, and couldn’t help the sharp, hollow pang in his chest at the first hint of Deku’s voice.

“I- ah, geez, I hope this one goes through… hasn’t shut off yet? Oh, shit-!”

There’s a panicked frenzy of sorts from the other end, and Katsuki could’ve sworn Deku nearly dropped his phone.

“-Kacchan! Hi, uh, it’s me!”

Katsuki could hear the exhaustion from miles away in just that single, short line.

“I’m sorry I haven’t gotten a chance to call in so long… the cell service is nearly nonexistent, and- aha, I won’t waste my time on that. I just, uh, wanted to say I miss you. And I’m sorry. They, uh… well, I just extended my stay. There’s so much that needs to be done, and I just- well, it’s…”

There’s a short, nervous laugh, and Katsuki wasn’t sure he’d ever remembered hearing such emptiness in Deku’s voice in so long. He clutched the front of his shirt with stiff, shaky hands, held his phone close to his ear so he wouldn’t miss a thing.

“It’s hard. I’m- I’m a little tired, hah… I wanna talk to you more. Really, I just- I-I mean, I…”

Deku paused.

“I miss holding you, Kacchan. I miss hearing your voice. I… I really hope it’s not too long before I can come back again.”

Static rose up in his ears, pressure rising through his face as he tried to hear the rest of the crackling message.

“Shit, I’ve gotta go-! I’m sorry, I’ll try and call more, I just- I hope you’re doing alrigh-”

The line went dead, clipped the last words of the message, and left Katsuki with nothing but the teasing glow of the replay button.

Deku, I…

He crawled his way into a better sitting position, stared at his phone, at the soft light pouring through his window and onto dusky orange petals when it finally struck him.

...have I really fallen this hard for you? Is this what it’s like to- to be in love?

Katsuki only realized he was crying when he looked down at his hand, on the sickening sheen of the moonlight bringing wounded tear-stains into view. There’s a hole in his chest, a longing he’d never imagined he’d feel.
I miss you. I want you. I just wanna feel your arms around me again.

He choked, pulled his pillow against his chest, and cried himself to sleep with one last wish on those bitten, ragged lips.

*Just this once, please, just this once… let me be selfish.*

Izuku dropped his phone in his lap, buried his head between his knees, and tried to pretend he wasn’t crying, too.

*Kacchan… I’m sorry, I-

“Midoriya! Are you free at all? There was just some stuff I needed to- oh, shit.”

There was a shuffle beside him, and before Izuku could tell him otherwise, Kirishima dropped into a short squat and sat down. “Hey, you okay?”

“M’fine.” He mumbled. “I just- I think my voicemail might’ve gotten through, and…”

It’s more than that, though. The past month had been brutal in every way possible- Izuku had grown numb long ago to pulling bodies out of the rubble, to seeing people lose everything they had. He was the one that had to be there as comfort, though. He was their savior. And with the sheer amount of media attention his particular antics had brought upon him, Izuku wasn’t able to steer the spotlight off of his face whether he liked it or not. And yeah, maybe he had chosen to stay so that his friends could go home and be replaced by a few lower-tier heroes now that the worst of the damage had been attended to- but Izuku couldn’t- no, wouldn’t- leave the face of this mission. This was the first shot Izuku had at building back his reputation since his accident, and though it had been going well, he couldn’t afford to botch it at this point.

But even he, even the hero, was scared. The nights were getting harder to sleep through, and the days were laced with a tense, unrelenting sense of fear that kept him on his toes and had him jumping at the smallest movement.

If there was anything he’d learned about Kirishima, though, it was that there was no use lying to him.

“I didn’t get much sleep last night.”

It wasn’t the whole truth, but-

“Did you skip your meds again?”

And there was the kicker. Izuku nodded, let his face fall limp, and leaned into the open arms Kirishima offered him. His friend hugged him close, visibly irritated but not accusatory in his actions.

“I’m sorry, it’s just- they’re running low, and I don’t know how much longer I’ll be here, so I’m trying to make them last, you know?” He fumbled. “What else can I even do right now…?”

*I didn’t realize how much I needed them. I thought I’d be okay after so long but…*

Kirishima didn’t shout, didn’t argue. He just held him close, tight, let Izuku feel like maybe he wasn’t so alone this time.

*That’s not how it works. I can’t just stop, not right now. Just missing one or two days at a time has been making me feel like absolute shit.*
“How much do you think you have left?”

Izuku swallowed. “No more than a week’s worth- maybe two, if I can make it last.”

“Oh, okay.” He sighed. “Have you talked to the on-site medical team at all?”

“They’re here to treat emergencies, not-”

“This is an emergency!”

The sudden outburst caught him off guard. “Don’t be ridiculous…” Izuku’s words came out dry, hollow. “I’m going to be okay. I mean, it’s not awesome, but…”

*I really, really, don’t wanna deal with this again. I don’t wanna feel like I did a year ago again. I wanna be okay.*

“Stop thinking so much. Just- just listen to me, okay?”

Kirishima’s voice broke partway through his words.

“I’m not gonna be here much longer. I don’t wanna leave in a few days and know that you’re going to be suffering and that I could’ve done something to help, so…” Kirishima took a deep breath, and somewhere within him, Izuku felt his heart begin to settle. “First things first. We’re going to make a visit to the medical team, yeah? I’ll go with you. Unless you don’t want me to.”

*You… you don’t gotta…*

But there was something resolute in Kirishima’s grip, in his gaze, and Izuku could tell that this was coming from more than a place of obligation.

*You don’t gotta, but… you really want to help me?*

“You’re sure?”

“Never surer.” Kirishima finally pulled back and squeezed Izuku’s shoulder. “Are you up to going right now? Need a longer break?”

“Wait, now?” Izuku’s eyes went wide, but Kirishima only nodded. “It’s kinda late, do you think that this will still be-”

“They’ll be out there for at least a little longer.” He assured. “And it’s better to take care of this before it’s too late, yeah? Maybe it can’t solve everything, but it’ll keep this stuff from getting worse, right?”

He couldn’t deny it, but just accepting that something that seemed this small and inconsequential was worth the label of emergency was hard to accept.

*No. Stop. This is important, whether I like the idea of it or not…!*

Kirishima stood up and stretched out a hand to him. Not out of pity, not because he saw Izuku as helpless.

*He just wants to help, and also…*

“You’re right. It’ll keep things from getting worse.” Izuku admitted, taking Kirishima’s hand and letting himself be pulled to his feet. “I don’t wanna lose all the progress I’ve made, and…” He
paused, let go, and felt a real, genuine smile start to cross over his face.

_Not just for Kirishima, or Ochako, or even Kacchan. For myself, I…_

“I wanna get better at letting myself be saved, too.”

Chapter End Notes

i hope that the secondhand embarrassment has worn off by now. That scene was painful but amazing to write fdlkjs god the things u can do in fic. Incredible

Thank u so much to my beta @aetherlite for handling my last minute requests, and my twitter is @aeronines!

edit: im sorry, but the next chapter is gonna go up tuesday instead of this tuesday just because a lot of stuff came up that i didnt expect and i dont wanna try to rush and give yall crappy writing when this next chapter has some moments i wanna be sure gets the care they deserve. so again, im really sorry, but i can assure you i'll be going back to the regular schedule after this week
It was the first of July.

“Valiant, over here! There’s a group of collapsed houses that haven’t been searched yet.”

More than two months since he’d arrived, and the smell was still awful.

“Ah, right… I’ll try and get it cleared up in the next hour or so.”

This wasn’t something anyone should ever have to get used to, though. It was only on occasion he let himself think about just how long he’d been out at the disaster site, about how every day had been bleeding into every night without pause and about how he’d just come to accept it. Work was only punctuated by the occasional meal or fitful bout of sleep, and for as much as his medication was helping to ease the worst of his symptoms, the sheer lack of real human contact and fucked up schedule was screwing with his head more than he’d thought it would. He missed his friends, missed his life, but—

“We’ve got another acre to check out when you’re done, then reconstruction after that. If all goes well, we can get another few quality shelters back up today.”

“I’ll… I’ll be there.” Izuku nodded, not bothering to force positivity at this point. But all he received in return was a clap on the shoulder, a wry, resigned look, and the silence of the desolate space in front of him.

I don’t wanna see any more bodies today… I’m so tired, so please… just one day is all I want…

And as always, his recurring prayer was never heard.

The rest of the day went by as per usual, and it was all he could do to keep his head up, keep walking, and continue on like the machine he’d become so long ago. Yes, this was his job, but it wasn’t his life.

But I sold it to work years ago, didn’t I…? Everything… everything comes back to saving. Rescuing. Being the one to be strong for others, to smile when no one else can.

However, that night- July first- was harder than usual. Izuku only managed to hunker down in his barren room after the moon had long risen in the sky, nothing but memories of his friends and months-old texts to keep him company. There’d been a couple of messages that got through on rare occasions, but with how flaky everything was to begin with, he’d accepted the isolation until it was over. It was hard to associate the other members of the relief team with real companionship, though, and despite having tried his best to stay out and eat or converse with people outside of work, he
usually found it more exhausting than anything else. Food was taken back to his room and eaten, the dish put aside before he collapsed onto his mediocre bed, not awake but never fully asleep, either.

The last step of his nightly routine involved pulling out his phone, scrolling through saved pictures, texts, and the occasional voicemail in an attempt to remind himself that his friends weren’t that far away, that he’d be able to go home eventually. He hovered a little longer over Katsuki’s near-smiling face in a rare selfie, then past a blurry shot of Ochako and Kirishima doing something weird in his kitchen, followed by one last picture of him and Katsuki on the beach after a training session, looking too much like a couple for two people who technically still weren’t.

*It’s been so long... will he even want me when I come back? Has he moved once since we kissed?*

He scrolled back further through their texts like he’d done a million times before, pretending he didn’t know almost every one by heart already.

*I just... I want to hold you again. It’s not that I can’t be alone, but I don’t wanna be. I wanna see you, my friends, my mom, my plants...*

*Homesick.* That was the word.

Sometimes, he let himself think about how Kirishima and Ochako had to be doing, and how Katsuki was doing in his internship with them. But for as much as Izuku was glad Katsuki was with two of the people he trusted above all else, he held a jealousy that couldn’t be put down if he tried.

He was tired of just living through each day, and so, so ready to go back.

Izuku wasn’t sure how he wound up in his phone’s contacts a minute or so later, and in that same moment, called him.

*It’s four in the morning. Even if this goes through, he’s not gonna pick up.*

He’d tried enough times, after all.

The phone rang, rang, and Izuku waited through it, one beat at a time. He wasn’t sure what he was doing. He wasn’t sure why he was doing this.

*I just... please, I want someone to talk to. Someone that knows me for me, at least more than most. Is that too much to ask...?*

A part of him said yes. But if nothing else, Izuku managed to shake that thought off and blearily reminded himself that his head was just telling him lies, the same thing he’d been told time and time again in therapy.

Izuku wasn’t sure when the phone stopped ringing and he started talking, either. He spoke slow at first- nothing but mumbled nonsense, words tossing and turning like choppy waves and crashing into the speaker shoreline. Soon, though, that noise turned to speech, turned to feelings, turned to tears.

*I just- please, I just want-

“Kacchan... hi, I’m...”*

*Scared, exhausted- “...tired.”*

His lip trembled so violently it hurt.

“Don’t worry, I... I got my prescription refilled, so it’s not that, I- I-I just-”
Something inside him was cracking, breaking.

“I hate this, hate feeling weak, helpless… you- you’d know, wouldn’t you…? I’m just, you know, I’m so… well, this- this is my job, right? This is what I wanna do? I- I-I wanna help people, but all this…”

I don’t wanna do this any longer. Not right now. I just wanna go home, please…

“…y’know, sometimes, I think- I-I think the media was right. Maybe I really should’ve just retired after my accident…”

There was a choked, broken whimper that must’ve come from himself, but through tear-blurred vision and ringing ears, he couldn’t know for sure.

“I- I’m trying to be strong, really, I wanna be strong, but it’s- it’s so hard to give everyone a smile when there’s nothing but wreckage and bodies around…!” He stopped, breaking off into a choked cough. “I’m a hero, I… I should be able to handle this, should be able to take this, so why… w-why…?”

I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry…!

“I, just- I’m so tired, and I miss you and I miss everyone else and I just- j-just wanna hold you again, even if I still c-can’t figure out what you see in me…!”

Kacchan, I- is it too much to ask, really- is it too much!? Is it too much to wanna go back home to you and Kirishima and Ochako and my life? Please, I can’t figure it out!

“I’m sorry, I just- I lo–”

...I love you.

The phone slid from sweaty palms onto the hard mattress as tears came crashing down over greasy cheeks and his legs snapped stiff against him, chest heaving so heavy and so dry all the same.

Stop thinking, stop hoping, just- just stop!

“...Valiant- Valiant, hey, are you okay?”

Wha... what, who’s-

“Hey. Hey, look at me. I’m right here. I’ve got you.”

It was a familiar voice, at least. No one he’d known for long, but still someone that wasn’t a total stranger.

He clenched his teeth, and what must’ve been a gargled I’m sorry came through them at some point. His hands were shaking, shaking so bad, and as the blood kept rushing through his ears it was all he could do to breathe, just breathe, just breathe and focus on the hand on his shoulder and the comforting words rattling against his body.

I... I-I’m sorry, I...

“Valiant- Midoriya- it’s okay. You’re fine. Take your time.”

Izuku wasn’t sure what was going on, not really, but he eventually managed to get into some sort of a sitting position, arms still wrapped around his legs in a death grip and back hunched over in what
had to have been his attempt at self-defense. There was still talking, still words, and for as much as it hurt to let the tears out holding them in was even worse.

So, he cried.

He wasn’t sure how long he was there, sitting like that, but the person beside him- the mission director, he eventually remembered- never moved, was never afraid or disgusted by what he was doing.

*I’m a hero, I’m on an important assignment, and I just… I just wanna be strong.*

“I can bring you water and an extra blanket if you need.” The director offered once he’d calmed down enough to focus a little more, still not talking but coherent enough to nod. It was only a minute or so that she was gone, and upon her return, she placed the cup in his hands and made sure his hands were curled tight enough around it as she draped the new, softer blanket over his bare shoulders. He was so far past the point of caring that she was seeing him in his boxers, seeing the grime still littered over his body that he couldn’t work up the energy to clean off before he’d crashed in bed.

But before any apologies or even an *I’ll make it up to you*, the first thing that left his mouth was nothing but a weak–

“...t-thanks.”

She put a hand on his back, sliding down just a bit before rubbing gentle circles over it in a way that couldn’t have been taken as anything except calming. *Fuck,* Izuku was sure he looked like a complete and utter disaster right now, but couldn’t bring himself to even take that into account.

“You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to.” She murmured. “You can ask me to leave whenever you want. But I’m here to listen if you need.”

*Here to listen… but, what do I even have to say?*

Izuku took a tiny sip from the glass, stale water hitting the back of his throat just before he went to wipe the tears from his face.

“I- I didn’t think it’d be this hard.” He started, staring down at the contents of the cup. “Doing all this. Didn’t- d-didn’t think I’d get so... homesick.”

*I’m tired. I’m so tired…*

“I’ve- I know my calls won’t go through, but it’s… it’s nice to at least feel like I can talk to my friends. And talk to my-”

Izuku stopped mid-sentence, unsure of what to even call Katsuki.

“...my, um, partner.” He finally decided on, the word coming out in a rush, so nice and yet so strange.

*We’re not even dating, not yet, but saying ’friend’ just doesn’t feel… right.*

But his director didn’t push it, just nodded and listened. Izuku took another sip, hands a little stiller than before, and sighed.

“I- I think I’m, uh…” He paused, just the *thought* of his next words enough to make him feel sick.
“...tired.”

And all at once, the demons in his head reared up in a brutal assault against the logical part of him, countering the factual it's okay, you're human too, you can't be there for everyone.

“Everything here, and all the people that we’ve been trying to save have been in reach, so why… why…? I—I’m a hero. I shouldn’t be weak even though I know it’s okay to be, but I don’t know how to convince myself of that either, and it’s been so long since I’ve gotten to- y’know, really talk to anyone, and the meds are helping but it’s not perfect and I’m still struggling and it just keeps getting harder and harder to get through each day...!”

No, don’t cry again, don’t cry, stop crying!

The hand moved against his back again, gentle, too gentle as he let himself succumb to another round of tears. He wasn’t sure what this meant, really. Was it strong, that he was letting himself be vulnerable like this? Or was it just another weakness, a sign that he couldn’t hold it together and wasn’t fit to be a hero in the first place?

“Take the time you need, Midoriya. You’re safe here.” The director repeated, and those last words— you're safe—echoed through his head longer than he’d expected.

I’m… safe. I’m okay here. This place is fine. Safe.

Izuku let one last, long, weary breath shudder out, and finally felt a little more grounded than before.

“I don’t wanna be selfish.” He started, still staring at the floor. “I can- I can see how many people have been struggling, and how many we’ve helped out here, but I just… I… I-I dunno how much longer I can take it.”

He expected some retort, some reprimand for all the violently personal information he’d spilled, but for as many lies as he’d told himself, she didn’t raise her voice even once.

“I’ve had my eyes on you the whole time you’ve been here.” The director said, hand moving up to squeeze Izuku’s shoulder. “You’ve been doing a fantastic job, and at the start of this assignment and for so long after, I didn’t know how we’d manage without you. I can see just how much you care in every little thing you do.”

Izuku opened his mouth to protest, but she cut him off almost immediately instead. “And it’s okay to be selfish. You’re what, twenty? You’re so, so young. It’s okay to want. It doesn’t make you any less of a hero, especially with how much dedication and real, honest effort you put into your work.”

There was no good response- nothing smooth, nothing confident he could say. All Izuku managed was a meager nod, naught but a sign he’d heard and listened.

But the director didn’t push it, didn’t ask for more info, and just waited.

“Your birthday is this month, isn’t it?” The director asked, and he nodded again, biting his lip. “Well, I’ll try and keep that in mind. Maybe I can work something out around that time.” She gave his shoulder one last squeeze before letting go, and got to her feet. “Think you’re gonna be okay for tonight?”

Izuku took one last sip, and handed the now-empty cup back to her. “I… yeah.” He paused, swallowed, and finally met her eyes. “Thanks.”

“Alright. Well, don’t hesitate to come find me if you need anything.” She stopped in the doorway to
look back at him, and a short smile twisted at the corner of her mouth. “And I mean *anything*, okay? I don’t want to see anyone under my command suffering to that extent.”

*I hope I don’t have to come talk to you again, but… fine.*

“Okay.” He promised, slightly surprised by how much more stable he felt than before.

And as she left, Izuku disappeared back under the sheets, pulled the new blanket up over himself, and took one last glance at his phone before falling asleep.

*I can do this, I’ll make it through, but… I guess it’s okay if I’m not strong, too.*

When Izuku woke up, it wasn’t to the shake of his shoulder or an order to get moving. He blinked, rubbed the sleep from his eyes, stared out at the wall in front of him, and took a short, bleary glance at his phone to see that it was-

*Holy shit, it’s one!? In the afternoon? Oh, shit- fuck, I should’ve-*

He shot to his feet, launched himself out of bed in a panicked frenzy, and ran to the bathroom with clothes in hand to get dressed.

*It’s one, it’s one, I overslept, how did I oversleep? They- they always wake me up at seven, did I somehow fall back asleep? Did I go through my morning routine and forget about it after some nap? What- what’s going-*

Izuku burst out of his room, went to shove himself inside the small bathroom, but was stopped by the familiar voice of the mission director almost instantly.

“Valiant.” She called out, a slight smile over her worn lips. “Hey. Go get some food, okay?”

He halted, confused, and looked over at her. “I mean, I *really* don’t think I have time for that right now, it’s already so late, and-”

“And you’re off the clock today.” His director crossed her arms over her chest. “Get some food, go back to sleep, and do what you can to relax. That’s all you’re instructed to do.”

...*huh?*

“Wait, but there’s-”

“There’s nothing for you to do except take a break.” She insisted. “If you want orders, there they are. Got it?”

Izuku couldn’t manage much more than a nod, trying to process just what he’d been told. God, he probably looked ugly right now, with a bedhead worse than usual and dry, crusty tear-stains strewn across his cheeks and ringing his eyes. While last night wasn’t as bad as it could’ve been, he definitely hadn’t been looking forward to the next day’s work.

“…got it. And, um.” He swallowed, stomach churning. “Thanks.”

*I guess this is her way of caring, then… maybe I will do that, get food, get clean, go back to sleep…*

It was only when he showed up to the impromptu dining hall in his shitty sleeping clothes instead of his hero suit that it began to sink in.
I… I don’t have to work today.

Izuku carried the food to a small table in the corner of the hall, let himself spend more than two minutes shoveling it down his throat, and for the first time since Kirishima had left, felt a little more accomplished than before.

Look, see, I didn’t complain about a break. I didn’t fight it. My therapist would be proud, right?

A small part of him couldn’t believe that this was what counted as a victory, but at the same time, he knew he needed to get better at looking at even these little moments in the positive. The food was bland, and the room smelled nearly as bad as the rest of the area, but it was-

It was something.

Izuku only retreated to the bathroom after grabbing a change of clothes and heading for the cramped shower space. The water was still cold and the stalls still sucked, but he didn’t have to bear it with thoughts of what the rest of the day would consist of. But at some point in the shower he realized how long his hair had gotten in the time he’d been there- usually, he paid it no mind, but his undercut had nearly grown out and the rest had gotten at least another two inches of length on it.

Guess that’ll have to be one of first things I have taken care of when I go back home… it’s not awful, but it’s definitely not what I wanna keep for any longer than I need to.

Looking, really looking at himself in the mirror after that realization was more than a little strange. Sunken, hollow eyes stared back at him, accented only by sharp creases in the skin and worn, downturned lips. Rough stubble ran the length of his jaw despite his futile attempts to keep it smooth. Somehow, he figured there was more life in his face than there had been up before his accident, but it still wasn’t awesome.

At least I haven’t been panicking or treating my body like shit. I’ve been eating okay, as okay as I can, but I guess it’s just the situation as a whole that’s making this whole thing worse.

A minute or so later, he pulled away from the mirror and got dressed. Wandered back to his room, collapsed on the bed, and let still-weary limbs relax as much as they could.

This isn’t so bad when I don’t have to keep thinking about what my next assignment is going to be. Well, I mean, I’ll be back out there tomorrow, but still…

For as much as he tried to lull himself back to sleep with the new blanket, his body was still on edge and ready to jump at the slightest instruction. Rest was nice, yeah, but less so when he was strung and wired for action. And as usual, it was another twenty, thirty minutes of twitching before he grabbed his phone again in an attempt to exhaust himself enough to pass out.

What he saw, though, nearly scared him shitless instead.

...oh, no.

He stared at the screen a little longer, trying to pretend that what he was seeing was an illusion, a lie.

No, no no no!

Izuku shot up in a panic and hoped that somehow, some way, the voicemail he must’ve left the night before hadn’t gone through.

“You’re… you’re kidding me.” He stuttered, trying to remember what all he’d said. “The one time-
the one time I didn’t want it to send…!”

Every word he could recall made his blood turn to ice, splinting out his sides and sending a nervous horror coursing through his veins. Yeah, he and Katsuki were getting close, and he was aware of the surface of Izuku’s issues, but pouring out his feelings like he knew he’d done last night?

Unacceptable.

I can’t- I shouldn’t- this isn’t his responsibility to bear!

But the selfish part, the greedy part said it was more than just that. That maybe, maybe-

I don’t want him to see everything I’m dealing with. I don’t want to scare him away. He seemed fine when he found out, didn’t look at me like I’m some freak, but I still… I don’t want him to worry.

He’d received no response from Katsuki, and he wasn’t sure if that ultimately helped or hurt worse. No news was usually good news, right? But it would be odd if Katsuki didn’t reply. Maybe. Izuku wasn’t really sure what to expect right now after realizing how much he’d just said out loud to someone other than his therapist.

I’m sorry.

Izuku spent the rest of the day torn fitful bouts of sleep and uttering that mantra over, and over, and over again.

I’m sorry.

For that night, and all the rest, Izuku didn’t check his phone for fear of seeing Katsuki’s concern.

I’m fine, I’ll be okay, I swear.

It was one week into July.

“Alright, you two! We’ll see you tomorrow.” Uravity called out, waving Katsuki and Yaoyorozu goodbye with Red Riot beside her. “Get some rest, alright? You two did great today.”

The two interns answered back with a chorus of we will, and the heroes turned to take their leave only moments later.

Yet, just as he was about to step out the door, Katsuki heard them speaking again, talking a little too loudly amongst themselves. And for as much as Katsuki prided himself on being an honest, upstanding person, he was almost certain he’d heard the name Midoriya dropped at some point.

I shouldn’t eavesdrop. Shouldn’t listen in. But if it’s about Deku, if it has anything to do with that shit he sent me the other day…

He swallowed.

...a minute won’t hurt, right?

“Bakugou, what- what are you doing?” Yaoyorozu asked, standing beside him with a look of hey, we should go that only served to make him all the more inquisitive.

“Just- just a sec.” He mumbled, easing a little closer to the sound of voices in Uravity’s office.

“Wanna check something out.”
Ever since he’d received that heart-wrenching voicemail from Deku, he hadn’t been able to get it off of his mind. Each scrap of information he could glean from listening to his mentors’ passing words and conversations was lodged away for future reference in the fleeting hope that at some point, some time they’d reveal more about him.

And this time, Katsuki felt their conversation was more important than most.

If it’s about him… god, if they know how he’s doing, if they know if he’s finally- finally gonna-

“…Izuku’s been allowed a few days off.” He heard Uravity start, some sort of relief in her voice. “He hasn’t been protesting it, either.”

“Oh, thank god…” Red Riot sighed. “He’s been out there for what, a month since I left? And I mean, you know how rough that shit is. Midoriya needs breaks sometimes, too.”

Their voices were getting further away, and with a gulp, Katsuki scooted a little further down the hall and closer to Uravity’s office with the hope that they didn’t notice he was still there.

“Totally, totally…” Uravity paused, and Katsuki had to strain to hear the next few words. “Though, if I’m being honest, the fact that he’s not protesting has me a little worried. From what it sounds like, Izuku’s just…”

“-beat. Hell, I mean, you can see how tired he looks on all those newscasts. I know he’s trying to push himself, but he’s… I’m sure he’s really, really ready to come back.” There was a slight pause and some noise of disgruntlement that followed. “—should’ve stayed back ‘stead of him. Shouldn’t have let him insist on staying. I should’ve—”

“Babe, relax.” Uravity seemed to hush, and from the very corner of his eyes, Katsuki could see her pull him into a hug. “…been over this. You’re fine. You made the most logical choice you could in that situation, didn’t you? Like it or not, out of the three of us, his quirk is the best choice for handling both rescuing and rebuilding. And we’ve been needed more here than out there…”

Wait… wait, it was between Red Riot and Deku as to who would come back…?

Katsuki’s blood ran cold, and for as much as he liked his mentor, couldn’t help the resentment piercing his chest as he continued to listen.

“I know, I know, I just…” Red Riot’s voice trailed off, cut short by a punctuated curse. “His birthday is only about a week away. But I can’t- I don’t wanna be the reason it’s fucked up for the second year in a row…”!

Huh? Something happened last year?

“…I mean, it was both of us.” Uravity reminded him. “But, yeah… I get it. I think they’re working on trying to get him back in time for it, so we might be able to throw something together if he does come home.”

“For sure. I mean, maybe we could convince them to secure a phone call with him at the very least. They last thing I want is for him to feel forgotten again…!”

Wha… forgotten?

It’d been a year since, and yet, Katsuki couldn’t forget Deku’s face when he’d given him what little he had on his birthday. Beyond that, though, he couldn’t remember ever contemplating that he’d been forgotten, of all things.
And after all you did for me, I can’t believe anyone would just forget you.

“He won’t. We won’t let that happen.” Uravity promised. “And, if you’re okay with it… think we should let Bakugou know when Izuku comes back, too?”

Katsuki froze, lasered focused on whatever they could be saying, but couldn’t help the mild bit of panic flooding through his veins.

“Ah, yeah, that’d probably be a good idea.” Red Riot agreed. “He still never told me if he’d started dating Bakugou or not, but I mean… s’not like I can blame him. I doubt Midoriya would wanna get the press involved at all, because any publicity about them having something together could make Bakugou an easy target for villains.”

Wh- holy shit, what all do you know!?

“Why do you think I’ve been pushing him so hard? I just- god, I’m scared for his safety. There’s nothing wrong with him and Izuku being together, and I can tell that they both really like each other, but I just… I don’t want him to become Izuku’s weak spot. U.A. has good security, and I know he’ll be at least mostly safe on school grounds, but I don’t know what’s going to happen if he’s let out without supervision on patrols. And come on, you can’t convince me that Izuku wouldn’t lose his shit if Bakugou was put in danger.”

Katsuki couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Couldn’t believe that his own mentors though that little of him, that they thought Deku didn’t have trust in him on his own, that he was a- a–

I’m nobody’s weak spot, dammit!

His hands were shaking, blood rushing to his head and panic through his veins, so much to the point where he almost walked away right then and there.

But, no. Not yet. This was the most he’d heard about Deku all week aside from the soul-shattering voicemail he couldn’t get out of his head.

“Bakugou’s doing really well, though. Definitely ahead of where I’d expected.” Red Riot added, but there was no denial of the situation in his words. “I can see what Midoriya sees in him, at least a little, but I just… I’m gonna tell him when we know the date. I don’t know what all he’s been told about us, but I can’t leave him out when I know Midoriya would be happy to have him around.”

“You’re right, you’re right…” Uravity conceded. “Okay. If he comes back, we can get him a cake, yeah? Do you know if there’s any merch he’s had his eye on?”

The conversation trailed off into basic planning, and it was only by that point that he allowed himself to be pulled away by a rather irritated Yaoyorozu, who had apparently been looking forward to spending the rest of the evening with her girlfriend. Totally valid, yeah, yeah, but the familiar, numbing jealousy was enough for him to wander back into the dorms with a blunt greeting and goodbye to Todoroki, and to leave Yaoyorozu to her own business without a parting.

I’m not a burden, I won’t be a weakness. I’m- I’m more than capable, and I don’t need all that fucking concern!

That wasn’t to say he didn’t worry for Deku either, though. He’d woken up early on the night he’d received the voicemail, frustrated that he hadn’t been there to answer but scared enough by Deku’s fractured voice and blurry words and the idea that he still wasn’t sure what Katsuki- Katsuki- saw in him.
Dumbass. I’ll- I’ll have to beat it into him when he gets back, I guess…!

But when he walked back inside and saw the lone reminder of Deku—not Valiant, but Deku—a whole new wave of emotions crashed over him instead. It’d been relatively cloudy the past couple days, and despite Katsuki’s best efforts, Deku’s flower was still drooping in the window, so out of place among the books and training equipment that lived beside it. This wasn’t exactly a new occurrence, but for as much time as he spent trying to bring it back to its former glory, it wasn’t anywhere near as brilliant as it had been with Deku.

“Hey, buddy.” Katsuki sat down on his bed, staring at the flower and managing to calm down a little bit from before. “You think he’ll be back in time for his birthday?”

He’d grown used to the still responses at this point, but for as stupid as he probably looked talking to a plant, something about it was oddly soothing.

“I’d like to have you home by then.” He continued, still staring at the faded petals and limp stalks. “I’m sure Deku misses you.”

Katsuki fondled with his hands in his lap, and sighed. “I miss him too. He’s… he’s a dumbass, and he needs to take care of his damn self, but I…” He paused. “I like him a lot. I’m gonna be the best damn partner, gonna be the best hero, and we’ll be the best team. No one’s gonna be able to stop us.”

Silence.

“…he’s… he’s just gotta come back, first.”

And when he does, I won’t let him down. I won’t let this confusion about what we are hang around any longer.

He took one last glance at the plant and made a silent promise to himself.

When he comes back, I… I’ll be the one to make the first move.

Izuku stumbled out of bed at seven in the morning, hauled himself to the dining hall, and crashed in a seat with a plate of mediocre eggs and a cup of coffee just as his director sat down across from him. He didn’t pay her too much mind aside from nod and a curt greeting, and would’ve been perfectly content just shoveling the eggs down his throat had she not slid something across the table for him to see.

“Do you remember what day it is?” She started, Izuku’s eyes darting to the small envelope that she’d pushed to his side of the table. “I figured someone would need to remind you, so…”

“The day, huh?” Izuku repeated, and pulled the envelope closer. “Dunno. Did we get a shipment of ice cream in or something?”

The director rolled her eyes. “Oh, please. Just look at it.”

He still wasn’t really sure what to expect, but when he opened up the envelope to see bright colors and a gaudy Happy Birthday! message strewn across the front, a part of him jumped while another sank.

Oh, it’s… “It is today, isn’t it…” Izuku swallowed, the bright colors too vivid against the stark room. “Ah, um. Thanks.”
I don’t wanna think about this right now, though.

“Twenty-one, right?” She continued, despite Izuku feeling more than a little sick for a multitude of reasons. “Geez, you’re still so young… but come on, open up the rest, will you?”

He really, really didn’t want to open this in front of her, not with all of the awful memories from last year’s birthday surfacing in combination with the fact that his friends still weren’t there.

“You know, I might, uh, wait—”

“No.”

Izuku blinked, tilted his head, more than a little confused about the sharp response. “But, I—”

She narrowed her eyes with a look that said no arguing. “This is an order, Valiant. Open the card.”

Is that supposed to make me feel better?

Izuku sighed, but figured that no, it probably wasn’t. Nonetheless, an order was an order, and he didn’t have any energy to fight this particular battle right now.

“Fine, fine.” He relented, and with a bit of dread bubbling up in his stomach, opened it. There was no heartfelt message, no money wadded between the fold, but instead—

...oh... oh, my god.

His eyes shot back to those of the director’s, then back to the card, and cycled through over and over and over again before the message finally, finally seemed to get through.

“Are... are you serious?” Izuku started, trying to pretend there wasn’t a sharp crack in his voice. “This- please tell me this isn’t a joke.”

Because staring back at him from that card was the one thing he hadn’t expected to receive.

“You’ve done well, Valiant.” She grinned, one of the happiest faces he’d seen rising up over her face. “And I think it’s time for you to go home.”

...home.

The train ticket tucked inside the card nearly slipped out as Izuku dropped it on the table, burying his head in his hands and trying not to yell or scream or cry because holy shit, I—

I’m going home.

“We’ll drive you back to the train station in half an hour.” She continued. “It’ll be about ten o’clock by the time you get to the station, and from there, a few hour’s ride back. Got it?”

I’m really, really going home.

“Y-yeah, I- I got it.” He said, still trying to process all this. “I’m just- are you serious? I haven’t talked to the media, there’s still work to be done here, and I—”

“These are my orders, you’re done.” She insisted. “You’ve done more than enough over here, and we’ve found some heroes and volunteers to take your place. The worst of this crisis is over, so we’ll take it from here. Okay?”
“...okay.” He got out, trying to pretend there weren’t tears beading on the corners of his eyes or a violent tremble threatening his lips. “Yeah. Yeah, okay. I got it. I’ll, just, finish eating… get my stuff, and head back, then…?”

No matter how many times he agreed to it, said it, it still didn’t seem real. The crappy, makeshift shelter had been his home for far, far too long, and for as welcome as going home was, he wasn’t sure it’d sink in until he was back in his own bed and surrounded by all the people he knew best.

“Sounds good. Don’t dawdle, okay?” She stood up, still smiling. “I’ll miss you, but… I’m glad to give you this last assignment.”

“And I’m, um…” He paused, rubbing his arm across his eyes again and hoping he wasn’t crying too much. “Glad to accept it.”

And that was that. She walked away, leaving Izuku to vacuum down the rest of his breakfast and run to his room, changing into something that might have only been worn twice since its last wash before jamming the rest of his belongings into a backpack. He tried not to think so hard about the why he was doing this and just focus on the get it done, but it was hard to ignore the blood thrumming through his veins and the violent shaking in his fingers. Not sadness, not anger, not frustration, but-

Happiness. Excitement. Relief.

It wasn’t long before he’d raced out of that small-ass room and out towards the roadside, and waved goodbye to his director one last time before hopping in the car and sitting back as the driver took off down the street. Familiar rubble and destruction rolled back him by the windowside, but compared to how it was just a couple months ago, it’d improved incredibly. They’d set up a ridiculous amount of temporary shelters, dining halls, and medical centers all about the area, and the people still around were doing so much better than they had been on the day of the accident.

They… they will be okay. There’s people other than me that can cover for now.

And yeah, maybe this sort of leaving-the-scene had never fit into his idea of a hero, but there came a point where he had to think about himself, too.

I’m allowed to want sometimes. And that’s… that’s okay.

The drive back was easy, and by the time he arrived at the train station, the sun was well into the sky. His one hope was that he wouldn’t be recognized on the way there, but even so, there was always the chance that he wouldn’t be bothered. He thanked his driver one last time before heading out, and boarded the train just as it was supposed to leave. It was strange, so strange to be riding one again after he’d been away so long, but at the same time, it felt more like home than he’d anticipated.

Almost there. Almost there. Hell, what’s gonna be the first thing I do when I arrive?

Izuku managed to grab a seat in the corner of the sparsely-populated train, and to his relief, didn’t receive any attention aside from a few raised eyebrows and curious looks. Far better than words and attempts at conversation, and a vast improvement from any of his too-daring fans attempting to get closer than they should. He tucked himself away, pulled out his phone, and found that there was somewhat of a signal, though weak and flickering. A part of him was scared to find out how many messages he’d received while he was gone, but his near-dead battery was enough of a hint for him to leave his phone be for now and just try and rest on the way there. Still, though, his mind was so far out and racing with all the thoughts of what would happen for the rest of his day now that he was
really, truly, going home.

Thirty minutes later, he managed to fall asleep. That said, it was fitful and punctuated with random jolts awake and twitching he couldn’t calm, a part of his body still not believing that he was leaving.

*I wonder when I'll start work at my agency again... probably right away, I’d imagine they need help out on the field. But at least I’ve got tonight...*

Fingers rapped against his leg, and with a sharp sniff, he realized that *showering* and doing a round of laundry should probably be the first thing checked off his list.

*Maybe Kirishima and Ochako will be free... hm, I hope so! It’d be nice to see them again today, but, ah... can’t get my hopes up.*

At the very least, he was glad that this year was already looking better than the last.

The train ride was quiet too, and Izuku was mostly awake by the time they arrived at his stop. He stumbled out of his seat with shaky legs, heart racing in anticipation and so much disbelief upon just seeing the familiar city landscape. Maybe this was all just a dream, and he was just waiting to wake up. But the logical part of him told him *no, this is real,* again and again, and it was all he could do to believe in it.

That said, he was almost certain he was seeing things when out of the corner of his eye, he saw Kirishima standing and waiting.

*Huh...? Wait, I never... got to tell him that I was...*

But Kirishima only grinned, ran up to him, and slung an arm around Izuku’s shoulder before taking in a sharp whiff of his probably awful stench and gagging.

“Holy shit, bro.” He wrinkled his nose, and for all the mock disgust on it, couldn’t help the fond affection he’d missed so much. “Come on, let’s get you to the shower.”

“Kiri, I-” Izuku started, only to almost immediately be cut off.

“Just follow me, ‘kay?” Kirishima gave him a reassuring smile and without another question, dragged Izuku along. “We’re gonna head over to my agency ‘cause it’s close. You can clean off there, and I’ve got some clothes for you to change into.” He wheezed again upon catching another hint of Izuku’s aroma, and wrinkled his nose. “Ugh, yeah, you *need* to get outta this stuff soon.”

“I only had like three sets of clothes, okay? I’m trying my best!” Izuku insisted, but couldn’t say that Kirishima was *wrong.* Yeah, he looked like shit, smelled like shit, and probably sounded like shit, too. “But, um...” He paused. “Thanks. For, uh, meeting me.”

“Course.” Kirishima nodded, still walking. It’s your birthday, after all. Right?”

*My birthday... “Ah, yeah... it is.”*

“Well, this is the least I can do to make up for last year.” Kirishima said. “But! Just come with me, alright? We’ll head over to your place soon enough.”

“Ah, um, okay...?” He was still confused, but not left with much choice in the matter as Kirishima took off running at top speed. Izuku followed him all the way there, as the agency admittedly was fairly close to the train station, and found himself led to an already stocked-up agency bathroom.
“Take your time, but not too long, ‘kay?” Kirishima said, but made some sort of face upon noticing something. “Oh… shit, did you want some shaving cream? I don’t know if I have any here, but, uh… you got a lil something on your face.”

Izuku reached up to feel a bit of stubble beneath his fingers, more than he was used to but not too much to handle. “Ah, it’s fine. I’ll probably take care of it tomorrow. And, uh, get a haircut.”

Kirishima nodded. “Yeah, yeah. Like, it’s not bad, just…”

“I know, I know. Looks weird.” Izuku sighed. “Hope it’s not too bad, right?”

“No, and it’s not weird. Just… different.” Kirishima said, looking over him. “Anyways. I’ve got some clothes we picked up from your place, I’ll leave ‘em outside the door. Alright?”

“Ah, right. Got it.” He nodded, then stepped back and into the shower, a bit of relief sweeping over him after getting out of his nasty, well-worn clothes and under the hot water he’d missed so much. The grime he’d done his best to ignore all came off after a few rounds with a washcloth, and he couldn’t help but be thankful that this first wash was somewhere outside of his place. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d felt so clean, nor the last time he’d used such good-smelling soaps and shampoo that his friends had to have been behind putting out. And just to think that they’d done this much, set up a meeting at the station and a hot shower…

Even just this is so much more than I ever could’ve asked for.

Izuku got out after a while, and despite his initial thoughts that he’d be quick, knew it couldn’t have lasted any less than fifteen minutes. But he cut himself some slack this time- after all, he was allowed to take the time to enjoy the simple things like hot water and a stall he could move more than a foot around in. Izuku dried off with a fresh towel, took a blowdryer to his hair, and lastly, checked behind the door to see something new waiting for him. Or more specifically, a few somethings.

Hm? Oh, I haven’t seen these in a long time…

He grabbed the clothes off the floor, and when he went to unfold a shirt he’d forgotten he had in his closet, saw a small note fall out. He picked it up, read it over, and flushed a little when he realized it had explicit directions for how to dress himself.

“I’m twenty-one, not two.” He pouted, but followed the instructions anyways, buttoning the tight black shirt up (with the top two undone- this was important, apparently) and then cuffing the sleeves to exactly three-fourths of the way on his arm. Why this was necessary? He had no idea. But the rest of the note detailed wearing the belt they’d provided him and pulling his blue jeans up, as well as making sure that he left his shirt untucked, a little more casual looking than usual.

Nothing wrong with the way I usually dress. Assholes.

That said, he was a little disappointed he couldn’t put in the earrings they’d left for him. The holes had closed up while he was on the mission, and for as much as he liked them, he’d have to find a time to go get them redone. But after pulling on the nicer-than-average shoes and tossing his dirty clothes into a bag they’d provided, Izuku could admit that yeah, maybe he felt kinda good just looking different than he had before.

Kirishima came running after a quick call from the doorway, and with one look up and down, Izuku seemed to receive his seal of approval.

“Mn, alright. I think she’ll let you fly with this.” Then, he clapped a hand on his shoulder. “You look good, dude. Feelin’ alright?”
He nodded, a bit of a wobbly smile coming up over his cheeks. “Yeah, I’m feeling better. Just, uh, maybe a little overwhelmed? I dunno, it’s just kinda nuts to come back from that place to... to this.”

There was a glint in Kirishima’s eyes that seemed to indicate this wasn’t everything, but Izuku didn’t question it. “Makes sense. I, uh. Yeah. Was pretty thrown off too when I got back.” He pulled him in for a quick hug. “But seriously. Glad to see you home.”

Me too… me too.

“Ready to head out, then?” Kirishima asked, stepping back. “Well, head out to your place. Or is there anything you wanna do before we go over there?”

There really wasn’t anything that came to mind other than maybe stopping by and seeing Katsuki, but really, any chance of that was down the drain to begin with. He still didn’t know what they were right now, not with all the things that had happened in the past few months, and Izuku didn’t know when he’d find out, either.

So he nodded, agreed, and just like that, they were off.

I don’t know exactly what’s going on… but if this is the start of the night, it can’t possibly be all bad, right?

Then again, the thought of returning to his apartment after an extended leave scared him more than he’d like to admit. Logically, he knew that it wouldn’t be like before, that there wouldn’t be garbage strewn about in every nook and cranny and that there wouldn’t be dirty dishes and awful odors stinking the place up. Still, though, he was sure that his plants were dead, and the thought of them being gone hurt more than he’d liked to admit.

The orange one is probably safe, right? Maybe? I know I asked Ochako to take care of it, but I don’t know how much she actually did…

More nervous but still excited, he followed Kirishima all the way back to his place, the sun starting to lower itself in the sky by the time they arrived at the familiar complex. And for as many bad memories he had associated with that place, he was working to replace it with the good, one step at a time.

Just like when I was with Kacchan. Just like when he came over before I had to leave and we cooked, cuddled, kissed…

He hadn’t realized just how much he valued that night until it’d been snatched away.

The climb up the stairs was easier than he’d expected, and long-past struggles of getting stuck going down, of needing help at every corner made him realize just how far he’d come and how much further he had left to go. He wasn’t perfect- far from it, really- but just this told him that yes, I’ve improved. This is something.

A part of him was glad when Kirishima let him fumble to find his keys and open the door himself. Some semblance of normalcy rushed through him when he twisted open the knob, opened the door, and-

...holy shit.

And right in front of him was his second big surprise of the day- coming home to see his apartment in perfect condition, sparkling clean, bright, and fresh- with the addition of a friend and cheap party decorations lining the room.
“Ki- Kirishima, you didn’t have to-”

But Kirishima only shook his head and shoved him inside. “I didn’t have to do anything, but I wanted to. And hey, don’t let me take all the credit, alright?” He grinned, and as he did, Izuku was slammed into by the force of his other best friend, her hug so tight that Izuku thought he’d be breaking another few ribs.

And yeah, okay, he almost cried right then and there.

“Oh my god, Izuku…” She whispered, holding him close “God, I’m so happy to see you. I’m so glad you’re safe…!”

He wasn’t sure what to say or how to react, but couldn’t react when everything about this was so ridiculously unbelievable and so incredibly touching. Izuku settled on just holding Ochako close, relishing in the touch he’d missed for far too long, and trying to convince himself that this was really happening.

“Alright, alright…” She pulled back, giving Izuku a big, bright smile and directing him further into the apartment. “We’ve got food, drinks, and- oh, um, check out the stuff in the window if you want!”

Wait, by the window…?

Izuku tilted his head, a little confused, but nearly choked when he saw what she was talking about. He ran over to his window across newly-cleaned floors, and nearly broke into tears again when he saw all the young, new plants resting in it.

“The others died, so…” Ochako rubbed the back of her head. “I hope these ones make an okay replacement?”

This time, there were more colors in the flowers- yellows, reds, purples- and Izuku could hardly believe that they’d done this for him.

“They’re perfect. Holy shit, I-” He stopped, covered his mouth with his hands, and gave up on holding back the tears. “Thank you. Oh my god, thank you…!”

The orange one wasn’t there, but… as much as it hurt, he’d probably be able to get over it after a while. For as well as Izuku tried to care for his plants, he couldn’t bring a dead one back to life.

“These are kinda your birthday gift, so…” Ochako let out a short, nervous laugh. “I’m glad you like them. We weren’t totally sure what you liked, but we got someone to help us pick some out. There’s a list of what type they are on the coffee table!”

I can’t believe… I keep saying that but I can’t- this is crazy.

But just then, he noticed that something seemed a little off. Right in the middle, where he’d assume one should obviously go, was left perfectly empty. Izuku didn’t let himself linger on that particular fact, though, not wanting to get his hopes up in the off-chance that his plant was still alive.

“Seriously, I- I love them.” Izuku repeated. “I’m gonna look into them a whole bunch tomorrow. I just- you guys, I—”

“You’ve got time to let it sink in.” Kirishima said. “Even if it’s just for tonight, just… try and forget about all the stuff that happened back there. Alright?” He crossed his arms over his chest. “This is your night, and this time, we’re gonna do our damn best to make it good.”
Izuku bit his lip, went to hug Kirishima again, and let himself live more into the moment for the first time in so long.

*My night.*

“You’re right. This- this *is* my night.” He mumbled, and felt himself believe it. “And holy shit, I… I don’t know what you guys could do to make it better than this.”

When he let go, though, he could’ve sworn Kirishima and Ochako exchanged some sort of knowing, excited glance. “…well, I’ll guess you’ll have to wait and find out, huh?” Ochako said, more teasingly than he’d anticipated. Nervous energy bubbled up in his stomach, but this time, it wasn’t out of anxiety or fear.

*I… I’m happy.*

Izuku let them lead him into the kitchen and pile him up with food and drinks before he sat down, and only minutes later, they opened the door to let a couple more close friends- Jirou and Inasa- inside. He greeted them the same, with hugs and tears and too much relieved laughter between the celebration, and the five of them set to enjoying the small party and catching up amongst themselves. He didn’t realize how much he’d missed everyone, even just the simple banter and friendly conversation until he had it again.

*I’m glad that I got to help at the disaster, but being here, seeing them…*

Yeah, he couldn’t say he wasn’t glad to be back.

But as the night was drawing to a close, and the effects of what little alcohol he’d actually drank wore off, Izuku found himself bidding goodbyes to Jirou and Inasa as quickly as they’d arrived. Only one more birthday wish remained, but he knew- realistically, he always knew- that there was no way he’d be able to see—

“Oh, I’ll be right back!” Ochako said, jumping up from her seat after glancing at her phone, and running to…

...the door?

Izuku peeked up, strained his neck to look closer, but was perfectly blocked from view of his own house by Kirishima’s head and Ochako’s body as she opened the door, letting something- no, someone- in. He wasn’t sure what was going on, no, not really, but something odd stuck out from the picture- namely, the hint of something orange, and carried by someone who—

...no. No way. It’s almost ten at night, you couldn’t have—

“…oi, just take it, tell me where he…”

*Ka…*

Izuku bolted from his seat, nearly ran straight into the wall, and half-crashed into the couch in his attempt to get closer to what was, what *had* be to be-

“Ka- Kacchan…?”

Red eyes stared back, and that face filled with frustration and worry and fear melted in mere moments as Katsuki shoved the thing he was carrying at Ochako and ran towards Izuku, practically throwing himself against his chest and wrapping those perfect arms around his waist.
Katsuki was here, here, and before he could change his mind, Izuku grabbed him by the hips and lifted him up, one under his shoulder blades and another beneath his ass as he held him close, so close, so much more and so much better than he’d ever remembered feeling before.

“De- Deku…” Katsuki whispered, the name choked out in a wobbly whisper. “You’re here, you’re—holy shit, this isn’t- I’m not.”

“Dreaming?” Izuku said, hoping Katsuki didn’t mind the tears. “I- well, If I’m not, you aren’t either.”

There was no kissing, no furious making out right then and there, just Katsuki clutching to him like he’d be dead if he let go and Izuku wondering what he’d done to deserve all this.

I wanna hold you… just wanna hold you wanna kiss you right now, but- we’ve got company.

“There’s- there’s cake if you want some.” Izuku offered, and Katsuki only squeezed tighter in response. “Mm, ’kay. I’m gonna- gonna set you down, alright?”

Though it was clear Katsuki didn’t wanna let go, he managed a short acknowledgement and allowed Izuku to crouch down and draw back, if only for a moment. However, Katsuki’s hand darted for Izuku’s own almost immediately after, and for as much as it hurt, Izuku didn’t let him take it. Ochako and Kirishima were still very much there, and for as many words as they had to say and as many things they wanted to do, they’d have to wait, if only a little longer.

That said, he didn’t exactly move away when Katsuki pressed up against him in the kitchen, and was having an admittedly hard time focussing on cutting and plating the cake for him. The whole day had been overwhelming in the best way possible, but to top it off with this?

He’s really here. I’m not making this up. Kacchan’s with me, and he… he’s not pulling away.

“Ah, here you go.” He handed the plate off with an awkward shake, and when Katsuki took it, Izuku knew he was staring at more than just the chocolate frosting. Those eyes were on his chest, neck, lips- worried, relieved, and yet so hungry all the same.

Yeah, that was when Izuku realized why he’d been told to wear what he was. If they’d known Katsuki was coming, if they realized what had happened between them, at least to some degree…

They set this up. They got Kacchan to come out here. They had me dress better for him. And I…

When he took a glance back at his friends, they only gave him a smile, a nod, and a thumbs up. Izuku flushed, hoped Katsuki wasn’t looking too hard at him at the moment, and prayed he didn’t look as red as he felt.

Oddly enough, though, Katsuki sat the plate down on the kitchen counter with some sort of strange look over his face before shoving his hands in his pockets.

“I’m gonna go wash my hands.” He started, and Izuku could’ve sworn there was more of a rush to his words than before. “The bathroom’s through your bedroom, right?”

“Oh, yeah.” Izuku confirmed, slightly confused. “But you can just use the kitchen sink, you kn–”

“Thanks!” Katsuki answered instead, bolting away before Izuku could finish. He still wasn’t sure what was going on with him and if Katsuki was really doing okay, but he didn’t question it.
I hope he doesn’t feel sick. Is he going to throw up? How is he really feeling right now?

As soon as Katsuki left the room, though, Izuku leaned back against the countertop and realized he was sweating more than he’d thought he was. It’d been so long- so long- and Izuku wasn’t sure how much Katsuki knew about his predicament and how much he’d heard of that last, desperate, pleading voicemail that he wished he could take back.

What if he’s disgusted, revolted, doesn’t want—

“Hey, Izuku?” Ochako interrupted his thoughts. “We’ll probably get going soon, if that’s alright.”

Huh?

“Wait, already?” He paused. “You don’t have to go. I- I like your company, you know. Just cause, um, he’s here doesn’t mean that—"

But before either of his friends could reply, a short, loud shout came blasting into the kitchen.

“Oi, Deku! Where are your damn towels!?"

Izuku’s eyes shot open, and he spun around towards the sound, mildly concerned “I, uh, I’ll get one!”

Are there really no towels in there…? I mean, it’s my bathroom, but if it was cleaned up with the rest of this place…

Yeah, he wasn’t up for thinking about this too hard, either.

Izuku grabbed the nearest hand towel in the kitchen, made his way over to the bathroom, and was about to set it on the floor in front of the door when suddenly, it flung out and smacked him straight in the nose. He stumbled back, hoped it wouldn’t bruise (he had no idea that a door could hurt that bad) but was promptly grabbed by his free wrist and yanked further into his own bathroom by what had to be Katsuki.

“Oh, shit. Sorry.” Katsuki swore, but then, bit his lip and faced Izuku with a look that held more feeling than he’d seen all night. “Or, well, I’d be more sorry if you weren’t such an absolute asshole!”

Wait, wha- what!?

“Kacchan, what are you—”

“What was that!?" Katsuki yelled, and Izuku could’ve sworn there were faint, all-too-telling red rings around his eyes. “That- that goddamn voicemail you sent! God, you scared the shit out of me…!”

Oh.

“I- I just—"

But there was no time to say another word when Katsuki crashed against his front again, fingers clawing into his shirt as his head buried itself against his chest. Katsuki was definitely crying now, but really, Izuku could hardly blame him. This was what he’d been afraid of for the past two weeks, and now, seeing it come to fruition like this…?

If you wanna leave, wanna end this, then why are you still holding on? I knew I shouldn’t have expected you to feel okay, but--
“You’re such a jerk…!” Katsuki choked. “Saying that you— that you don’t know what I see in you? Don’t you know how much I like you!? Why the hell do you think I keep doing shit with you? I— I missed you so, so damn much, asshole!”

And those words— just those words alone— were enough to spin everything on its head.

Wait, wait… Kacchan, you…?

It was clear as day that that was the truth, that that part of the voicemail had seemed to hurt Katsuki the most, but Izuku knew that this time there might be something he could do to remedy this. He wrapped his arms around Katsuki, fell back against the now-closed door, and just held him, held him.

“I thought about you all the time. Thought about coming back all the time.” He whispered. “If I could have called you, I would’ve. I tried so many times. I’m sorry. But I…”

Is it too much? Is it too much to say that word…?

He swallowed, fingers tightening around Katsuki’s back, as he felt the rapid, thrumming pulse of his heart in his chest. “Kacchan, I— really, I lo—”

A hand reached up, grabbed his chin, and yanked his face down into a fumbled, desperate, messy kiss before Izuku could finish talking. It probably ranked as one of the worst starts to any sort of making out he’d done, but for as much passion and want was heavy in the air, Izuku couldn’t help but follow along and let himself be dragged under into the messy clash of lips and teeth and spit they’d created. He was spun around for a moment, then gasped as Katsuki shoved him closer to the toilet and onto the the closed seat only seconds later. Katsuki threw himself onto his lap, diving back onto wet lips and tear-stained cheeks and pressing harder, closer, coming from nowhere but longing and whirlwind I missed you’s, you’re safe, I’m glad you’re here again.

This wasn’t a kiss. This wasn’t an attempt at romance or shoddy flirting or even an act of sexual desire. This— this was a silent, sobbing plea of hold me close, feel me close, I need you to know that I’m here.

And yet, it was Katsuki who pulled back first.

“Deku…” He started, name falling from his lips in a cracked, awkward, fumbled mess. “I— I just—” Katsuki paused, his glassy eyes staring up at sunken, hollow ones. “You’re really here… they— they told me you would be, but…”

Tears were dammed up behind crimson eyes, but there was a smile— yes, a smile— hidden beneath those wobbly lips.

“Dammit, Deku. You need a haircut.” He mumbled, and yet, didn’t break their steady gaze. “‘Cause I— I dunno if I wanna ask you to be my boyfriend if you’re growing out a damn mane.”

Wait— wait, did you just say—!

Izuku hadn’t heard the latter part of that sentence, his mind only zeroing in on that one word and hoping for the millionth time that day that this wasn’t a dream.

“Your—”

“My boyfriend.” Katsuki repeated, a little more confident this time. “What, got a problem with that?”
Are you—

“Are you trying to ask me out?!”

For whatever reason, Katsuki didn’t seem as though he expected that response. “I- uh, is it working?”

You’re not smooth. You’re really, really not smooth. But holy shit, Kacchan, I—

Izuku grabbed Katsuki’s hand, pulled it close, and held it against his chest, right over his heart.

Just like before, back at the beach that first time.

“Do you- do you feel that?” He whispered, and the red flush over Katsuki’s cheeks was enough for him to know answer. But he just seemed stunned instead, as if seeing this visceral, absolutely undeniable answer was enough for him.

“Yeah, and it’s… it’s so fast.” Katsuki finally got out, stunned. “So does that mean- that really means that—”

Izuku answered him with a kiss, slower and more careful than their last frenzy had been. Katsuki’s lips fell open, pliant for only a moment before learning the rhythm and doing his best to follow along. It wasn’t perfect, wasn’t great, but…

“Yeah.” Izuku said, leaning back just enough to cup Katsuki’s cheek with his free hand and run his thumb along the skin. “Yeah, it does.”

Katsuki’s face broke into some ridiculous, unbelieving look, but Izuku kissed it off of him before he could doubt his words any further.

I missed you.

“Kacchan, I…”

I want you.

“Deku, you’re such a—”

I love you.

“Whatever I am, I’m also your boyfriend now.” Izuku broke off into a short laugh, more out of the absolute ludicracy of this all more than anything. “Isn’t that right?”

He wasn’t sure he’d seen Katsuki smile so big in all the time he’d known him.

“Yeah, that’s… that’s right.” He swallowed. “But don’t think I’m about to let you off the hook for saying all that garbage on your voicemail. I’ll just have to make you see how much I see in you. If we’re gonna do this, then I’m- I’m gonna be the best damn boyfriend. And that means that you’re gonna see how much I like you, and that you…”

“Show you how much you mean to me?” Izuku finished, and Katsuki could only nod. “I will. But, honestly… if you’d asked me this before I left, would it really have been the same?”

“No. Not at all.” Katsuki shook his head. “Hell, I mean… I don’t think even I realized just how much I wanted you until you… y’know, weren’t there. And I just- I don’t wanna lose you again. I don’t wanna feel like you’re gonna forget me. I wanted to know more, y’know? ‘Cause when you
left, I wasn’t completely sure if you just liked me more as a friend, or if it really was… something greater. I didn’t know. Not until—” He paused, swallowed. “Not until that last damn voicemail.”

_Huh? “Wait, how did you—”_

“Right at the end.” Katsuki said, sucking in a breath. “When you said— well, when you got cut off while saying _I love you._”

This time, it was his turn to flush.

_Oh, shit. Shit, I did do that, didn’t I?_

“I- I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to—”

“But didn’t you?” Katsuki leaned in. “I’ve never taken you for much of a liar, Deku. Didn’t you mean it? Or am I the only one who can be fuckin’- fuckin’ _proud_ to say _I love you?_”

_We’re only just getting started, we have so much to learn, but I mean, yeah, I can’t deny it, and I definitely think that I- that I—_

Izuku wiped the gross, heavy tears from his face, and shook his head. “Kacchan- you’re not the only one.”

_We’ll learn on the way._

“I-I think I love you too.”

They kissed again, again, again, so natural and yet so rocky, but before they broke apart, there was a sharp knock at the bathroom door and a shout from the other side.

“Hey, lovebirds!” Ochako called. “We’re taking off. Not really in the mood to hear you guys make out any more. Have fun, but not too much fun! And Bakugou—” Katsuki froze in his lap, looking mildly concerned. “You better not forget to take the thing out of the box. Got it?”

Izuku could’ve sworn he heard Katsuki grumble under his breath. “Yeah, yeah!” He shouted. “Now leave us alone, jerks.”

_This is my time right now. No- our time._

But as Ochako and then Kirishima bid them farewell, things started to settle down between the two of them as well. Katsuki looked out of breath, lips red and maybe a little swollen, and Izuku was sure he probably didn’t look much better. And not only that, but—

“Kacchan, you…” Izuku paused, a nervous laugh slipping from his lips as he realized just where they were. “You asked me out, while- while I’m sitting on the _toilet._”

Katsuki appeared more than a little offended by Izuku’s disdain for his taste in venue, though. “What, it’s not like you have many _better_ places in your tiny-ass apartment I could’ve shut us into. And you _are_ kinda, you know, _tall._” He shifted a little bit on Izuku’s lap. “This was the best I could do, ‘kay?”

“So basically, what you’re saying is that _not only_ did you ask me out on the toilet, you _planned_ to ask me out on the toilet!” But Izuku couldn’t help the bright, warm smile piercing the corners of his cheeks, and kissed Katsuki again upon seeing his pout. “It’s okay. You’re still cute.” He snorted. “Even if you _suck_ at flirting.”
He only earned a grunt in reply to that, but after a moment, Katsuki wound up laying against Izuku’s chest again. “And you’re, still- I dunno, pretty hot. Even with your overgrown hair and scratchy-ass stubble.”

“Mm, do you mind?” Izuku grinned. “I’ll shave it off soon, don’t worry, but-”

“It’s- it’s fine.” Katsuki mumbled. “Just go get a haircut. But the stubble ain’t- I dunno, It’s not bad. You still look pretty hot.”

Izuku smiled, and as they got up from their unfortunate seat, kissed Katsuki on the forehead again. “Well I’m glad you don’t think your boyfriend is too bad, then. I’ll take pretty hot.”

How does this all feel so normal and just, so right?

Katsuki followed close behind, grabbing Izuku’s hand and not letting go. “Well, I don’t think I mind you thinkin’ I’m cute, either.” He said, starting to embrace it a little more. “But, uh… yeah, that thing Uravity mentioned? We should definitely go take care of that. Right now.”

Hm? What could be so urgent that it—

There was no thinking too hard right now, though, not when Katsuki took the lead and paraded him out into the small living room. On the table sat a plain, mid-sized, brown box, but inside—

No- you’ve gotta be—

Katsuki stepped back behind the box, a little sheepish, and pushed it closer. “Don’t think I’ve said it yet, but… happy birthday, Deku. We didn’t kill it.”

And right there, sitting in that box, was yet another reason for him to break down and cry that night.

My… my…

Trembling hands reached down, and carefully lifting the familiar yet fading plant from the box as Izuku stared at all the petals, new and old, at each and every bit of the flower that had followed him through his darkest times and into his brightest moments.

“You brought it back…” Izuku started, fat tears bursting in his eyes and rolling down his cheeks. “You really- oh my god, I thought for sure it was-”

“I didn’t kill it.” Katsuki grinned, arms crossed over his chest a little more triumphantly now. “Uravity would’ve. But don’t worry, I got this shit all taken care of.”

“Well, it’s still a little sad and limp, but—”

“Hey, not everyone has your magic-ass fingers!” Katsuki scowled. “I tried, okay?”

Magic… magic-ass fingers. You know, I’m just… not gonna think too hard about that.

He didn’t push the phrasing, but instead brought the plant back to the center of the new ones and into its rightful place, and felt every piece that had gone missing on that long, arduous mission start to go back together again.

It’s not perfect. We’re not perfect, but…

Katsuki came up beside him, took his hand, and together, they looked on at the small, new garden.
I’m… I haven’t been this happy in…

“Hey, I- just wanted to say I know it’s getting late, but…” Katsuki hesitated, though any ounce of former fear had left. “I’ll go if you want. I don’t mind. But, if you’d be open to it…”

Izuku knew where this was going before the words left Katsuki’s mouth.

“Could I stay the night?”

...is… is that really okay?

He couldn’t deny that he wanted to keep this going a little longer, wanted to fall asleep with Katsuki for as long as he could imagine. But the stigma, the hesitation, the fact that he was a hero with a reputation for staying single and a status to keep made him pause and think.

If it’s just for the night… if it’s for my birthday, if there’s nothing even remotely close to sex, then…

Izuku swallowed.

“Promise me one thing, okay?” He squeezed Katsuki’s hand and looked him full in the eye, not hiding anything from him right then and there. “And I’m serious- we aren’t having sex right now. Don’t try anything. That clear?”

His heart was pounding in his chest, but he wasn’t sure just why he was so nervous. Maybe because Katsuki had been the object of his fantasies for so long, and maybe because that was all the history he had with relationships, and that this one- this wasn’t one he wanted to screw up.

I’m gonna do this right. Or at least, more right. I’m not gonna let myself rush into something like this again, because I…

Katsuki just hugged him, nodded, and gave him nothing but wholehearted agreement.

I want to learn to really, truly love him. Not just through passing thoughts or fleeting feelings, but…

They left for the bedroom, and Katsuki grabbed the overnight backpack he’d brought along just in case before going in. It was easy enough to get changed into something a little more comfortable, but what struck him more than anything was how nervous yet excited Katsuki seemed about just being there beside him.

I wanna see him excited. Happy. It’s my favorite face on him.

With them both snug under the clean sheets, Izuku scooted a little closer, wrapped his arm around Katsuki, and pulled him close.

“S’good.” Katsuki murmured, though Izuku could’ve sworn he heard his boyfriend’s heart beating out of his chest. “You’re warm.”

“Warm, huh?”

Katsuki hummed a slight agreement. “Yeah. Warm. Like some… I dunno, bigass battery.”

He only pulled him closer at that, and Katsuki found a home beneath Izuku’s chin, fitting in like a missing puzzle piece.

“A battery…” Izuku repeated. “Well, in this position, I guess we are making a full circuit.”
Feet between feet, heads under heads. Yet all Izuku received for his comment was a slight knee to the balls and a groan at what he could admit was a pretty weak joke.

“Go to sleep, idiot.” Katsuki said, and there was a heavy amount of exhaustion in his voice too. “Talk more tomorrow.”

“Mm, okay.” He agreed, and hugged him close.

This birthday… my twenty-first… how can I ever remember last year’s disaster, or even all the shit that happened in the past couple months after all this…?

Katsuki’s eyes were closed, him having fallen asleep surprisingly fast and surprisingly easily. He didn’t want to move to wake him, but one last thought crossed his mind before he joined his boyfriend in sleep.

I’m allowed to say it. I can. It’s not weird, it’s not strange, cause he’s—

“...I love you, Kacchan.”

He’s my boyfriend.

And as he finally let himself relax, comfortable and happy for the first time in months, he could’ve sworn he heard something shift below him. Izuku’s heart jumped as Katsuki’s warm mouth moved against his chest, as at last, a short series of muffled words rose up to wish him a last goodnight.

“I love you, too.”

Chapter End Notes

ALL YALL NEED TO GO CHECK OUT THIS ART THAT WAS MADE FOR THIS FIC CAUSE IM STILL CRYIN
From @SixZero _, an AMAZING, HANDSOME, GORGEOUS DEKU, AND-
From my fantastic, amazing beta @aetherlites who not only helped me out on a schedule, but drew me another FUCKING BEAUTIFUL DEKU in addition to everything else he does. makin me cry real tears in this chilis tonight (and one more bonus, from my INCREDIBLE AND AMAZING FRIEND @Kuckoonut not directly related to this fic but an older!deku bdk piece that she gifted to me asjdklfads help me im not strong enough for all this)

That was a lot of screaming, but i hope you enjoyed this massive chapter, and my twitter is @aeronines!
A different kind of practice

Chapter Summary

this chapter only exists bc kacchan slept over :^)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Deku was a snorer.

Not in a bad way, per say, but it was there. Little grunts and snorts and mumbling, along with the occasional heavy rumble from deep within his throat. Not enough to annoy him, but enough for Katsuki to notice upon waking up. But with his head tucked just beneath Deku’s and pressed up against his chest, even harder to miss was the constant, near-therapeutic rhythm of his beating heart. It still hadn’t sunk in where he was- he’d woken up at some unknown hour of the morning, the closed window giving away nothing, and he had no interest in moving out of Deku’s arms to check the clock. Even so, did it matter? It wasn’t a school day, he was off, and his only plans were to be determined by whatever Deku- his boyfriend- wanted to do when he joined Katsuki in wakefulness.

My boyfriend.

Katsuki could almost laugh- it was ridiculous, really. Last night had to have been some wild dream, something he’d wake up to in the morning and realize he’d only imagined in Deku’s absence, some fantasy that could only exist in the depths of his mind.

He said yes.

But there was no denying the warmth from the arms hugging him close, nor the sound of each and every breath Deku took- low, gentle, and far more relaxed than he would’ve expected. Katsuki couldn’t see his face from where he lay, but he could imagine the content smile he had to be wearing with ease.

He’s… mine. This is real.

Katsuki couldn’t stop to think about just where he was, either, without the high possibility of crying for the tenth time in twenty-four hours. The first had been when he’d learned Deku was coming back- the second, when he was boxing up the flower to take with him. The third was when he was waiting to leave, and Camie had come up to his room to ask what was going on after he’d ran off from the common room in a sudden bout of emotion. On and on like that it’d gone, and yet, even couldn’t have expected that things were really going to go like- like this.

I said those- those damn words, and he said them back. That happened. That really, really happened.

And just as Katsuki was starting to shiver with the first warnings of another sob-fest, the body beside him shifted as a more vocal groan sounded above him. Shortly after came a long yawn, arms tightening around him, and Katsuki was smashed against his boyfriend’s- admittedly very nice- chest. He was aware enough to realize that Deku was probably mostly asleep, but since Katsuki did
have the desire to, y’know, breathe, he pushed back against Deku’s chest and tried to pry himself a little further out of the iron grip.

Problem was, though, that Deku was a pro hero. A hero with very nice, very firm muscles, and lots of them.

“...oi, Deku.” He started, straining against those strong, too-sexy arms. “Let- let go, ‘kay?”

His only response was another another loud snore, and Katsuki found himself starting to worry a little more than before.

“Oi, Deku!” Katsuki attempted once more, a little louder. “Get up!”

...and still, nothing.

_Dammit…!_

Katsuki hissed, pushed back as much as he could, and gave in.

“Deku!” He shouted, half-choked. “Get- get up!”

And in combination with a sharp smack against his chest, Deku jerked back and nearly kicked Katsuki in the crotch. He let out a sharp wheeze, rolling away from his boyfriend for just a moment before coughing and catching his breath again.

“Ah- oh, shit. You okay?” Deku asked, scooting a little closer to take a better look at Katsuki’s face.

“S’fine, fine.” Katsuki grunted. “But, geez… you tryin’ to kill me in your sleep? Really wanna off me that bad, huh?”

“Wait, what…?” Deku tilted his head, confused, but with him currently crouched over him and looking down with a face full of too much concern, nothing but fondness managed to rush through Katsuki again.

“Felt, uh… kinda like you were tryin’ to hug me to death. Wasn’t for long, but… if I stopped breathing, I think it would become more than just my problem.” A cheeky grin stretched itself over his face, and before Deku even gave him a proper apology, his boyfriend leaned down to kiss him. So easy, so natural, and Katsuki wondered how he’d gone so long between that first kiss and now.

_Last night was good, but it was different. Different than this, and different than the first time, too._

A part of him was glad that frantic, racing passion was gone for now. It’d almost been overwhelming, being away for so long only to come back to such desperate movement and longing and touch. While Deku’s hands had never really left him, it wasn’t as if he was any better himself. Yeah, he had friends that hugged him sometimes- namely Camie- but it wasn’t the same. Nothing was.

‘Cause Deku… Deku’s different.

It was only when Deku drew back, though, that he realized that Deku probably hadn’t had anyone in the disaster zone that was really there to talk to him- let alone hold him- for months.

Put in that light, it wasn’t hard to imagine why he’d needed every bit of contact he could get, and why he’d let Katsuki stay the night in the first place.

Now, though, he’d be a dead man to say that Deku didn’t honestly want him here. There was
something in his voice, in his eyes, in his touch that told Katsuki this was more than just a temporary thing. This wasn’t a one-time makeout session, nor was Katsuki just someone to warm his bed. He’d been around Deku long enough now to read him a bit better, and every part of him knew that there was nothing but raw truth in what they’d done.

*And now he’s my boyfriend. He’s really, really my boyfriend.*

“...sorry for nearly crushing you, Kacchan.” Deku finally said, pushing a stray hair from Katsuki’s face. “My bad.”

“Mm, s’all good.”

Katsuki was sure that if Camie could see him, she’d be howling from the honeyed look they shared right then.

*Ugh, god. I’m so fucking gay.*

“You hungry at all?” Deku asked, not moving. “I don’t mind cooking something up for breakfast.”

“Mm, yeah. I could go for something.” Katsuki grinned. “You got sausage on the menu?”

“Um, I don’t usually keep arou- wait.” He paused, face flushing a fierce red. “Kacchan!”

“You alright?” Katsuki continued, letting one hand trail down to rest on his thigh, far more amused by the shock over Deku’s face than he should’ve been. “You’re lookin’ a little red, Deku. Come down with a fever?”

Deku finally groaned, shook his head, and sighed. “You’re a little shit, Kacchan. And, please- keep it in your pants, alright?”

Katsuki raised an eyebrow. “Oh? So I don’t get anything this morning, either?”

*“Kacchan! Oh my god, I just got up.”* His boyfriend complained. “Look, can we- you know, talk about this later?” He paused. “And even if the circumstances were right, I don’t think you’d be getting any with that attitude.” But despite his words, a wry smile betrayed his feelings. “Come on. Let’s get some food, alright? It’s…” He twisted around to glance at the clock. “…already ten. Well, uh… yeah, that was a mistake.”

He watched as Deku carded a hand back through his own hair. “I’ve got some stuff I need to do today, so… can’t waste a whole lot of time, you know. And I’m assuming you don’t have classes?”

“It’s Saturday.”

“Right, right, it’s Saturday.” Deku mumbled, shaking his head. “…anyways. Let’s go.”

Katsuki followed his boyfriend out of bed and yet, even in the ratty t-shirt and pants he was wearing, *still* managed to look good. It was unfair, really, just how *nice* Deku was to look at, and how much nicer than even that he was to talk to.

*God, I’m lucky. So, so damn lucky.*

Though, another part of him wondered what he’d look like walking out of bed shirtless and covered in *him.* But that thought was shoved away for now as he switched his focus on the present, on Deku walking into the kitchen, not even baggy pants hiding just how *nice* his ass was.

*And now I actually get to appreciate it. Holy shit.*
“Oh! Hm, Ochako and Kirishima must’ve put away the food that was sitting out before they left… but, shit.” Deku frowned. “We don’t have anything except, uh, party leftovers. And I’ll be honest, I’m really not in the mood for cold pizza and cake right now.”

Deku shut the fridge door and leaned back against the counter with a sigh. “I’m sorry, I, uh… forgot that it’s been a while. Since I’ve been here. Guess groceries are another thing to add to the errand list today.”

“S’all good.” Katsuki shrugged. “Maybe we could go out for breakfast somewhere? I remember passing by some places on the way here.”

“I mean, in theory, yeah…” Deku pursed his lips. “I just… ugh, you know, I can’t really… well, we can’t really…”

It was with the sinking of Deku’s face that Katsuki’s heart fell too, bitter reality facing them in the light of the new day.

“I’m- I’m a pro hero, Kacchan…” It was clear that Deku didn’t wanna talk about this right now. “And- not that it’s a problem that you’re younger than me, no, I just… you know, I don’t wanna make you a potential target. I don’t wanna put you in danger, from villains or unwanted press. That’s… that’s all, really.”

I... yeah, I...

“I get it.” Katsuki swallowed. “It’s- it’s okay. I’m fine with just keeping this private.”

*I’d be able to defend myself even if I was a target, though. I’m not helpless.*

The look over Deku’s face sang of nothing but sincere apology and guilt, and for as much as it sucked, this was the reality of their situation.

“I’m- really, I’m-”

“You don’t have to apologize.” Katsuki interrupted. “Trust me. I mean, I kinda knew what I was getting into when I asked you out, so… don’t feel shitty, ‘kay?”

He finished his words with a hug, arms wrapped so tight around Deku’s waist that he wouldn’t be able to deny the truth in them. Thankfully, though, he reciprocated.

“…you’re really sweet, Kacchan.” Deku murmured, then with another, quieter whisper- “...god, I’m lucky…”

*You’re lucky? Pfft. I’m the lucky one, asshole.*

“I love you, even if you’re an apologetic dumbass.”

“Mm, yeah…” Deku paused. “And I love you, even if you’re a little shit sometimes.”

Katsuki grinned, and only served to further that assumption with a slight drag of his hands down to Deku’s ass, and dared to give it a sharp squeeze before yanking his hands back up and relishing in the estranged sound Deku made return.

“Kacchan!”

“What, sorry?”
Deku just groaned, buried his head in Katsuki’s shoulder, and mumbled some muffled nonsense in response. But when he pulled back and stepped away, Katsuki could’ve sworn Deku was a little redder and maybe, just maybe, a bit hard.

“You’re pushing it, Kacchan.” Deku warned, though his movements said otherwise. “Ugh, god, it’s a good thing I like you.”

He couldn’t manage much more than a shrug before leaning back against the counter. “You have a nice ass. And I trust I can say that now without it being weird?”

“Yeah, well, it’s not like I’m going around saying that you have a nice chest.”

...holy shit.

And it was only a moment later that Deku seemed to realize what had just come out of his mouth, and yep. There was the blush, face red as his freckles.

“I- shit, I didn’t mean-” He sputtered, eyes wide. “I just- it’s- it’s right there, you know!? It’s not like I was looking at your-”

“S’okay.” Katsuki smirked. “I figured that was the case.”

And now I have confirmation. Perfect.

Deku buried his head in his hands, visibly flustered. “Kacchan, you- you make me feel things. And I, um, can’t really act on those things right now, you know? I don’t wanna go into detail right now, maybe later, but, just… don’t be expecting sex anytime soon. It’s not happening.” He let out some sort of short laugh. “Hell, we haven’t even been together for a whole day. We can talk more later, but, uh… I guess I don’t mind the comments so much, but keep it to a minimum. Okay?”

Somewhere in Deku’s face, Katsuki could see that there was something more, something deeper bothering him about all this. And while the jokes and comments were always fun, making his brand-new boyfriend upset on their first day together wasn’t something he particularly wanted to do.

Shit.

“My bad.” Katsuki awkwardly rubbed the back of his head, not pushing the topic any further. “So, uh, did you have an idea of what to do for breakfast?”

His boyfriend nodded. “Would you be alright if I ran down to the cafe down the street and just picked up some coffee and breakfast food? I’ll get you whatever you want.”

“That sounds good.” Katsuki hummed. “It can be some sort of pseudo cafe date, then.”

Deku managed a laugh and a small smile, but Katsuki could tell there was still some sort of sadness lingering in them. “Yeah, I… I guess.”

He… he really doesn’t wanna hide, does he?

But even so, Deku gave him another kiss before heading back into his bedroom to get changed into something more reasonable for going out. The feelings were real in both directions, and for as much fun as he had teasing Deku, he’d rather see him happy instead.

In time, I guess… but, agh, it’s frustrating.

He was well aware of his friend’s active sex lives, and had heard rumors of other students at school
getting it on on a regular basis. It wasn’t as if he was dying for sex, but…

*It’d be nice. It’d be so much better than fucking myself on that damn dildo, even if it is pretty good. But if Deku says no, then… I can’t just ignore that.*

Besides, like he’d said, it was their first day together. If all went well, they’d have all the time in the world to enjoy each other. But first steps had to come first. Katsuki wasn’t in this whole thing for a fuckbuddy, after all.

*I asked him out cause I like him. Cause I love him. Cause I wanna get to know him more and not see him slip away from me while I had a chance.*

“All right, know what you want?” Deku asked when he stepped out of his room, wearing some long-sleeved shirt and a hat to hide some of his curls. Still cute, even if his choice in fashion was wildly more abysmal than it had been the night before.

“Maybe just a latte?” Katsuki furrowed his brow. “Uh… do they have, like, breakfast sandwiches or anything?”

“Yeah, they do. Eggs, cheese, and… your choice of meat.” Deku sighed. “Let me guess, you want–”

“Bacon.”

Deku stared at him and raised an eyebrow, but didn’t question it. “…allright, then. Bacon it is. Anything else?”

“That’s good for me, unless they’ve got like, fruit or something.” Katsuki thought aloud. “Gotta stay a little healthy, y’know?”

“Oh, trust me. I know. I graduated from U.A. too, remember?” His boyfriend said, a little lighter now. “Okay. Well, I’ll be back soon, and just… don’t burn the place down, I guess?”

Katsuki nodded, and with that, Deku was gone.

Now, only the question of what to do until he got back remained.

*I guess I’ll get changed. I can shower when I get back to the dorms, but I brought clothes over for a reason. No need to look like I just rolled out of bed when I know I can do a little better.*

He walked back to Deku’s room, and before he reached for his clothes, noticed his phone on the nightstand.

*I… I should tell Camie about all this, shouldn’t I? She’d had to have known that I slept over, but to what extent…?*

That in mind, he redirected himself towards his phone before grabbing it and hopping back on the bed, getting into a nice position among the rumpled sheets before flipping open the camera and taking a few quick selfies. It’d be better if Deku was there, but… eh. He’d take what he could get. With that, he popped up his texts with Camie and sent the picture with no context, knowing she’d understand without any. Then, Katsuki dropped his phone on the bed and went back to grab his clothes from his backpack and changed.

It wasn’t as if he’d brought anything nice, no, just a black t-shirt and slightly baggy pants- even so, it was marginally better looking than his shitty night clothes. Quickly, he ran to the bathroom to brush his teeth and (what he could of) his hair, used the toilet, and came back to see his phone ringing at a
hundred miles a minute. There was no question who it was, really— but, he figured he’d grace his friend with a response, and picked up the phone to answer what had to be Camie’s ten million questions about absolutely everything that had gone on between them last night.

Even so, he wasn’t sure anything could’ve prepared him for the ear-splitting screech that came next.

“BAKUGOU KATSUKI, YOU BETTER PICK UP RIGHT—”

He yanked the phone away from his head, sweating, and only managed to yell back a strangled I’M HERE before even daring to put it close to his head again. Thankfully, that seemed to quell Camie’s tone a little bit, and with a silent prayer that his eardrums would stay intact, Katsuki tried again.

“Bakugou, holy shit, you better tell me what—” Camie started, only to stop mid-sentence. “You asked him out, right? What did he say?”

“Geez, I don’t know.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Does it say anything that I slept with him last night? Did you really not get enough from that picture?”

“Well, I can assume things, but it’s not like I knew if he had a second bedroom or something.” She replied. “But that’s! Not! Important! The important thing here is that Pro Hero- fucking Pro Hero Valiant— said yes to you asking him out, right?”

“Yeah. He did.” Katsuki said, and just hearing that out loud again cemented it even further that Deku, of all people, was his boyfriend.

But he’s so much more than just… Valiant. He’s him, too.

“And you claim you slept with him too. Hm…” Camie paused for a moment. “You didn’t have sex. But you slept in his place? In his bed?”

“I- I didn’t tell you we didn’t have sex, how’d you—”

“Babe, you’d be a lot more marked up if you had.” She told him. “And please. You, getting one of the hottest, most well-known pro hero bachelors to stick his dick in you on your first night over? Yeah, um, I don’t think so.”

Katsuki groaned. “Why? Why do you have so little faith in me after I’ve already gotten this far?”

“Hm, yeah, you’re right. I should have more.” Camie admitted. “Because Valiant isn’t any smoother than you are. God, what a perfect couple.”

“Oi, who cares how smooth I am! We- we’re doin’ this now! Dating!”

“...yeah, like I said. Perfect.” She laughed. “So, aside from sleeping with him, what else? Isn’t he at home if you’re there right now?”

Katsuki sighed, leaning back onto the headboard. “He went to go pick up breakfast. There’s no food here ‘cause he’s been gone, y’know. I asked him if he wanted to go out together, but…”

I wish I could go out with him for real. Take him on real dates outside. We’ve hidden our meetings from other people for this long, but... I hate this feeling. Like I have to hide who I’m dating. Like-like us being together is some sort of problem.

He’d thought it’d be easier to deal with, but even after only one day, the effect of their situation was starting to hurt.
“...we, uh, can’t really make this public. Deku’s too nervous, I think.”

“Mm, yeah. I’d imagine the tabloids would be all over him- and you- if they saw just you two together more than once.” She paused. “You knew what you were getting into, right? You told me that if he said yes, this was probably going to happen?”

“I know, I know. Doesn’t mean I have to like it.” He kicked the sheets at his feet. “I… shit, Camie. I… I love him. A lot.”

“Is this supposed to be new news, or...?”

“No, I just- I get to say that he’s my boyfriend now. I’m- I’m happy, okay?”

I’m… I’m really, really happy.

“Sap.”

“Oh, shut up.”

But there was an undeniable warmth in his chest despite the fact that this was all so new. Katsuki didn’t know what it took to be a good boyfriend, let alone the best boyfriend, but dammit, he’d learn on the way.

“...hm, you know, I think I might have an idea.” Camie started after a long moment. “I saw some signs up for this, uh, pop-up amusement park that’s going to be happening next week? Maybe you and Valiant could go together?”

“No, no, that’s still out in pub—”

“Let me finish, Baku.” Her voice was as certain as ever. “Maybe, you and Valiant- and me and Momo- could go, and Valiant could be our chaperone. Hm? How about that?”

...a chaperone?

“Wait, are you saying like, him taking us on some sort of field trip or something?” Katsuki scoffed, incredulous. “Holy fuck, I’m not about to make my boyfriend be some sort of babysitter. That’s- that’s ridiculous…!”

There was a long sigh from the other end, and Katsuki could picture the exasperation on Camie’s face from just that sound. “But don’t you get it? I’m just saying that that could be an excuse. You know, we show up as a group, ride rides together, and you and Valiant can hold hands on the ferris wheel or something. As long as you keep that stuff on the low-down, it’s a perfectly valid reason! I swear, one day you’ll appreciate my genius.”

Katsuki still couldn’t get his head around the god-awful idea of Deku parading him and his friends around the park like a party of grade-schoolers and their teacher, and even if Deku heard about this absurdity, there was no way- absolutely no way he’d agree to it!

But before he could come up with a decent response, there was a rattle of the door at the front, and Katsuki heard Deku’s voice echo in from the doorway to the bedroom.

“I’m back! Food’s here, and it’s still hot.” Deku called out, cheerful and in higher spirits than before. “Where’d you go, Kacchan?”

He hopped off the bed and turned towards the doorway, yelling an I’m coming! as he went.
“Make sure to ask him about this!” Camie insisted. “Don’t be a wimp!”

Katsuki bit his lip and retorted with a sharp sneer. “Oi, I ain’t a–!”

“Oh, were you talking to a friend?” Deku interrupted. “Sorry, I don’t wanna interrupt you.”

“No, no, she’s just being ridiculous.” Katsuki muttered, ending the call with a jab of his thumb. “Tryin’ to- y’know, come up with stupid plans.”

He shoved his phone back in his pocket and went to the sink to wash up, but Deku’s curiosity only seemed to grow stronger. “Oh, plans? Are you going out somewhere today?”

“No, not that.” Katsuki grumbled. “She just- agh. Get a load of this.” He dried off his hands and circled back around to the barstools, plopping down in the seat next to Deku. “She was talking about some pop-up amusement park, yeah? And she said- she said that you should be some chaperone for me and her and her girlfriend, just so that we can get out for a bit together. I mean, come on. It’s stupid, ain’t–”

“Oh, that’s not a bad idea.” Deku contemplated, and Katsuki nearly shit his pants right then and there. “It’s an excuse to be out with a group of students that aren’t more deeply connected to me, and we could spend time together outside of here. The media probably wouldn’t think too much of it as long as we keep it on the down-low.”

Katsuki’s jaw dropped, stunned as Deku reiterated everything Camie had just told him.

You... you've gotta be...

“Did you hang up on your friend?” Deku asked, more interested than Katsuki would’ve liked. “Or, uh, do you have any more information on this event?”

He gripped the phone tighter in his hand, trying to force a smile up on his face- or at least, something that looked a little less like a constipated rendition of murderous intent.

“I- I can ask her later.” Katsuki grit out, trying to calm down and pretend that Camie hadn’t just gone and arranged what might be their first date of sorts. “But you- you really don’t mind that?”

Deku shrugged. “I mean, it’s definitely not ideal, but it’s something. Right?”

It... I guess it is something, huh. Dammit, Camie.

“...right.” He relented. “Yeah, I guess. But shit, this food smells good.” Katsuki said, attempting to divert the conversation.

“I know, right?” Deku agreed, and just the simple cheer in his voice was enough to make something swell in Katsuki’s chest. “When I walked in, the employees recognized me, and, ah... well, they wouldn’t let me pay. I think they threw something else in there, too. I still tipped them, but it’s just kinda crazy to see that people were actually aware that I was gone, and that... there was still a place for me when I got back.”

There was an unusual waver on the end of Deku’s voice, and for as much as Katsuki had tried to research and see what all Deku had been going through out on that mission, nothing hit harder than watching his boyfriend in the here and now. He was quieter, maybe a little more reserved, but just the simple touch from him wanting and needing to hold Katsuki and just know that he was there held so much more weight than just words.
He… he must’ve been really lonely out there. I mean, he said as much in that voicemail, but…

Witnessing it up close was so, so different.

“Well, ah, sorry about that.” Deku said, a bit of a nervous twinge in his voice. “Don’t wanna get down today, so… right! Breakfast.”

He pushed Katsuki’s latte towards him, the cup warm between his hands. Next was the sandwich, just as he’d ordered, and he soon discovered that Deku hadn’t skimmed on the fruit, either.

“Oh, are these pastries…?” He said, a bit wonder-struck as he pulled a couple of chocolate croissants out of the bag along with the rest of the food. “I didn’t think they’d remember my usual order, but this- god, that’s sweet.”

“Why wouldn’t they remember?” Katsuki paused, and wound his free hand around Deku’s. “You never left my mind when you were out there.”

“Kacchan, stop it…!” Deku protested, but only squeezed back tighter. “You- you’re different, okay?”

“Mm, different?” He pulled his boyfriend’s hand to his face, and with a knowing smirk, kissed the back of his palm. “I’d hope so.”

That gorgeous red was back on Deku’s face, and god. Katsuki almost wished it wasn’t such a good color on him. “We- we should probably eat, I don’t want the food to get cold, and I… have some errands I should run today…”

“Well, I just had a thought.” He started, slow and soft, and Katsuki could nearly feel Deku’s eyes fixating on him. “Maybe with this time we could, y’know… reschedule that thing you mentioned a while back…?”

He could tell Deku was confused for a moment, but it was only seconds later that realization crossed over his face, mouth falling into a small o shape.

“You mean… back when we were texting, after that first kiss…?” His boyfriend whispered, and Katsuki could’ve sworn there was a hint of a smile on his face. “I… well, um…”

Quieter now, yet so much more in the moment, Deku swallowed. “I… I guess one day at home won’t hurt, if I means I can spend a little more time with you.”

Yes…!

Katsuki had to keep from launching into a dramatic fist-pump, and instead kept his giddy energy under wraps. “Your hair is a little long, but I don’t mind having it around for another day.”

And just like that, Deku’s focus fell back on him and not on the shit he’d been through in the past couple months. Katsuki was making plans- he couldn’t erase everything that’d happened, not at all, but he could be a distraction.

Something for both you and me to enjoy, eh?

But he let go of Deku’s hand for the time being, went back to enjoying his not-so-sausage-filled breakfast, and made a point to tease his boyfriend for getting the same thing as him. This right here was nice. Easy. Comfortable. And Katsuki was going to do his damn best to keep it that way.
When they finished breakfast, though, the first thing he got was a request.

“If we’re gonna do this, go brush your teeth.” Deku said, standing up and starting to clear the trash from the table. “I’m going to, too. For as much as I like you, kissing someone with breakfast breath isn’t exactly the most *enjoyable* experience.”

“Is this lesson one, then?” Katsuki grinned, but received more than he’d expected in return. Deku’s eyes were sharper, more knowing, and all at once, Katsuki remembered that he *definitely* had a leg up on him in terms of experience.

However, Deku just shrugged, smiled, and let him wonder.

“I guess it is if you’d like it to be. And, oh! Mints are handy to carry around, too.”

*I already do that, but… hm. Should try and remember to use them more, I guess.*

That said, those simple instructions got his heart rate going, and it wasn’t long before Katsuki found himself back in the bathroom while brushing his teeth like a madman.

*I’m gonna make this great. I’m gonna learn. I’m gonna be the best damn boyfriend and the best damn kisser there is.*

Once he finished, Katsuki spun around, only to nearly run face-first into Deku walking *into* the bathroom, looking a little more startled than he probably should’ve.

“Sorry, sorry!” Deku sputtered, taking a step back so that Katsuki could leave. “I, ah- well. It is a little cramped in here, isn’t it?”

“Mm, yeah. Probably wasn’t made for two people though, was it?” He offered, only to receive a nod in response.

“Nope, it’s, ah… definitely a bachelor pad. I mean, I never planned on dating again, or at least…” He hesitated. “Well, I… I wanna get better with relationships.”

*…did something happen before…?*

“Anyways! I’ll be done in a minute, and I think I’m gonna shave this stubble too.”

“Even though it’s kinda hot?”

“Hot? No, no. This makes me look *old*, Kacchan.” Deku frowned. “I just turned twenty-one! I’m still young. Let me feel young.”

“Fine, fine. I guess it was a little scratchy, anyways.”

“Exactly. Now shoo, and let me clean up real quick.”

It did wind up being a fairly quick cleanup in the end, and after only a few minutes, Deku joined him again in his bedroom, Katsuki having plopped back down on the bed for the time being. He wasn’t sure exactly *what* it was Deku wanted to do, if he was being honest- yeah, the whole premise of *kissing practice* sounded fantastic, but the execution?

There, he’d follow Deku’s lead.

*Not just will- I want to follow his lead. I wanna learn to do it good, then do it better!*
But Deku didn’t come and sit next to him- instead, he was met with his boyfriend’s arms crossed loosely over his chest and a slight look of contemplation in his eyes. Katsuki wasn’t sure where he wanted to do this, after all, and while the bed seemed as good as anything else to him, Deku seemed to be thinking a little differently.

“Mm, alright.” Deku said after a moment, arms dropping to his sides. “Couch?”

“Why not here?” Comparatively, the two locations didn’t seem all that much different, but…

“If- if I get back in that bed with you, I’m not going to want to leave.” His boyfriend admitted. “We can watch something in the living room if you get bored, too. Plus, I like to think my couch is fairly comfortable.”

Put that way, it made a lot of sense- not that Katsuki would particularly mind staying in bed with Deku all day. “Well, I haven’t gotten a chance to check in a while, but I think I trust your judgement.”

“Perfect.” And there it was, that slight dip in Deku’s tone that sent Katsuki’s heart racing and anticipating rising. “Then, I guess that’d make this lesson number two- join me in the other room?”

Katsuki nodded and got back to his feet. “Course. And, shit... you don’t have to phrase everything like a question, you know.”

Deku shrugged, sat down, and patted the open spot on the couch next to him. “I know I don’t. I guess it’s more like… I’m trying to be sure I’m not crossing any boundaries, you know? The last thing I wanna do is make you feel pressured or uncomfortable.”

“I- no, I don’t feel-”

“It’s more of a precaution.” He continued as Katsuki sat down, an arm wrapping around his shoulders. “Asking, and giving you room to back out- it’s important. I- I know this all new and exciting, for both you and for me, but… that doesn’t mean I wanna rush into things.”

A gentle, questioning, and yet oh-so confident hand came up to cup his chin before trailing up to his cheek, thumb slowly stroking itself over his face.

“So, that said… here’s lesson three.” Deku murmured, eyes illuminated with a soft light and warming the deepest parts of Katsuki’s soul. “Can I kiss you, Kacchan?”

Asking for permission…? I mean, I guess if that’s important to him, then… it’d be a weird thing to argue with.

“Yeah- yeah.” He breathed, a slight, heated tingle trickling down his spine. “Please. Kiss me.”

Last night, they’d ran into this faster than they probably should’ve. High-strung emotions and desperate, longing action had overtaken anything that could have come first, but even so- there’d been no doubt in the air, no doubt in either of their movements that they hadn’t wanted it. With the atmosphere now a little cooler and tinged only with flickering sparks of excitement and curiosity, it was easy to see that things were different.

Different… not bad, not at all, just… different.

Now, Katsuki wanted to know Deku more, wanted to figure out how to love him as best as he could. And with the first touch of lips on lips and the small, unfettered gasp that came next, Katsuki knew Deku was in this all the way.
This is real, and... I'm his, too.

“Kacchan… mm, follow me… oh—! That's a little hard, but…”

“S’it good? Hng, like- like–”

“You’re good, you’re good, just… yeah, yeah, relax just like that...”

Something low, slow, and deep shuddered through Deku's whole body, so all-encompassing that Katsuki could feel it through his lips alone. Not that he was any better, really- a part of him was glad he couldn’t hear the awkward grunts and whimpers that were probably coming from his mouth. It was hard enough to not just revert to pure instinct and go harder, to not bite at Deku’s mouth, to not suck down as rough as he could to make sure he knew that Katsuki was there and wasn’t going anywhere this time.

But for as much as that sort of passion and bursting energy was fun, there was something equally attractive in the soft, slow fire that Deku offered, something almost sensual about the way that he took his time with Katsuki's lips, kissing, caressing and making him feel so damn cared for and loved all at once. If last night was a bonfire, today held the embers- alight enough to warm and comfort, but not so much that it overwhelmed.

Deku... feels good, so good...

“Perfect... oh, you’re already learning, Kacchan…! Do you… hah, feels good, doesn’t it…?”

“It’d feel better if you stopped talking so much, dumbass… if you wanna kiss so bad, then kiss me.”

“Right, right...”

*Keep going further, further, just a little at a time...*

Yet after just a moment later, Katsuki pulled back, breathless, and let his hand run over to Deku’s lap with the barest hint of a question. Words weren’t needed here, though- his boyfriend nodded, eyes lidded and cheeks flushed as Katsuki maneuvered onto his lap. Knees straddled either side of Deku’s legs as he leaned in close, so much more level at this face-to-face than they’d been before. Here it was easy to tilt his head and meet Deku with all the gentle force he'd offered earlier, drawing from every bit of newly learned skill he could. Each whisper, each moan, each hint of pliancy Deku reacted with made every touch sear further against his skin, over and over and over again.

*S’nice when you’re leading, but it’s not so bad when I take control, too.*

His boyfriend’s hands were the next to show their agreement, wandering up to Katsuki’s waist and holding it gently, not daring to touch under the thin fabric but getting close enough to tease. Katsuki had never imagined something as slow and as goddamn simple as this could be all it took to send him deep into the moment, but with someone like Deku on the other side, anything was possible.

Then, with a little more confidence came one more request- low, soft, and all-too promising.

“Kacchan... are you up for one more lesson...?”

It was all he could do to nod, agree, to sink further and further into what incredible sensation and comfort Deku had already offered.

“Mhm. Yeah, I... I’m ready.”
“Perfect, perfect…” The praise swelled through him as Deku’s grip got a little tighter, a little surer, and before he knew it, those lips were on his again, harder and deeper than before. “Then this one… number four, I like to call tongue.”

There was no good reaction to Deku pressing further into his mouth, strong and warm and showing off all the strength Katsuki had seen in him before, utterly confident and so, so damn hot.

_Holy shit… holy shit, how can I even- it feels good, so good, but it might be- might be a little—_  

Katsuki pulled back, panting and trying to catch his breath, and thankfully, Deku seemed to understand.

...too much, for now.

A hand pressed itself to Katsuki’s back, holding him against Deku’s chest and stroking in wide, rhythmic circles as he calmed down, slowing his still-racing heart.

_It’s not that I don’t want that, it was- it was really good, just… too many feelings. More than I think I can handle._

“Kacchan, you feeling okay?” He was hugged tighter, but not too tight- just enough so that he could bury his face into the crook of Deku’s neck and breathe, _breathe._

“Y-Yeah… just, uh, give me a second, and I’ll…” His voice trailed off with a waver, faltering at the realization that he was unsure of how to describe the jumpiness in his veins and the palpitations in his heart.

“No rush.” Deku promised, reassuring. “I’m glad you stopped… see, even for this, I wanna be sure that you’re feeling comfortable.” He paused. “No- not even for this, but _especially_ for this.”

Katsuki couldn’t remember the last time he’d felt safer than right there on Deku’s couch, enveloped in every bit of his boyfriend.

_He’s got me. He cares about me._

“But I can get you some water? You might be a bit dehydrated, too.”

Yeah, yeah, that sounds…

He managed a quiet agreement, and after just a moment longer, was moved from a Deku’s lap and onto the couch. Katsuki wasn’t totally sure why he was still shaking a little, confused as to whether it was from excitement, pleasure, or just sheer overstimulation. It was more than a little embarrassing to get so flustered just from a little _kissing_, but at the same time, this was all new. Hell, Deku was the only one he’d ever kissed, and a part of him felt like that gap in experience was showing even more now. The more he got to thinking about it, the more new insecurities began to arise. He was too new at this- Deku probably wouldn’t want someone who couldn’t keep up, but at the same time, other memories began to clash with those assumptions. After all, not _once_ had Deku been discouraged or frustrated with his level of experience- quite the opposite, when he thought about it.

Deku was a teacher. A leader. Someone who’d look at Katsuki with the same level of respect that he viewed him with. And as Deku returned back to the couch with a glass of water and a blanket, it was hard to say there was any use in thinking that his _boyfriend_ didn’t think enough of him.

_He’s- I don’t think he’s looking at me with pity. Not here, not now._
The blanket fell around his shoulders, cup placed in his hands. He really had been dehydrated—turns out, making out as much as they had in the short time they’d spent together took more of a toll than he’d expected. Maybe that was where the issue was coming from, some combination of sensation and elation overloading his body and shutting it down in an attempt at protection.

But that— that was okay.

“Wanna watch something for a bit?” Deku asked. “We- we don’t have to be kissing all the time. Breaks are good.”

Already he was feeling better hearing that, and with a nod, Deku turned the TV on to find that the All Might film they’d had on last time Katsuki had been over was still in the DVD player— one more sign of the apartment’s recent vacancy. It was good, though— Katsuki found himself up against Deku’s side, held close just as they’d done before.

Is this what love is? Just—being happy together? Being comfortable like this with him?

Katsuki still wasn’t totally sure, but he wasn’t sure he’d mind if that was the case.

It’d been ten when they’d woken up, and two when Katsuki remembered to check the clock again. They’d been on that couch for a while, yet he had no reason to consult the complaints department. Just being near Deku like this after so long was nice, and the fingers trailing along his back, arms, and legs only made it more intimate than before. There was a side of him emerging that he usually kept down, vulnerable and so much more trusting than usual. After all, Deku had yet to do him wrong, and Katsuki had no reason to believe that’d change in the future.

Time soon turned to hunger, though, and it was at the first sounds of rumbling stomachs that they pried themselves from their spot on the couch and left for the kitchen. Leftovers were brought out this time, and soon after shoving them in the microwave, Katsuki found himself reaching for Deku again, kissing him again, again, half-ignoring the blaring of the kitchen timer when it went off. The meal didn’t last long either, though— as soon as they were finished, Deku hefted him up onto the kitchen counter and pulled him down for another kiss, or maybe two, three, four— it didn’t matter, really. It was him, and he was here, and for now, things…

Things are okay, aren’t they? This… this is good.

And just as Deku had put off his laundry list of things to do till the next day, Katsuki found himself shoving his work to be done to a little later. He was a straight-A student, top of the class, carrying himself at peak performance and never letting that position waver. But yeah, even he needed a break like this sometimes.

Hm, wonder how much I’ll tell Camie later… if she’ll wanna listen to me talk about Deku’s lips, the gorgeous sound he makes when I kiss them just right, the way that he talks that makes me feel like I’m the only one that matters, and the way that my words can turn him into a desperate, needy mess faster than any pro hero should…

Counter-kisses turned back into couch makeouts, the rest of the afternoon consumed with exploration and revelation of what they wanted and what they didn’t. Easy, slow, and far more electrifying than Katsuki had ever imagined a simple makeout session could be.

“Like it when you kiss me, Kacchan… mm, yeah, right there, that’s the spot…”

“Don’t mind if you go harder, y’know, when your teeth were biting down on my— hng, shit… y-yeah, just like that…”
“Your lips are gonna be all red and swollen when you go back home, though… you sure you don’t mind?”

“I would’ve stopped you a while back if I did, Deku.”

That said, as soon as he got back to his dorm, there was no doubt that Katsuki would need at least a couple rounds with his dildo- and from what he’d noticed after sliding a little too close to Deku’s crotch on more than one occasion, he wouldn’t be the only one looking for more relief.

“It’s… getting a little late. I think it’s almost six? Maybe seven…? I don’t wanna keep you here too late…”

“Oi, don’t worry about the time. ‘Kay? Focus on me. I’m here right now. I’ll- I’ll leave when I’m ready.”

“I know, I know, but you- you must have schoolwork, right?”

“Did most of it before I came by yesterday.” Katsuki shut him up with another kiss. “I’m not an idiot.”

*I mean, I’ve got some stuff to do, but…*

Deku stopped him from coming close again, somewhat of a shadow falling over his face. “Even so, I can’t… I mean, we had most of the leftovers for lunch, and I love having you here, really, but I… look, I don’t wanna be tempted to let you stay over again.”

...shit.

Okay, yeah, he couldn’t deny that he’d been trying to think of the best way to ask Deku if they could sleep together again. He had class tomorrow, but the back of his mind had been up in arms with formulating a plan of action- wake up early, catch the train, get to school early enough to give himself time to finish the homework he’d left out, then shower at some point and go to class. Katsuki had already resigned himself to a day of exhaustion tomorrow if he could follow through with those plans for the next day, but just hearing that admission from Deku was making him rethink things.

*I don’t wanna make him uncomfortable either. I- I mean, he has stuff to do tomorrow, and it’s probably not cool to take up all of his time like that.*

The worn look in Deku’s eyes and the scars marking up his arms were enough to remind Katsuki that yeah, he was a hero with a job, and that today was certainly an exception.

This is his break, and I’m already damn lucky to get to spend it with him. Don’t push it.

“I… fine.” Katsuki mumbled. “When do you want me to go…?”

“You don’t have to act like I’m kicking you out.” Deku rolled his eyes. “We can make plans again, okay? I like spending time with you, you know.”

“Hm, yeah, I’d hope so after all this.”

“Oh my god, Kacchan. You really are a little shit sometimes.”

“A little shit you spent all day sucking face with.”

“Hey, you don’t have to put it so crudely! I mean, it’s not like it’s a bad face, but you just- ugh, Kacchan, you’re lucky I like- no, love– you.”
Deku pulled him into a tight hug with a small laugh, and for as much as he wanted to stay, leaving like this couldn’t be that bad, either.

“Alright, alright.” Katsuki murmured, relenting. “I’ll take off. Get dinner at the dorms, and… get my homework done.”

His boyfriend’s eyes were blown wide, shock clear on his face. “Didn’t you just say you’d finished it?”

“Yeah, most of it.”

“Most! Look, school—”

“School comes first. I know. I’m not- not gonna start slacking off now.” Katsuki sighed. “At least my internship has been good so far. I wish I’d get some more time in the field, but… eh, can’t win ‘em all. Uravity and Red Riot ain’t bad, though.”

“Mm, yeah. Guess I’ll have to ask them at some point how they feel about you too, huh?”

Katsuki pouted. “Hey. No using your friendship powers for info. I’m doing great, mind you.”

“Ah, yeah…” Deku let out a small smile. “I’m sure you are, Kacchan. Just messing around.”

They fell quiet after that, Katsuki relaxing back into Deku’s arms for the time that he could. This was their time, and their time alone- the media was out in the field, friends and family filling the other gaps in their social group, but for now—

*I’ll enjoy it while it lasts.*

“…hey, Kacchan…?” Deku started, quiet. “Just… thank you. For coming over and seeing me. It- it really means more than you know.”

Shit, Deku…

“I- I’m just happy to see you again.” Katsuki swallowed. “Seriously. And, uh… thanks. For letting me in.”

There was another soft laugh, and when Katsuki leaned back to look Deku in the face again, he could’ve sworn there was a subtle glisten of budding tears in his eyes. But he didn’t get much time to look, not before his boyfriend wiped a hand across his face and got to his feet.

“Okay. Okay, you need to get going before I start crying again.” Deku said, taking Katsuki’s hand and pulling him to his feet. “Go get your stuff together, and… meet me by the door, I guess?”

Katsuki nodded, went back towards the bedroom to retrieve what little he’d brought, and hurried back out afterwards to give Deku one last goodbye before taking off. Before Deku could even say a word, Katsuki had latched onto him, arms around his waist and head pressed against his chest.

“…love you.” He said, voice muffled by the fabric up against his mouth. “Love you a whole fuckin’ lot.”

“Love you too.” Deku murmured, kissing the top of his head before Katsuki drew back to stand on his toes and do it for real. Chaste, but just as meaningful as everything else that day. “And I’d say you passed today’s lessons with flying colors- but, would you like one more for a little extra credit?”

*Huh? More?*
“Just… be safe going home. Don’t have to text me or anything when you get there, but… take care of yourself.” Deku flashed him a bright smile, though there was undoubtedly a bit of sadness behind it. “I’m sure you’ll excel at this, too.”

...no, nevermind, I’m not gonna leave…!

But instead, he tried to force that same smile, forcing down the bubbles in his chest despite every part of him screaming to just stay, stay…!

I can’t, I can’t, I...

“...I will.” He finally said, hoping the words didn’t shake as much as he thought they did. “And you take care too. I’ll- yeah, I’ll text you later.”

It was more than they’d had in months, and saying goodbye again felt horrible after their last. Katsuki didn’t want to live with the fear that Deku would be gone again when he woke up, left with only a broken voicemail and promises of an unknown next time, next time.

Something different was in the air this time, though.

“We can make plans, too.” Deku nodded. “And- oh, yeah, could you ask your friend for more information about that amusement park coming up? I’m definitely interested, even if it isn’t… well, ideal.”

“Yeah, yeah, sure she’d be more than happy to help.” Katsuki snorted. “Just for you. I’ll get back with info on that later.”

“Right, right… okay.”

They were at a standstill- neither one wanted to open the door, to finally bring this day of absolute bliss to an end.

I… I’ll do it.

But just as Katsuki reached for the door, Deku did too, a scarred hand wrapping around Katsuki’s smaller one.

“One more?” He asked, barely a whisper, and it was all Katsuki could do to comply.

One more.

That one more could’ve gone on for seconds, minutes, hours- but as soon as Deku realized that it was probably too much for a goodbye kiss, he backed off, a twinge of pain creasing his features.

“I’ll see you soon, Kacchan.” He said, pulling open the door behind them in a flurry. “I- I love you.”

If Katsuki hadn’t known Deku was a pro hero beforehand, he’d never guess he was one from the trembling of his hands and the utter red of his cheeks.

He’s not good with goodbyes, is he…? I guess I’m not much better, but…

“I love you too.” He said one last time, and stepped out the door. “I’ll be safe.”

“I- yeah, yeah.” Deku swallowed. “I-I trust that you will. But if you need me to walk with you to the station, um—”
“I’m fine.” Katsuki insisted, and managed a small smile. “Okay?”

“...okay.”

The discomfort was far more clear on Deku’s face than before, but he didn’t protest or try to draw things out again. Katsuki grabbed the knob on the other side, took one last glance at his boyfriend through the crack, and hoped that it was a smile he saw before he pushed it shut.

I’ll be back soon, hopefully. Even if it’s with something as shitty as Camie’s chaperone date, it’s still me getting to see you.

He stood outside the door for what might’ve been too long, squeezing the strap of his backpack in his hand so hard it hurt, and after a minute- maybe two, three- stepped back, and didn’t turn around. Tried not to think about the possibility of Deku crying behind that door or the chance that he’d open it and come running back, not wanting to leave Katsuki again.

But he made it down the stairs, all the way to the train station, and still- nothing. No frantic calls, texts, or in-person fumbles.

He’s not going to leave right away. Deku’s not going anywhere this time. Not for a while, at least.

When he got on the train, though, something did appear on his phone. Katsuki pulled it up with mild curiosity once when they left the station, opened up his conversations, and nearly choked.

[Camie] BOY

[Camie] youve been out there all DAY

[Camie] did you mention the park to him? Bc im abt to be hella disappointed if u didnt

[Camie] baku

[Camie] its been 2hrs since that last message

[Camie] r u finally getting laid????

[Camie] mmm todo keeps asking abt u

[Camie] wants to know if ur still training tonight

[Camie] dunno why hes asking me like, youve got a phone too? use?? it??

[Camie] ughhhh u better tell me everything when you get back u ass

Katsuki had to hold back a laugh when he saw all her messages, but couldn’t find it in him to be surprised. He didn’t bother to reply, and figured that an in-person conversation, no matter how awkward or painful it’d be, would be an improvement from the barrage of questions he was sure he’d get over text. What was new, though, was his other unread from Todoroki, who for whatever reason, decided to use his phone for something other than checking the weather.

[Todoroki] I heard you got laid


Katsuki groaned, buried his head in his hands, and wasn’t sure how to say no, asshole without A) seeming like a loser, or B) raising more questions about what they’d been doing. With him, Katsuki
settled for a clean and simple stfu, and shoved his phone away for the rest of the trip.

Getting back to the school was easy enough, but just as he got off the train, Katsuki took out his phone again as he walked through the gates and off to his dorm. He didn’t expect anything back from what limited responses he’d given, but to his surprise, did see something new appear when he turned it on.

...Deku? Did something happen?

He popped open his messages, a bit nervous as he let his eyes flicker back up to the top, and had to do everything in his power not to cry when he read down.

[Deku] hey i forgot to tell you but

[Deku] last night was. um. the best ive slept in years i think

[Deku] so. thank you

[Deku] im sorry if thats weird but i just

[Deku] i

[Deku] i love you

[Deku] thank you for everything today<3

Katsuki wasn’t sure what to say- wasn’t sure how to express I wish I could be there with you right now, or even just I’m sorry I had to go without sounding too upset. He wanted to be there- wanted to be held, wanted to feel the steady beat of Deku’s heart in each breath he took, wanted to fall asleep with him every night and wake up to his smile and his laugh every morning. God, it sounded gay when he thought about it, but it wasn’t as if there was anything false about that statement. Despite that, he forced his fingers up to the keyboard while still walking in the dark, and tried to piece together something cohesive.

[Katsuki] yeah I rlly liked sleeping with u too

[Katsuki] excited to do it again

[Katsuki] also uh

[Katsuki] I think I completed your extra credit. Thanks for the lessons:) 

[Katsuki] and ily too<3

He shoved the phone back in his pocket, thanked the sun for having already dipped beneath the horizon, and let himself cry. Not bad tears, no, but ones of plain and simple catharsis.

I’m… yeah.

Deku’s- his boyfriend’s- face crossed his mind one last time- warm, gentle, and absolutely radiant.

I’m happy.

Chapter End Notes
idk how this hit almost 10k. i really dont. But i hope yall enjoyed!!! Im sorry i havent been able to get around to answering comments, but i read over all of them and hslkfj lays down all yall are too sweet cries

thank u so much to my beta @aetherlite for being the real mvp, and my twitter is @aeronines!
“Oh my god, you guys made it back early from your internship for once!”

Katsuki rolled his eyes, mildly disappointed by Camie’s greeting but not terribly surprised, either. “Yeah, yeah. Well, we got our shit outta the way early, and the streets were pretty well set up for patrols tonight, so…”

“What he’s saying is that he went through his tasks extra fast today so that he could get back tonight and rest up for tomorrow.” Yaoyorozu finished, shooting Katsuki a knowing look as they shut the dormitory door behind them. “Call me crazy, but I think someone’s a little excited.”

“That so, hm?” Camie grinned, walking with them as they wandered towards the common room. “I guess you really have come around, then.”

Oh, come on.

“Look. Deku didn’t think it was an awful idea, so what’s the worst that could happen?” He grumbled, despite the anticipation running through his veins. “What time are we leaving for the amusement park tomorrow? Nine in the morning?”

They found an empty spot in the common room, sat down, and relaxed back on the couch before Camie provided an answer.

“Yes! Nine. Valiant’s meeting us there, right?” She asked again, despite Katsuki having laid out the plan at least half a dozen times by now.

“Yeah, yeah. He is.” His fingers rapped against his leg, too fast to be normal. “He said that he’s gonna try and pull some sort of civilian disguise or whatever together, so with any luck, we won’t be bothered by the media.”

Katsuki couldn’t say he wasn’t nervous. Despite having technically been dating for over two weeks, it was still nerve-wracking and exhilarating to think about the very prospect of being with his boyfriend in public. About the idea that they were going on an actual date even though the situation wasn’t the most ideal. A part of him figured that Deku had to be desperate- after all, who agrees to fake-chaperone for a group of students just to hang out with his partner? Deku was a special case for sure, but a part of that willingness to take those opportunities just to spend time with Katsuki made his heart swell and his pulse race.

I get to see him again. I get to kiss him again.

He tried not to think too hard about the circumstances.
“I sincerely hope that that’s the case, too.” Yaoyorozu sighed. “I’m sure we’ll be okay, but it’s just- I don’t know, it’s hard to think that we’re accompanying you so that you and your celebrity boyfriend can go on a date.”

“Hey hey, we’ll have fun too!” Camie smiled, a hint of warmth that only showed up when she was talking to her girlfriend rising in her voice. “It’s not like we’re just going there to be bodyguards or anything- we can ride the rides, play the games, and win the prizes! It’ll be great!”

“And pay for overpriced festival food?”

“And pay for overpriced festival food!”

Katsuki could only manage a short huff at their antics, pulling out his phone as his friends prattled on about what they’d be doing tomorrow. He’d sent Deku a text earlier with the hope that they’d be able to call tonight, but after a quick check at its status, realized his boyfriend hadn’t even seen it yet.

I bet he’s a part of the reason I got to go home early. Damn you, covering everyone’s shit.

That said, Katsuki couldn’t dismiss the fact that Deku had been taking every patrol and every incident in stride– even on the news, he’d never seen him look so damn alive.

He’s been happy. I know he’s been happy. Every time I talk to him he’s goddamn giddy.

A small, crooked smile bent over his own face though as he looked through their past messages, and despite his teasing, Katsuki was in no place to admit he was any better. Nights filled with long, wandering phone call conversations and days where Deku showed up at Uravity and Red Riot’s agency just to see him had Katsuki floating on cloud nine.

“By the way, is Todoroki coming with us? He’s been showing up later than usual back home. Do you know if his internship has just been running late?” Yaoyorozu asked, a perfectly honest question despite Camie’s half-choked laugh in response.

“Running late?” She giggled, Katsuki’s interest suddenly piqued. “Well from what I’ve seen, I’d say there’s good reason to believe he’s found another source of extra practice.”

Huh? Extra practice?

“Did he find a new sparring partner?” Katsuki asked, slightly confused. “He… I guess we have been practicing a little less together than usual.”

“Well. It’s just a guess, but you know how he’s been kinda irritated every time someone brings up his internship?” Camie started, voice dipping to a whisper as the three leaned in together. “He’s been more, I dunno, chipper? For the past week or two.” She paused, and Katsuki knew the small, knowing smirk on her face all too well at this point. “Rumor has it our boy’s been up to something with his internship partner– you know, hanging out and spending time with someone outside of our class. I hear it’s some 2-B kid with a quirk that’s good during sex? Like, he makes vibrations or something. Wouldn’t blame Todoroki if he decided he wanted to take the guy for a spin.”

...wait, what?

“Well, it’s not like he’s getting any.” Katsuki scoffed. “And hell. If he was, he’d tell us. Right?”

That last statement had both Camie and Yaoyorozu’s eyes fixed straight on him, and with a slight
swallow, Katsuki felt a bit of nervousness bubble up in his gut.

“Tell us, huh?” Camie raised an eyebrow. “Yeah, tell us. Just like someone didn’t tell us he was going to be staying the night at a certain boyfriend’s place.”

“Oi, but s’not like I got laid.” Katsuki mumbled, though he wasn’t sure if that defense was really going to be winning him any favors. “I– I mean, that was all just spur-of-the-moment, my overnight bag was just in case, and—”

“Bakugou, you didn’t tell any of us you’d even brought an overnight bag.” Yaoyorozu narrowed her eyes. “I, for one, was more than a little panicked. At least Todoroki has been making a point to come home at a reasonable hour every night.”

Katsuki groaned, buried his head in his hands, and realized that he really should’ve known better at this point than to even start on the topic of basic communication. “Yeah, yeah, whatever. I don’t care who the hell Todoroki’s screwing around with anyways.” He sighed, pulled back, and stared at the phone in his hands. “Well. I’m going to get some sleep, and I’ll see you fucks tomorrow.”

He made a point of standing up at that last statement, and turned his back just as the last call of nine o’clock! fell on his ears. Deku probably wouldn’t respond to his texts till later, anyways, and Katsuki still had to clean up and get some rest.

But that night, just as he crawled into bed, a better-late-than-never response showed up on his phone.

[Deku] ah, im sorry for the late reply again. but thanks for telling me to have a good day!
[Deku] it wasn’t bad, but. tomorrow will be better
[Deku] im gonna go wash up and go to bed. I know you’re probably already asleep, but
[Deku] sleep well, kacchan. i love you:)
[Deku] and im looking forward to riding the ferris wheel tomorrow together!!
[Deku] haha

Katsuki could read the slight bit of nervousness in just those texts at this point. It wasn’t uncommon for Deku to not have a chance to look at his phone till late at night, leading to lots of apologetic texts and Katsuki telling him over and over again that he didn’t mind, that he understood.

He’s a hero. And I know he’s doing his damn best to handle work and this relationship we have.

He managed a reply with a short good night, love u too in return, and fell asleep with the promise of a new day, a new date, and a new chance for them to spend time together.

I’ll see you in the morning, Deku.

That morning came faster than he’d expected. It’d been a dreamless night, yet Katsuki still wound up vaulting out of bed half an hour before his alarm went off with every nerve on end. Not only was this the first outside date they’d be going on, it would be the first time Deku met his friends.

And somehow, it was only as he was throwing his clothes on (carefully, of course– dress was important) that he realized that his friends included Camie.

...oh, no.
Yeah, getting past that thought was the first hurdle of the day- he couldn’t be getting cold feet at this point, couldn’t cancel on Deku and beg to try something else after they’d already made plans and he’d likely asked for this day off in particular.

Please, don’t embarrass me too bad today. Deku needs to see me with some sense of dignity.

Katsuki managed to haul himself downstairs at eight-thirty, made himself a quick breakfast and chugged a cup of coffee, and waited for his friends to join him. It wasn’t like Yaoyorozu to be late, and Camie knew when to take things seriously. He’d assumed this was one of those times, but the clock had just ticked past the forty-five marker with no word from them.

Come on, come on… gah, I won’t be the one holding up our date today!

And finally, five minutes before they were supposed to leave, his friends came wandering into the common room dressed and ready.

“ Took you guys long enough.” Katsuki huffed, foot tapping the ground faster than it should’ve. “Come on, we gotta go. Deku’s gonna beat us there at this rate, and I ain’t about to make myself look bad on the first damn date.”

“Oh, we’ll be just fine, Baku.” Camie assured him. “We were just looking at the park map a little more. Y’know, figuring out where to go, what to do, areas where you guys can duck away for a bit…”

“…is that really your excuse?” Yaoyorozu flushed. “Well, um. That might be part of it, but…” She hesitated, taking a swift glance over at her girlfriend. “We were busy. Just had some, ah, business to take care of before leaving. We had breakfast earlier, got showered and all that, and, well…”

Camie groaned. “Babe, if you’re gonna drag it out like that, just say we had a little sex. It’s all over your face.”

That had both Katsuki and Yaoyorozu feeling more than a little awkward, but at this point, he was past caring. “I don’t care, let’s– let’s just go. You’re here, on time, and I’m not really in the mood to listen to you guys talk about your sex life!”

“What, don’t like being reminded that you haven’t been getting any?”

Not in the mood. Really, really not in the mood.

Katsuki sincerely hoped that this wasn’t a forecast for the rest of the day.

“Well, what part of I don’t care do you not understand?” Katsuki scowled. “We’re leaving. I’m not gonna be late.”

“Okay, loverboy. We’re going.” Camie brushed past him and to the door, earning nothing but a hiss from Katsuki at the usage of that damn nickname. “Wouldn’t wanna piss your hero boyfriend off. After all, who knows what kind of punishment we’d get for getting in your way?”

“Oh my god, do you ever shut up!?”

They left after Katsuki’s retort, and somehow still made it to train station in time. He was thankful enough that it was crowded- his friends couldn’t bother him as easily, and he could be left to scour the internet for ‘first date dos-and-don’ts’ for what had to be the fifth time that week.

I won’t screw this up. We’re already dating, which takes some of the pressure off, but I still have to
leave a good impression. I can’t– no, I won’t– be a shitty boyfriend. I’m gonna do good. We’re gonna have fun. Everything’s gonna be fine! Just! Fine!

He couldn’t pretend he wasn’t sweating, though.

Why am I so nervous? I shouldn’t be nervous.

Katsuki got off the train upon reaching their stop, half-sick to his stomach and trying his best to shove some of the anticipation away. This was just Deku. He knew Deku. This wasn’t training, wasn’t showing up at his place after the sun had come down, wasn’t sleeping in his goddamn bed.

So why, why?

Why am I so damn nervous?

“…Baku?”

All at once, there was a hand on his shoulder and a comforting voice near his ear. Katsuki found himself quickly steered to a more isolated part of the area, familiar faces near him amidst the crowd. Yaoyorozu and Camie looked on, shared a glance between each other, then turned back towards him.

“Look, I’m fine, I just…” He started, arms hugged close to his chest as the words trailed off.

“It’s understandable that you’re nervous.” Yaoyorozu started, nothing but raw honesty in her voice. “Even if you both know each other pretty well, this is new, so… you can talk to us if you ever need to, okay?”

Camie echoed her sentiments, and Katsuki took in a deep breath before releasing it slowly again– in, out, in, out.

...it’s going to be okay. I’m going to be okay, and we– we’re going to have a good time.

“Okay.” He finally got out, some of the anxieties starting to settle. “I will. Let’s, uh…” Katsuki checked his phone- they’d gotten there in time, the park only a few minute’s walk from the station. “Let’s get going. Once I see him again, I’ll– I’ll be fine.”

Looking nervous or uncomfortable was a big no-no, so Katsuki swallowed, dragged a hand across his face, and took one last moment to relax before they left the station.

In the same place as all that anxiety, though, was the excitement. Not everything keeping his nerves on end was negative, just new. But the weather was nice, there were only a few clouds in the sky, and he was getting to see his boyfriend again.

“He said he’d meet us outside the gate, right…?” Yaoyorozu asked, slightly confused. “I mean, the entrance is just up ahead, and yet…”

The park gate was bordered by a few trees, a trickling morning crowd, and at first glance, no Deku. Admittedly, he was a little bewildered– he’d expected Deku to be on time, and Katsuki wasn’t exactly early. He frowned, nearly went to call him, but then noticed a new figure closer to the treeline hunched over and scanning the area beneath a hat. It was hard to see in the shaded area, but Katsuki would be hard-pressed to mistake that physique at this point.

Nerd.
“Deku’s just being a deku.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “C’mon, over here.”

And sure enough, just as they approached the trees, the figure—clearly Deku, this close—snapped to attention and smiled.

“Kacchan!” He greeted, stepping a little further from the shadows. He’d dressed about as simple as they came, wearing only a long-sleeved white shirt, a black baseball cap, and basic jeans. Katsuki knew why he’d bothered with the sleeves despite it starting to grow warm outside, but from the sudden confusion in Camie’s face, remembered that not everyone knew why he’d be doing this.

“...aren’t you hot?” She started, leaning in a little closer. “Oof, buddy. You’re gonna sweat up a storm through that shirt. Why’d you choose white?”

...oh, no. Please, don’t start off the introductions like this.

Deku looked more than a little startled, and quite possibly a bit concerned. “I– uh, I mean, it’s not like it’s gray. White’s usually fine? I think I’d burn up in black?”

“Just ignore her.” Katsuki groaned, taking a step closer to his boyfriend. “You look good. Did you get a nice shower after work last night?”

At that, Deku’s attention was back on him. “Yeah, it was good! Fell asleep around one, got up at like… six… got here an hour early, and—”

“I’m sorry, you got here an hour early!”

His boyfriend paled, managing a small, awkward laugh before rubbing the back of his head. “Well, uh, I thought I was gonna be late, so I set up a bunch of alarms beforehand and wound up getting here before you guys? I’d planned to show up closer to nine-thirty, and it’s ten now… hah, well. I’m here now, right?”

Oh my god, you’re a dumbass.

“Deku, I swear. You’re so fucking—” Cute. Endearing. “—stupid.”

Even so, Katsuki couldn’t stop himself from reaching out towards Deku in a small attempt to just touch him—hold his hand, hug him, tug at his sleeve—only to be quickly shaken off instead.

“Kacchan, we…” He trailed off, and Katsuki wished he didn’t have to be the one to see the sadness buried deep in every crease on his face. The message came across, though. They’d both known what the situation was, that getting through it might be trickier than it should be, but had come to a reluctant acceptance.

Gotta take what I can get. What we can get.

“I– I know.” Katsuki sighed, and shoved his hands in his pockets. “I guess we should get going? We already bought tickets, but I wasn’t sure if you’d gotten around to—”

“I bought them earlier!” Deku interrupted. “While I was waiting around for you guys. The people working the ticket booth didn’t even recognize me until I paid, so at the very least, we might not get stopped much for pictures?”

...stopped for... pictures. Pictures with my boyfriend.

Bitterness swelled up inside him, and for as much as Katsuki kept trying to remind himself that
having fans was just a part of the job, something about the fact that he could hardly touch Deku while they were out when strangers were allowed to get close and take whatever stupid selfies they wanted hurt more than it should’ve.

“Hopefully not.” He said, the words coming out with more of a hiss than he’d expected. “If you’ve got tickets, then let’s go. No point in staying around here any longer, huh?”

Don’t be irritable. Don’t be pissy. We’re gonna have a good time.

“Right.” Deku nodded, and the smile he offered in return managed lift Katsuki’s spirits a bit. “And really, Kacchan… just being able to see you right now is more than enough. It’s been a long week.”

Katsuki couldn’t help the heat rising to his cheeks and tried to pin the source on the warm weather. Deku really did look good, even if it was simple. White cotton clung to his arms, his chest, and while there was definitely the matter of him dressing to cover his scars, Katsuki would be hard-pressed to believe he wasn’t trying to show off his body at least a little.

“I— yeah, I’m glad to see you too—”

“How long are you two gonna stand there and make googly eyes at each other!” Camie interrupted with a long, loud groan. “C’mon, Valiant. Kacchan might not listen to us all the time, but he’ll probably get moving if you tell him to.”

“Hey, don’t call me—”

“Huh? Oh, shit, wait up.” Deku started, just as Camie and Yaoyorozu began to turn to leave. “Kacchan, uh, what’s her name?”

“...dipshit.”

Deku narrowed his eyes, but Katsuki’s wonderful friends did stop before going too far out. “You two— and I’m gonna assume your name isn’t dipshit, but, uh… could you avoid calling me Valiant here?” Katsuki watched as his hand went back up to rub at the back of his head again, fidgeting in his hair. “Just, um. Midoriya is fine.”

Yaoyorozu looked more than a little puzzled at that. “...I’m sorry, but is your name really… green?”

And yet, there was some part of Katsuki that couldn’t help but grin upon watching his boyfriend groan, nod, and let out a long sigh. “There— there is nothing wrong with my name.”

Camie crossed her arms over her chest, looking him up and down. “Sure, Deku.”

“Hey!”

The shout came in unison, and yet, Katsuki couldn’t help but feel that that defensiveness was exactly what Camie had been aiming for. He huffed, turned away, and motioned for Deku to follow.

“She doesn’t get to call you Deku.” Katsuki muttered. “Told you she was a dipshit.”

“I feel bad calling her a dipshit when I still don’t know either of their names, but…” Deku caught up to him, walking side by side. “Hearing that felt really weird. God. Yeah. You’re the only one allowed to call me that.”

A bit of smugness welled up in his chest at the thought that yeah, he was the only one allowed to call Deku Deku. No matter how many fans or the press or the paparazzi tried to get close, Deku was his.
It was my name for him before, and it’s my name for him now.

“That’s cute.” Katsuki grinned, resisting the urge to grab his hand and pull him close as they approached the gate. “I guess I don’t mind you calling me Kacchan, either.”

“God, I’d hope not.” Deku scoffed. “I mean, not that I mind Katsuki, but something about calling you Kacchan is just… I dunno. I like the thought that it’s my nickname for you, I guess.”

“Hm. Possessive, much?”

“Oh, shut it. I know you like it, and don’t act like you’re any better.” Deku said with a light elbow to Katsuki’s side. “Okay– gotta go acquaintances-mode for a minute. Act casual.”

_Treating this like it’s some sort of stealth mission. God, that’s cute._

But he played along, didn’t bite back at Camie and Yaoyorozu when they entered the gates alongside him, stayed far enough away from Deku to appear friendly, but not too friendly. But after getting through, they slipped off to a nearby bench to reconvene and make plans.

“Mm, ‘kay.” Camie started, leading the conversation. “So. Deku. There’s—”

“I told you not to call me that!”

“...Midoriya. Fine.” She rolled her eyes. “God, you two are in deep. But anyways, like I was saying, there’s a few kinda closed-in attractions. One– the fun house. Two– the food stalls. Three—”

“I’m not sure the food stalls count as an attrac—”

“Kacchan, could you _please_ tell your boyfriend to stop interrupting me!?”

“Hey, don’t go calling me—!”

“Don’t call him—!”

“All of you, be _quiet!_”

Yaoyorozu crossed her arms over her chest, giving all three of them the sternest look Katsuki had seen in a while. “I’m not about to stay out here if this is what my day is going to look like. Camie.” She turned to her girlfriend, who looked mildly more embarrassed than Katsuki usually saw her. “Don’t antagonize them.”

Next– “Bakugou, you know she’s just teasing you.”

And lastly– “Midoriya, relax. This is just the kind of person she is. And I’m very, very sorry that this is your first impression of, um… us.”

The mood had quickly been subdued, but at the same time, became awkward just as fast. _This is what I was afraid of. I… I don’t want him to start thinking any less of me for this, don’t want him to think I’m weird or stupid or whatever just cause of—_

“I, uh… never introduced myself, did I.” Camie started, and Katsuki was honestly shocked to hear the apology in her words as she turned back towards Deku. “I’m Camie. And Baku, um. He’s said a lot about you. Good things.”

...thank god.
“And I’m Yaoyorozu.” She said. “It’s nice to see you back in town and healthy again, Midoriya. I know firsthand just how much Bakugou has been missing you.”

But the look Katsuki was met with from her only moments later told him exactly what she was referring to– a reminder, and quite possibly a threat to behave.

*Damn dildo. Almost isn’t worth it.*

Katsuki shoved that thought away just about as soon as it occurred, though, remembering the countless nights he’d spent with it up his ass.

*...okay, maybe it is worth it.*

Either way, it wouldn’t serve him well to have Deku find out on their day out what he’d been up to for months. Yaoyorozu held an unfortunate advantage over his head, and while she usually remained respectful and calm, Katsuki knew firsthand what kind of power she could really exert.

Deku remained blissfully ignorant of any underlying connotations, though, and shook the hand she’d stretched out to him. “It’s nice to meet you. Kacchan’s told me… uh. Not much about you guys, but what he has said has been fairly positive? And, um, I’m Midoriya. I dunno how much I need to tell you, but, ah…” He pulled his hand back, a wobbly smile appearing over his lips. “I care a lot about Kacchan, and I’m gonna do everything I can to be a good boyfriend to him. He… he deserves the world.”

*...holy shit, why are you like this.*

“Such a damn sap.” Katsuki groaned. “Make out a few times and this is what happens, huh? S’good I like you too, dumbass.”

“Mm, but I thought it was more than just like you.” Deku teased, and Katsuki wished more than anything to kiss the grin off his face right then and there. “What was it you said? Come on, it’s just a few words. Can’t be all that hard to get out.”

Katsuki burned, sure his face had flushed a fierce red at that question. “Thought we were supposed to be in acquaintance-mode. What happened to that, huh?”

He regretted saying that as soon as the words left his mouth, though, a part of Deku’s smile falling. “Ah… right. Sorry.”

*Dammit.*

But before he could recover from that blunder, Yaoyorozu called their attention back to a map of the park again. There were a few places they could go, and with the few hours they had to have fun, they’d try their best to make the most of it. After a minute of deliberation, the pros-and-cons of each location talked through, they settled on the rollercoaster to start with. The trip over was easy enough– despite Deku receiving a few stares and whispers, nobody went out of their way to yell at him or try and get his attention.

Still, though– Katsuki couldn’t have predicted how much it’d hurt to hear his boyfriend talked about as some piece of property. He didn’t wanna hear what strangers thought of his ass, nor about how well-built and handsome he was. Even so, almost worse were the murmurs he heard about Deku’s job. Despite his reputation getting big boost after spending so many months at the disaster site, there was still lingering gossip surrounding his physical ability to be a decent hero.

“...hey, is that Valiant? He’s back on duty in town, right?”
“Oh… oh my god, I think it is… but I heard he’s only back because he had to be pulled off of duty from the disaster site early, though.”

“Wait, really? Did something happen?”

“…not sure, but it could be he just wasn’t stable enough. Like back at that first accident he had… you know, where he fucked up because he was too worn out…”

“…oh, shit, that’s right… I hope he’s getting better, but…”

_How can he ignore this? Doesn’t he notice…?_

Deku didn’t showed a single sign of caring, though, and with some sort of sickening realization, Katsuki realized that this is what his life- what his _every day_ had to be like. He’d been told about it back months ago, when they’d been in Deku’s apartment for the first time, but seeing it up close and personal was a whole different story.

_Stop talking about him. Just– just leave him alone…!

“Hey– Kacchan, we’re about there.” Deku said, interrupting his thoughts. “Let’s get in line.”

A hand gripped his shoulder, squeezing it tight and fast– a clear sign to _stop listening, keep walking_. Deku must’ve seen the frustration building on his face, but when he let go, Katsuki caught him shoving his hands back in his pockets, not one bit of skin showing.

_I… how can he live like this?

Katsuki’s stomach twisted, and not for the first time, he was starting to think this date– if it could even be called that– was a bad idea.

“Ooh, two to a row. Think I could get you to sit next to me, babe?” Camie asked as they got into line, Yaoyorozu only rolling her eyes and nodding. “Hell yeah. Thanks for still putting up with me!”

“Oh, knock it off. I would’ve left a while back if I didn’t like you.”

“Aw, right back at you! I love ya.”

“Yes, yes, I love you too.”

And while Katsuki had never felt much but glad that his friends were together and able to be happy with each other, watching Yaoyorozu slip her hand into Camie’s own right then did nothing but twist his stomach into tight, poisonous knots.

_I don’t wanna be jealous. I won’t be jealous. I– I just…_

Deku was standing right next to him, and for as much as they knew– they _both_ knew– that they had to keep up the secrecy, it hurt.

_Why can’t I just touch you…? Why, why…!?

But just as the line moved up, Katsuki felt something against his back- warm, flat, and a little shakier that he was used to, but still…

Deku wouldn’t meet his eyes, but kept his hand pressed against the small of Katsuki’s back and traced small, gentle circles around it. It could hardly be called a romantic gesture of any kind, but just the touch was enough to send tingling sparks through Katsuki’s veins, bouncing up and down his
spine. There was a little bit of a crowd, but with as close together as the line was, just that simple motion wouldn’t– shouldn’t– be enough to tick anyone off as to what they were.

_I slept in his bed. I made out with him on his couch for hours. I told him I loved him, and he said it back._

Katsuki took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, slowly. Now wasn’t the time for kissing or overdramatic romantic gestures, anyways. They were at a mid-grade amusement park, not some fancy restaurant or ballroom dance.

_Just cause we can’t show it doesn’t mean he doesn’t want me. It’s just… society sucking. People looking too deep into stuff they shouldn’t. Shitty gossip columns and tabloids trying to ruin reputations._

A small, guilty part of him thought back to so many months ago, to the folder he’d filed away on his computer that was home to nothing but mildly lewd pictures of Deku he’d manage to scrape together from the pages they had to avoid now. For as much as Deku believed that he’d always seen him as more than just an object, Katsuki knew that he’d done some stuff that definitely fell into the realm of _oh-no-he’s-hot_ rather than _I’m getting off to your personality,_ but at the very least, he’d always attempted to make an effort to know Deku for Deku.

_And since he knows that, since he trusts me and lets me in, I… I know that what we’ve got is something more._

“Feels good.” He said after a moment, loud enough to hear but not so much that the people around them could. “Thanks.”

“Of course.” Deku murmured, scooting a little closer. “I… I like spending time with you, Kacchan. And– oh! We’re next.”

Sure enough, they were the next ones to be seated. Katsuki ran ahead, Deku in the seat next to him while Camie and Yaoyorozu slid into the row behind them. After buckling up (Deku checked Katsuki’s seatbelt twice to make sure it was correctly attached) they were left alone but for the few people surrounding them. There were still whispers, yes, but it didn’t hurt nearly as bad as before.

_It’s just us. We’re doing fine._


“Something?”

“Yeah. Something.”

The sheer curiosity and childlike excitement in Deku’s voice was enough to up his mood again, and before he knew it, his boyfriend’s hand slipped into his lap and poked at Katsuki’s own.

“Can I hold it…?” Deku asked, quieter this time. “I like your hands.”

_Oh my god._

“Yeah. You can.” Katsuki replied, but just as Deku went to hold it, the car took out from the station and up the first hill. But his grip only tightened on the way up, because for as much as the circumstances _sucked,_ getting to hold Deku’s hand as the car rocketed down the first slope and up the second and listen to the sharp, howling laugh he let out on the way was all he could ever ask for.
"Ah—! Ka– Kacchan, do you put your hands up on these?" Deku yelled, still holding on. "Here– like this!"

With one last, tight squeeze, Deku pulled their hands up to the sky and screamed on the way down the next hill. His boyfriend’s laugh, smile, and messy hair blowing in the wind was all it took to make his heart soar, and for the first time, Katsuki saw pure, unadulterated joy on Deku’s face. They were far enough from the ground to be out of view, and if anyone else in the car had anything to say about it, they didn’t care.

Can… can this last forever?

The car raced over the next hill, under an overpass, and back out into blinding sunlight before they knew it. No one was there but them, just them, and if nothing else, Katsuki was sure to burn that radiant image of Deku into his memory.

And just as fast as it started, the ride came to an end. They let go before the car pulled into the station, but Katsuki couldn’t find it in himself to wipe the smile from his face or ignore the light in Deku’s eyes. Maybe it was simple, maybe it was just one ride, but…

“Where to next?” His boyfriend asked, bouncing on his heels as they exited. “Ah, I’m getting in the mood now. Haven’t been somewhere like this in a long time!”

“Lunch, maybe?” Yaoyorozu suggested as they left the rollercoaster area. “It’s getting close to noon, and since we’ve gone on the thing that would probably cause the most motion sickness, food might be a good idea?”

Camie chimed in an agreement, and with Deku and Katsuki’s approval, they headed off to the collection of food stalls near the edge of the park. The crowds were starting to pick up as they headed over- herds of people gathered along the paths, stalls and attractions bustling with incoming traffic. In a way, it was a good thing– harder to be singled out, and easier to hide within the crowd.

Deku had taken his hat off for the rollercoaster, but with it back on and covering the worst of his hair, he was harder to spot. Any real problems would come from his height and physique- while Deku wasn’t any more than a head taller than Katsuki, he was definitely still above average.

But before he could think too much more on that topic, they arrived at their destination. Camie and Yaoyorozu broke off from them quick enough to go find food, leaving Katsuki and Deku alone amongst the crowd. It didn’t take much time for them to locate what they wanted– before long, Katsuki found himself balancing yakisoba, takoyaki, and two carefully-chosen chocolate bananas (on sticks!) to the sitting area, all fully-funded by Deku’s wallet. Katsuki had tried to pay, but the quick reminder of I have a well-paying job and I’m your boyfriend, let me treat you was enough to get him to stop pushing the topic and let Deku do what little he could to show he cared. That wasn’t to say Katsuki let him get away with it entirely, though– quietly, he promised to himself that he’d take Deku to the nicest dinners someday and make sure to cover it all. He wasn’t about to let himself slack off on being the best boyfriend ever, after all.

Not that that’s an issue. He’s– well, tall is good. Hot. Nice.

They sat down at a more secluded bench at the perimeter of the sitting area and waited for Camie and Yaoyorozu to join them again, trying to ignore the fact that there were still potential prying eyes around them. From where they were seated, they weren’t very easy to see– hidden from the general public, at least.
Still, though, they were cautious. Didn’t talk much, and hardly dared to scoot closer to each other until after there were a few friendly heads between them and the rest of the park-goers. Thankfully, Yaoyorozu and Camie blocked a decent amount of the view, but even so.

*I wish I could kiss you right now, Deku.*

“Ooh, looks like you guys got some good stuff.” Camie remarked, just before shoving a piece of takoyaki in her mouth, chewing and swallowing before speaking again. “Hit me up if you’ve got any leftovers, will ya?”

Katsuki went to object, but to his surprise, Deku beat him to the punch. “I’m sure we’ll have no issues finishing. Right, Kacchan?”

Something about the slight acidity in Deku’s voice said that he still wasn’t over Camie’s insistence on calling Katsuki by the ‘wrong’ name multiple times, but really, who was he to blame him? He was well aware of how Camie probably came off to strangers– oblivious, foolish, and like a bit of an airhead, but he knew better at this point to know what she held behind her teasing smiles.

That said, he let his boyfriend’s ignorance go for now. “...ah, right. Shouldn’t be an issue.”

To his relief, Deku seemed to like Yaoyorozu. Lunch was filled with light, simple conversation, and at some point in the middle of chowing down his yakisoba, Katsuki slipped his fingers between Deku’s own under the table, like it was their little secret. The sounds of friendly conversation and white noise around them was enough to drown out the fear of being caught doing something as simple as that, and a part of Katsuki couldn’t help but be enamoured by the thrill. Secrets were good, yes, but the thought of someone seeing him— no, seeing *them*— doing something as simple as holding hands was enough to get his mind racing.

*If someone saw us… if someone saw us, and saw that Deku’s my boyfriend, that we’re together… I don’t think I’d mind that so much.*

Katsuki glanced up at him for a moment, noticed just what he was eating, and realized that the mildly phallic-shaped chocolate banana that Deku had between his too-perfect lips really wasn’t helping him out right now.

*fuck.*

A small, guilty part of him couldn’t help but wonder what would happen if his hand found its way to Deku’s thigh and down the inside just a little, what would happen if he accidentally bumped his clothed crotch. Would he blush? Yell? Tense up and try to act like nothing was happening?

Something new had found its way into Katsuki’s head, and the look Deku was giving him as he continued to suck on that banana, tongue poking out almost embarrassingly so along the sides was only furthering his interest. It was a good look on him– too good, really.

*I want more. Need more.*

And frankly, Katsuki wasn’t sure he could be convinced Deku didn’t feel the same.

“I’m going to the bathroom.” He announced, the words out of his mouth before he knew it. “Deku. You’re coming with me, right?”

The speed at which Deku shot up from that bench only served to prove his point. “A-Ah, well. I guess you need a chaperone, don’t you?”
“Sure. Yeah.” Katsuki nodded, trying to pretend that Yaoyorozu wasn’t squinting at him and Camie wasn’t cheering him on. “Uh, we’ll be back soon. Right after Deku wipes my ass.”

“Wipe your ass? Kacchan, plea—“

But there was no stopping them from racing around the edge of the sitting area and towards the bathroom, relieved to see that both the stalls were empty when they arrived. Only a few seconds and a single question of *can I* later did they nearly slam the small door behind them, Katsuki finding himself held up against the shitty bathroom wall while Deku’s lips latched onto his for the first time in two weeks. It was all he could do to reach for his hair, to pull him down harder, closer, and to taste the chocolate and everything else on Deku’s tongue.

“Fuck, yes…” Katsuki moaned, not going any easier than Deku was. “More… gonna give me more, right…?”

He was met with only rough, frantic, needy lips in return and Deku’s breath hot on his face, lips trailing from Katsuki’s own, all the way down to his chin, his neck.

“I’ve been— a-ah, been wanting you all day.” Deku confessed, drawing only a low whine from Katsuki’s mouth as he did. “‘Course I wanna give you more.”

*His mouth on my face, my chin, my neck... so... holy shit, so fucking good...!

“Y-You– that fucking banana wasn’t helping, shithead.” Katsuki groaned. “I could see that look in your eyes from a whole-ass mile away…!”

But for as much as Deku’s lips ran up and down his face and almost to his collarbone, he didn’t go so hard as to bruise or risk leaving any real marks.

*It’s for the best, it really is, but holy hell... I wanna see him on me.*

“I don’t mind you looking, Kacchan.” Deku continued, hushed. “You— you’re the one exception. If it’s your eyes on me, then I… I want it.”

*If he keeps this up, I’m gonna be too hard to walk...!

“I like giving you attention.” Katsuki echoed, head tipped back as he went further, further. “Hng, yeah, I-I like it when you—“

Then the bathroom door opened, and everything froze.

...oh, shit.

It happened in an instant. Deku’s grip became like that of a statue— solid, cold, and absolutely *unmovable*. What small bit of passion that may have been rising in the past minute or so dissolved to ashes and burned up in front of them. Fingers turned to ice, breath to dust, and Katsuki wasn’t sure he’d ever seen a look of such pure and utter *shock* on Deku’s face.

*We’re behind a stall. They can’t see us. We— this is fine. Right?*

Katsuki went to open his mouth, to say something, *anything*, but was met only with a silent shake of Deku’s head. Cold sweat was beading on his boyfriend’s forehead, and a part of Katsuki could’ve sworn he was *shaking*.

There were no voices beside them, only the thud of someone stepping into the one free stall next to
them and locking the door, soon followed by the telltale noise of the stranger pissing. Deku’s eyes had screwed themselves shut, and for however hot the thought of someone seeing them might be, his boyfriend’s sheer panic and fear was enough to make any hard-on he might’ve had disappear almost immediately.

_Leave. Please. We need to get out of here, shouldn’t have let ourselves come out here, shouldn’t have stopped thinking about being subtle, shouldn’t have—_

Katsuki had to bite his lip to keep quiet, and if he was already feeling this awful, couldn’t even _imagine_ what Deku was feeling. He tried something small— grabbed at the back of his boyfriend’s shirt a little tighter to show that he was there and not leaving, not afraid, but all he got in response was the miniscule shake of Deku’s head and a look that just said _stop._

_This was a mistake._

It could’ve been a minute or an hour before the stranger finished up, left the stall, washed their hands and went out the door. Upon the familiar, relieving sound of the door clicking shut, Deku let go, stepped back, and couldn’t look at Katsuki for more than a second. There were no words, not yet—the panic was too fresh, too real, and he didn’t have to see Deku’s face to know just how pale it had to be.

_I’m… was this my…?_

But before he left, Katsuki heard one last thing.

“You go first.” Deku said. It wasn’t a question, but an order. “I’ll meet you out there in a minute.”

_Trying to keep me safe, huh? I’ll be fine. We’re fine._

He didn’t protest, though, and went back out into the blistering sunlight with only one last glance at his boyfriend.

_We’re fine. Just fine._

That said, walking back to the bench was almost sickening, ceaseless chatter deafening around him and vision far brighter than it should’ve been. He found his way back to the table fast enough, but despite the familiar safety of his friend’s presence, even _they_ could tell that something was wrong.

“Bakugou…?” Camie started, leaning over the table. “Hey, are you—”

“Fine.” He mumbled. “Just– nearly got walked in on. We’re fine. Deku’s gonna be back in just a second.”

He didn’t answer the pained expression on Camie’s face, couldn’t meet either of his friend’s eyes. A part of him was glad he’d already eaten— now, just _looking_ at what food they had left was making him nauseous.

Deku only showed up again several minutes later, still pale-faced and nervous. But he sat down, left a reasonable distance between himself and Katsuki, and kept his hands in his own lap.

“Sorry for the wait.” Deku sighed, elbows moving up to the table as his head fell behind his hands. “I, ah… needed to walk around for a bit.”

There was something more in Deku’s voice, though, something that said that wasn’t all he’d been up to, but Katsuki wasn’t about to push it after a call so close already.
“No worries.” Yaoyorozu assured him. “You two being safe here is top priority, after all. Do what you need to do.”

His boyfriend only nodded at that, fiddled with his hands and fingers, and tugged on his shirt sleeve again in near-nervous habit.

But Katsuki wasn’t given much time to think on that subject before his friends went to change it back to what they’d do next. Deku seemed to get in on that discussion enough, but still. In every word, every movement, something just felt off. It was as if Deku was on edge, eyes scanning the area at every available second and only partly paying attention to the conversation at hand. He figured it could be pinned on instinct– Deku was a professional, had been for years, and getting out of that danger-radar mindset had to be tough.

*I wish I could make him feel better. Show him that I can handle myself so that he doesn’t have to worry. I hate seeing him so freaked out…*

Katsuki’s nails dug into his palms as the urge to seek out and defeat whatever was giving Deku a hard time only grew and grew.

*I won’t let myself get hurt. I can take care of me, so… let me take care of what part of you I can in return.*

“Bakugou, does that sound good to you?”

...wait, what?

Thankfully, Yaoyorozu noticed the confusion on his face, and repeated herself. “We were talking about going over to the games area for a while, then finishing up at the ferris wheel. Does that sound good to you?”

“Oh. Yeah, that works.” Katsuki nodded, having spent the whole first chunk of the discussion lost in his thoughts. “Hmph. I bet me and Deku will win more shit than you two at the games.”

“Is that a challenge I hear?” Camie gasped, getting to her feet and gathering the trash. “Boy, don’t you dare go underestimating us. We’ll kick you guy’s asses before you can blink twice.”

Katsuki had laughed then.

But four hours, thirty rounds, and two empty hands later had him starting to rethink that, though.

“Come on!” He shouted, close to tears. “I’ve gotten so fucking close! Just fall in the damn hole already!”

“...Bakugou, you’ve been at this game for an hour already.” Camie said with a smirk, arms crossed over her chest while both her and Yaoyorozu watched, both decked out in cheap plastic festival prizes. “Give up, and admit it. I win.”

“I– I’m not about to just give in like that!” He exclaimed, and had to restrain himself from using his quirk to launch the tiny-ass ping pong ball into the field of bottles. “I– I will win!”

For as valiant as his efforts were, though, only silence accompanied his proclamations. The throw was followed by a long, frustrated groan from Katsuki as it missed again, not even Deku’s hand patting his shoulder making him feel better.

“It’s okay, Kacchan.” He said for what must’ve been the hundredth time that day. “You don’t have
to be the best at this. You’re amazing in so many other ways, so—”

“No. I’m not about to let her show me up! I will win this!”

Just as he turned around to throw another ball into the field of bottles, though, a sudden sharp, startled noise from Deku caught him off guard. Katsuki stopped just as he released it, spun around, and was met with the sight of some stranger squeezing Deku’s wrist. Dark, messy hair and a pair of glasses sat over the stranger’s pale face, no features showing any particular distinction.

“Valiant!” The stranger greeted, leaning in far, far too close. “A-Ah, I never thought I’d meet you somewhere like here…! Um, uh, could I get your autograph?”

“Oi, let go of—!” Katsuki hissed, about to step towards the stranger and sock him in the face for just grabbing Deku out of the blue like that, but his boyfriend reached his free hand out to him and motioned a simple stay back, don’t move before he could.

“I’m sorry, I don’t have anything to write with on me.” Deku said with practiced steadiness. “We’re about to get going, but it’s nice to see fans!”

Katsuki nearly gagged at the fake laugh that came out of Deku’s mouth, full-on plastic quality and radiating nothing but let go of me, right now. The stranger hadn’t moved despite Deku’s words, though, and Katsuki was feeling angrier and angrier by the second.

“Oh, that’s okay!” The stranger’s head bobbed up in down in a wild nod, and Katsuki’s blood ran cold when he noticed that he’d managed to move his hand just under Deku’s sleeve, touching the scars he hated to show. “Are these guys with you? Ooh, students, maybe?”

Deku’s smile was growing more brittle at every word that the stranger let out, obviously frustrated. “Yes, and we’ve gotta get going soon. I’m sorry, but would you mind—”

“Wait, you guys are U.A. students!” The stranger gasped. “Oh my god, I recognize you from TV! A-Ah, this is so cool…!”

Katsuki’s eyes met the stranger’s, and a slight chill ran down his spine—cold, strange, and more than a little out of place. He could’ve sworn Deku tried to pull his hand back a little right then and there, but the stranger remained firmly attached.

Fucking fans. Haven’t you heard of personal space!? He’s obviously uncomfortable, so—

“Really, I’m sorry, but we have to lea—”

But before Deku could even finish his sentence, the stranger let go and stepped back, a wide grin over his face.

“Sounds good!” He nodded. “Ah, well, you guys have fun! It was nice meeting you, Valiant! I’ll bring a pen next time.”

Then, the stranger turned and walked away just as quickly as he’d arrived.

Holy fuck, what just…

Katsuki’s blood ran cold when Deku wrapped his free hand around his wrist, fingers trembling around it.

“Midoriya, are you okay?” Yaoyorozu stepped closer, worry creasing her features. “What— what was
“I’m fine.” Deku bit his lip, shook his head. “He didn’t do anything. Just a fan. This– this happens.”

*This happens.*

Katsuki didn’t know what to say.

*How the hell can he just let this happen!?*

“Let’s get moving.” Deku pursed his lips, leaving no room for disagreement. “If there’s one, there might be more. Sticking around here probably isn’t a good idea.”

They took off before much more conversation could be had, anger still boiling in Katsuki’s veins. Even for something as simple as a wrist grab, it shouldn’t be *normal* for Deku to just be touched out of the blue like that. Everything about that interaction made him sick, but for as much as he wanted to chase down that stranger and show him why he shouldn’t have messed with them, Deku kept insisting on staying calm.

“We’re in a crowded public place, Kacchan.” Deku murmured as they shouldered past people. “I can’t afford to cause a scene, and I can’t say anything aggressive that could make it to the media, either.” Katsuki watched as Deku took a deep breath in, and let it out as they left the worst of the crowd. “This is just the way it is.”

Katsuki shook his head, disgusted. “Why can’t you just push people off? Hell, I could’ve shoved him away! It doesn’t has to be you, but—”

“I need you to trust me, okay?” Deku insisted, sharper this time. “I don’t like it. I– Kacchan, I hate it when people do stuff like that. But this is for my own good, for your own good, and—”

He broke off, pursing his lips. “I really don’t wanna talk about this right now. He’s gone, it’s done, and we’re, uh…” Deku glanced back at Yaoyorozu. “Going to the ferris wheel, right?”

“Ah, yes.” Yaoyorozu nodded. “As long as that’s still alright with you.”

Katsuki was still pissed as hell, angry at the stranger and Deku’s insistence on non-action, but couldn’t push the issue any more. He was supposed to be a hero– supposed to be strong, supposed to protect the people he cared about. There was no getting rid of the discomfort in his stomach nor the worry gnawing at his bones, but for now…

*There’s… there’s nothing I can do.*

“Hey. Baku.” Camie came from beside him, slightly more upbeat than the rest of the group. “I dunno if you saw, but… you got that last ball in a hole.”

“Told you I could do it.” He mumbled, and tried to force a smile, a smirk, despite knowing wholeheartedly that it his voice fell flat. “Next time I’ll get it faster.”

Camie ruffled up his hair, getting a more legitimate bit of happiness from him. “I know you will. You’re Bakugou Katsuki, after all. And what does Bakugou Katsuki do?”

“Win.”

“Exactly!” She smiled, and pulled her hand back. “And what are you gonna do to this ferris wheel?”

Energy was starting to trickle back into his veins now. “I’m gonna beat this damn ferris wheel, too.”
“Hell yes, that’s the spirit!”

And just her simple enthusiasm managed to get him going again, if only a little. Katsuki found himself lighter, calmer, and a bit more relaxed as they approached the ferris wheel and got in line. With the amount of people around, it was near impossible to pick out individual conversations. Katsuki couldn’t say he was too bothered by that right now, though— ignorance was bliss, after all. Deku still wouldn’t stray as close to him as he had that morning, but that…

*That’s okay, for now.*

Among the fast-moving line, their turn came quickly enough. Katsuki was glad that the ferris wheel was home to closed-in cabins instead of open-air benches, and as they got inside and shut the door behind them, realized that it was some of the most privacy they’d gotten all day. He started on the seat across from Deku, knees nearly touching, but moved over to lean against his boyfriend and hold hands again almost as soon as it was off the ground.

“...hey, Kacchan?” Deku started, quiet. He hadn’t been particularly talkative since they’d gotten away from that god-awful fan, but something wavered in his words more than usual.

“Yeah?”

“I, um…” He paused, eyes turned to the window looking over the park. “I just, uh, wanted to apologize.”

Apologize? “Why?”

“Why?” Deku snorted, still staring out the window. “You tell me. It’s my fault we’ve hardly been able to do… well, you know. Couples things. People talk, people stare, people get invasive… just because of my job. I know it must’ve been uncomfortable for you too when that guy came up, and I just… I don’t want that to be the experience we have to remember, you know?”

“Is that the reason you’ve been so twitchy since we left?” Katsuki furrowed his brow. “Because that’s how we’d remember today?”

“No, no… well. Yes and no.” He shook his head. “I can’t claim that that’s the only reason, but I just… I dunno. Seeing your friends with us, and seeing them happy together just makes me…” A small, tired sigh escaped his lips. “Jealous, I guess. I know, I know, that probably sounds bad, but I… I think I’m just tired of feeling like I’m on the outside looking in.”

...tired of feeling like…

“You say that like this isn’t the first time.” Katsuki murmured, squeezing his hand tight. “Am I wrong?”

It was a short laugh that he got in response, Deku’s eyes falling to his lap from the window. “You’ve always been perceptive, Kacchan...” A pause, and— “Red Riot and Uravity are my best friends, you know. And they’ve… well, they’ve been together for over a year now.”

...oh.

Deku only seemed to be growing more upset thinking about that, though, and for as much as Katsuki wanted to know more, prying probably wouldn’t be the best thing to do right now.

*If I’m gonna be the best boyfriend... I gotta show him I care, right?*
“Oi. Eyes over here.” Katsuki murmured. Deku complied, though slower than usual. “Why are you worrying about them when I’m right here?”

“I mean, it’s just that this whole day has been—”

“I don’t care how the whole day has been.” Katsuki repeated. “Look at me, Deku.”

And without waiting any longer, Katsuki shifted to one of his new favorite places—Deku’s lap—and stared him dead in the eyes. “You see me?”

“Course I do, Kacchan. You’re right in front of—”

“But do you see me.”

The cabin fell quiet save for the creak of the ferris wheel and the slight breeze against its walls.

“...I…”

Deku’s voice trailed off, dull eyes taking on some sort of luster after a long, silent moment.

“Kacchan, I…”

It was his hands that moved first—onto his hips, cradling Katsuki’s waist in a way that could only be described as intimate.

“I think I get it.”

This time, Katsuki was the one to lean in and tilt his head with practiced ease, Deku’s lips fitting onto his far better than they had back in that shitty bathroom stall. There were still nerves present—no use pretending that he didn’t notice the quiver of Deku’s mouth or the fidgeting of his hands on his hips—but his job, in the here and now, was to bring him back to the present.

_Focus on me, Deku. Let me show you that I…_”

“I love you, y’know.”

A small whimper slipped from Deku’s mouth, not bad or needy, but simply _vulnerable._

“You… you make it hard to forget.”

Katsuki’s hands slid down to his boyfriend’s wrists, thumbs poking under thin sleeves and running over scars he was starting to learn.

“I’m glad.”

The minutes that followed were much of the same—slow, gentle, trusting—and Katsuki wouldn’t have had it any other way. Deku followed his lead this time, moving in pace with his newfound confidence and assurance. There was a part of him that loved this side of Deku, too—the vulnerability he never showed to the outside world, the simple faith he placed in Katsuki to take care of him and do him right.

No profound words were said there, no drastic actions taken. But here, they were safe—not in danger of strangers, fans, or even friends—because while this was a group trip, while it was public, this was still...

_A date. Our date._
Katsuki pulled away as they began to near the ground again, but just before he was about to slide off his boyfriend’s lap, heard a soft wait.

“Kacchan– before you go, I’ve gotta–”

_Hm? “Gotta what, Deku?”_

“I love you.”

There was a wobbly, but genuine smile over Deku’s lips. “I… I’m not about to forget to say it back, you know.”

_Oh my god._

Katsuki would’ve thrown his arms around Deku again right then and there if not for the fact that they were only a few stops from the bottom– instead, he settled for one last chaste kiss, and sat back in the seat across from him as the door opened and they were released back into the mania of the park. But they didn’t go far– Katsuki ran off to a more secluded corner in the shade, Deku close beside him as they waited for his friends, and looked back up at him to see that smile still there and still present.

“You’re cute as fuck, Deku.” Katsuki whispered, near-breathless. “Holy hell. You can’t just say stuff like that.”

_Hm? Say what?”_

“Oh, don’t be a little shit with me, you—”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Deku said, but there was humor in his face and a twinkle in his eyes. “I thought we were in _acquaintances-mode._”

That comment alone had Katsuki choked up with laughter until Camie and Yaoyorozu found them, just as happy after their ride. Soon enough, they found themselves on their way out of the park as the sun started to set and on their way home. To his surprise, though, Deku offered to walk with them back to the dorms– something Katsuki was more than happy to take him up on.

When they finally got back to the gates, though, Camie and Yaoyorozu went on ahead of them to give them a moment of pseudo-privacy. It was still near the street, yes, but more secluded than where they’d been for the majority of the day.

“I’m gonna take off now.” Deku said, and for as much shit as they’d gone through that day, the positives appeared to weigh on his mind more than the negatives. “You be safe, alright? You’ll take good care of yourself? Follow your mentor’s directions and be careful on the field?”

“Yeah, yeah, I told you I will on the way here.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Geez. And I’d have thought you’d have a little more faith in me after today.”

“Shut it, you know I do.” Deku snorted. “Alright, alright. Well. I know today was kinda a mixed bag, but… overall? I enjoyed it.” He paused. “Even through the rides and other stuff, though, seeing you was was highlight.”

_I’m not gonna make it at this rate, asshole._

In the light of the setting sun, it was hard to see the red that was surely on Katsuki’s cheeks. “Sap.”

Deku grinned. “You know, I think I’ll take that in stride.”
“Of course you would.”

But despite the casual comments, nothing but comfort and sheer affection could be found in them. Katsuki pulled Deku into one last hug—they didn’t know when they’d see each other next, after all—before separating for the night.

“I’ll text you later?” His boyfriend asked, earning only a nod in response. “Awesome, awesome. Well, be safe, and… I love you.”

“Yeah, yeah, love you too. Now go shower, sweaty.”

“Swea– excuse you, you’re the sweaty one!”

“I think we can call it a tie for today?”

“...okay, maybe for today.”

With that last comment though, Deku waved goodbye and took off towards the train station, not looking back. Katsuki did the same, walking to the dorms and enjoying the vivid colors streaked across the sky.

For some reason, though, a bit of unease settled in his stomach. The day’s events still hadn’t fully left his mind, and with Deku now gone, some bit of strange anxiety began to wind itself up in his chest.

Nah, I’m probably being ridiculous. Nothing too out of the ordinary happened today.

And that was the belief he settled on—stayed on—for the rest of the night, and for the days to come.

We had a good day, and any unease is just that.

Unease.

Chapter End Notes

i keep telling my beta @aetherlite im gonna buy him dinner for being so awesome and helping me the night before. he keeps saying no. one of these days he’ll agree

I hope you enjoyed this chapter, and my twitter is @aeronines!
(btw, i dont really know how much ill be able to answer questions in the comments, so feel free to talk to me through twitter, discord, or my curiouscat if you’re looking to chat!)
“I’ll call you again after I get off from my internship today. And you’re still up to doing order-in dinner and a movie tonight?”

“Course I am! Ah, okay, I’ll let you go.” There was a brief pause from the other end of the phone. “Stay safe out there, okay? The crime rate’s been fairly high this week.”

“I’m telling you, I’ll be just fine. I’ve got my provisional licence now, remember?”

“Oh, right. The provisional licence that you’ve had for a whole, what. Two days?”

“Three days! I’ve had it for three days.”

“...okay, okay. I know you’ll be fine. I, um... yeah. I’ll see you later, Kacchan!”

“You too, Deku.”

As always, there was a short moment for I love yous before the call ended, but not for the first time that week, Katsuki couldn’t help the slight bit of frustration gnawing at him after hanging up. It wasn’t as if he didn’t know why– far from the opposite, really. Ever since they’d gone out to the amusement park two weeks ago, Deku had been jumpy as hell, checking in on him every day, even if it was only a text of are you doing okay? Everything safe at your internship? Are you safe?

“Are you done with your call?” Yaoyorozu asked, standing only a few feet away from him. They’d been waiting for Red Riot and Uravity to give them the go ahead for patrolling today for a few minutes, and in the short time they had, Katsuki figured he’d give Deku a ring to make sure their date plans were still in place for the evening. They’d met up a few times since the amusement park– once at the beach for a round of training (Katsuki wasn’t about to let that routine go), once at Uravity and Red Riot’s agency (Deku had come by to talk to his friends, but Katsuki wasn’t so sure that his timing was a coincidence) and twice at Deku’s apartment. Those easily stood to be his favorite moments– even if it was just a brief dinner or an hour or two to watch something, or just some time to make out and talk and explore a little more of each other. Katsuki found himself learning more and more each time their voices started getting quiet, teasing, curious– learned that Deku was an expert on knowing how and where to kiss to make him feel good, so good, learned that he was still more self-conscious than Katsuki would’ve liked about his scars, learned that Deku wasn’t always perfect, either. He’d come to love those lips trailing down his neck, teasing at his collarbone, making bubbles rise up in his gut and his mind twist with pleasure.

Even so, something was different.

“Yeah, s’done.” Katsuki sighed, sliding his phone back in his pocket. “I’m going over to his place after patrol today. I brought an overnight bag, so if I don’t come back to the dorms tonight, that’s...till someone gets hurt
where I’ll be.”

_I just hope he’s not so on edge tonight._

“Staying over, huh?” Yaoyorozu gave him a small smile. “I’m glad that you two have been able to do that, at least.”

“Yeah, me too. I like it, he likes it…”

His voice trailed off, and Yaoyorozu seemed to notice something, shifting slightly towards him. “I, ah… I’ve been meaning to ask you, though. Is everything okay?”

“Okay?” He repeated, slightly confused. “I mean, neither of us are injured or sick or dying, so—”

“I was asking more in terms of how happy you two are.” She said. “Maybe it’s just me, but you… you’ve been looking a little more tired than usual over these past couple weeks. Did something happen?”

“No, no, nothing happened.” Katsuki mumbled. “But… I dunno. He’s just been acting weird.”

That piqued her interest. “Weird? How so?”

He shrugged, not really sure how to put a name to what it was he was feeling. “Kinda overprotective, I guess? He keeps telling me to be safe like, every time I go out. S’been a little jumpy, too. When we went out to train at the beach last week, I caught him looking over his shoulder every five seconds. Like he thought we were being watched or something.” He paused. “I… I dunno. It just… kinda feels like he doesn’t think I can handle hero work. Or being outside at all with him. I know, I know he just wants to take care of me, but it’s just…”

“A little much, maybe?”

“…yeah, I… think so.”

Yaoyorozu put a hand on his shoulder, looked at him with nothing but warmth and the utmost security. “You should bring that up to him at some point. It may just be his instincts as a hero, and he’s saying things without realizing it, so… bring it up. Start the conversation.”

There was a part of him that said no, that things were fine the way they were and that he’d just keep working to prove Deku wrong, but…

_She makes a good point._

“Fine, fine.” He muttered. “I’ll… ask him about it tonight. I mean, it probably is just cause of the crime rates and all that, but… yeah.”

_This is probably a non-issue at best, so… I shouldn’t be worrying about this. I’ll ask him to relax, it’ll be okay, and everything’s gonna be fine._

“Good.” She nodded. “Well, I’m looking forward to today. Now that we both have our provisional licenses, everything feels… ah, more attainable, I suppose? Really, this whole internship has been wonderful so far.” Yaoyorozu paused. “You’re staying with Uravity and Red Riot after the summer’s over too, right? Not changing locations?”

“Yeah, I’m staying. S’been good, so… no reason to leave.” He had to fight to keep a bit of a smile from appearing on his face. “I can’t say I mind Deku being allowed to stop by every once in a while,
either.”

For as frustrated as he was with Deku right now, he still enjoyed seeing him and being able to talk and touch and love on him like a normal couple would. Being around his friends was one of the few places they could really do that safely, too. Katsuki knew he was lucky enough to not just have one, but two fantastic pro heroes as mentors, and Deku’s connection to them only made it more appealing.

“I don’t blame you.” Yaoyorozu said. “I like him, too. Deserves a whole lot more than the media gives him, anyways. It’s crazy to think how much his reputation rose and then just... plummeted. They still hardly highlight the things he does well... ah, well. Maybe the next billboard ceremony will change that a bit. I’m willing to bet he’s going to rise in rank a lot this year after his drop at the last one.”

“Agh, I hope so.” He grumbled. “Deserves it. I know he’s gotten better at taking breaks and stuff, but he’s still handling a ton of work. And—”

Whatever he was about to say was immediately cut off as the door was opened, Uravity appearing in the entrance to the room. “Sorry about the wait, guys! We were taking care of some paperwork real quick, but are you two ready to head out?”

“Of course.” Yaoyorozu dipped her head. “Ah, I’m excited!”

“I’m as ready as I’ll ever be.” Katsuki crossed his arms over his chest. Maybe Deku didn’t have full trust in him to do hero work well and protect himself, but he’d show those expectations up. “I’m gonna do damn good today. Those villains ain’t gonna know what hit ‘em.”

_Time to show off what I’m made of._

“I like your energy, you two!” Uravity nodded. “No use in waiting around, then. Let’s get out there!”

_Deki won’t think I can’t handle myself after I prove I can take the heat._

Katsuki had passed the provisional license exam with flying colors– the event as a whole hadn’t been too noteworthy, really, more of a one-and-done. But with new permissions in hand and a confidence rippling through his veins, fresh energy was bursting within and the desire to impress was at its peak.

_I’ll do good. I’ll do great. I’ll be the best there is, dammit!_

And with that in mind, they left, out to the streets and into the bustling city.

“I know we’ve said it, but the crime rate has still been rising.” Uravity reminded, walking beside them. “Red Riot’s patrolling in a different district today, and while I’m going to be keeping an eye on you two, I’m also going to trust that you guys are going to be able to handle yourselves in the chance there’s some incident.”

“There won’t be any issues.” Katsuki grinned. “Don’t worry about us. Nothing I can’t handle is gonna come up.”

“I think you mean, nothing we can’t handle?” Yaoyorozu butted in. “But, yes. I don’t think we’ll have any trouble taking care of a few unexpected situations.”

_She’s got the right idea._

“If the crime rate really is getting high, then why don’t you have us take our own section to patrol so
that you don’t have to be babysitting us?” He continued, unable to suppress his excitement at the slight change in Uravity’s face. “I mean, we’ve been patrolling as a group for a while, and as long as we’re not far apart, it wouldn’t be all that bad, right?”

*Come on, come on…! If we can show we can take this on our own, then—*

“...fine.” Uravity conceded. “But you two better check in with me every few minutes, okay? If anything feels off— and I mean *anything*— I better be hearing about it immediately. You guys are my responsibility today, and I’m only allowing this because you’ve shown me that you’re capable. That doesn’t mean handling everything on your own, but…” She sighed. “Don’t make me regret this, okay?”

“You won’t. I’ll make you damn proud to call us your interns.” Katsuki promised. “We’ll take care of things.”

Uravity nodded, still looking a little nervous, but did nothing but give them explicit directions concerning where to go, when to meet back up, and a final reminder to communicate, communicate, communicate.

*Yeah, yeah, we will.*

Their mentor took one last glance at the both of them, a proud, yet nervous smile on her face, and finally waved before turning towards the next street down the block.

“This way, then?” Yaoyorozu motioned, and for as prim and proper as she appeared at times, Katsuki could see the dancing, excited fire in her eyes. “We’re meeting back here in two hours, so let’s not waste time just standing around.”

“Sounds good.”

And with that they were off, turning down the street opposite from the one Uravity had gone to. If he was being honest, Katsuki was glad she was the one covering their internship today. Red Riot was a great mentor, but for as fun to be around as he was, something told him that he wouldn’t have let them just go off on their own like this. Uravity had always seen them as something stronger, though—if she’d seen them as anything but capable, Katsuki knew she’d never have gone as hard on them with training as she had.

So really, they’d be good. Fine. *Great.*

But despite literally *everyone* around him prattling on about the crime rate and the danger, the first hour of their patrol remained completely and utterly *uneventful*. Katsuki was half-yawning by the time they turned down the fifth lookalike city block, trying his best to stay alert with how absolutely *dull* the whole day had been so far.

“You and Camie doing anything tonight?” He asked, trying to stay at least mildly entertained.

She shrugged. “We were thinking about getting dinner off-campus. Though, Todoroki may wind up accompanying us if he’s around.”

“Can’t believe how much he’s actually been *gone.*” Katsuki snorted. “God, he was complaining about his internship partner for days on end, and suddenly they’re all buddy-buddy with each other?”

“Oh, relax. I think he’s having a good time.” Yaoyorozu nudged him. “Besides, that means he’s not getting in your way when you wanna go spend time with Midoriya, right?”
“He was never getting in my way.” He mumbled. “Sure, he’s an idiot sometimes, but the dumbass is my friend. I’d be stupid to not wanna see him.”

“Well, maybe we could all go do something next week? It’s been a while since we’ve all gotten to hang out together. Even just dinner or something could be fun.”

Yeah… “Yeah, that’d be—”

But before he could finish his sentence, there was some sort of movement up ahead— civilians shifted as if suddenly disturbed, people knocked to the side and caught off balance. No one fell, no one was hurt, but upon taking a closer look at the area, there was no sign of how everything had been jostled.

“That was… odd.” Yaoyorozu said a minute or so later, scanning the area for what had to be the third or fourth time. “We should probably let Uravity know about this.”

Katsuki scowled. “What, so we can tell her that we missed what might’ve been a villain? Come on, we have no info right now. For all we know, it was just a nasty breeze. Or someone tripped.”

Something in the back of his mind denied that notion, but with nothing he could see in front of him, nothing he could hear among the bustle of the city streets, every ounce of reason in his body had to deny it.

Nothing happened. No one was there. Relax, okay?

“I mean, we should still probably—”

“You wanna be the one to tell her we saw some sort of invisible villain who didn’t do anything but trip over the curb?” He tensed, rigid and more irritated than he would’ve liked. “Yeah, uh, no. I’m not about to make an idiot out of myself on the first day we’ve got on our own.”

“I don’t know, something just felt a little off about that, but…” Yaoyorozu sighed, arms crossed over her chest. “I suppose you’ve got a point. If there’s anything else that comes up along those lines, I’m letting Uravity know, though. Got it?”

“Fine, fine.” He groaned. “Let’s keep going. No point in standing around here looking for a problem that doesn’t exist.”

There’s other things to worry about. This is ridiculous. And I can’t… I’m still not allowed to engage in combat if there’s no real emergency in the area.

They started off again, still walking down the street, but the population was thinning as they approached the outer parts of the city. Nothing strange, nothing unusual, and just as he’d thought, nothing out of the ordinary was present.

“We should probably start heading back to the rendezvous point soon.” Yaoyorozu reminded him. “It’s about a fifteen-minute walk to get back, and we really shouldn’t be late if we want to be able to head out on our own again. It’s been quiet, so I don’t think we’ll be missing much…”

Katsuki couldn’t help but agree, despite a part of him wanting to keep going, find something. Sure, he’d technically done as ordered just patrolling quietly and keeping watch, but coming out of the day with no conflict whatsoever left him more bitter than he’d expected.

How am I supposed to prove to Deku that I can handle myself if there’s nothing for me to take on? How am I supposed to prove to myself that I can deal with villains? How am I supposed to show I can deal with any sort of hero work, really?
“Let’s turn back in a few minutes.” He said, determined to at least give this whole thing a little more time before leaving the scene.

“...if you’re sure, Bakugou. But not too long.”

“Yeah, yeah, won’t be—”

*Whoosh!*

Katsuki spun around just as some strange breeze sped past him, and before he knew it, something— or someone, maybe— kicked in the backs of his knees at the joint and sent him stumbling to the pavement. He recovered in an instant, of course, but there was no doubt, no way that could’ve possibly been—

*That… thing from earlier.*

“*Oi!*” He shouted, clenching his fists in an attempt to pretend they weren’t shaking. “Come out here, asshole! Show yourself!”

*Don’t hide like this…!*

Yaoyorozu was just getting to her feet again too, fists clenched at her side after having been knocked down beside him.

“Bakugou, don’t go provo—”

“It’s not *provoking* if it gets someone to give me a target!” He shouted, frustration ringing like hollow, brittle glass. He dashed on ahead of his partner, ducked into a nearby alleyway, and ran down in an attempt to find out where the asshole who’d touched him had gone. “Come on, fucker! Don’t go touching me and thinking you can—”

There was another rush of wind, footsteps, and some sort of perverted laugh that sounded from somewhere just before—

*No.*

“Katsuki, he’s—!”

Yaoyorozu’s voice was too out of reach, too far away, not close enough to help.

*No, no…*

Dark hair and crooked glasses materialized against the brick of the alleyway as a knifelike fist throttled him in the chest, and before he could let off a single explosion, the attacker swung a leg behind Katsuki’s feet and knocked him flat on his back.

*No, no, NO!*

His instincts reacted first. Sparks flared from his palms, one hand on the ground and the other in the air as an explosion burst to the air in front of him, only managing to graze his attacker’s shoulder before a spiked, brass-knuckled fist pierced his shoulder and another was driven into his chest. Katsuki choked, tried to fire back something, *anything*, but his attacker had him on his back and shoved him down before he could. His head slammed against the concrete, the world spinning, spinning, spinning as the spikes were yanked from his body. Pain split through every nerve, and it was all Katsuki could do to pretend that the blood dripping from those spiked knuckles and soaking
through his clothes hadn’t just come from him.

*Get off. Get off. Don’t touch me…!*

“T-The hell do you—”

Those eyes locked on his own—glassy, dark, and just as chilling as the rest of him.

Then came the smile. The grin. The greasy, brass-knuckled hand trailing up to his jaw and shutting off anything he would’ve been able to do.

“Didn’t think I’d get to see you again so soon, Kacchan.”

Yaoyorozu might’ve been shouting in the background. One or two civilians could’ve noticed the scene taking place in the alley. But all Katsuki could hear was the static ringing in his ears, the blood roaring through his veins, and the numbing, chilling, *horrifying* whisper of lethal fingers on his skin.

*It’s… it’s that guy, from back at…*

“I’m here to ask you for a bit of a favor, okay?” He started, Katsuki unable to move with the villain’s weight on top of him. “You know Pro Hero Valiant, right?”

*The guy from the park…!*

There was a pause—Katsuki assumed he was supposed to answer.

“Get—get off of—”

“I asked you a question, Kacchan.”

*No. Don’t say that. Don’t say that name…!*

Katsuki wasn’t sure how fast they got there, but before he could move, those deadly spiked knuckles were pressed near-teasingly against his throat as that face brought itself close, so close to his own.

“I’ll say it again. You know Pro Hero Valiant, don’t you?” His attacker paused. “Hm, well… you seem to know him better as *Deku*, right?”

*No, no—“Shut the hell up!”*

The spikes dug in further, and Katsuki could hardly hold back the scream threatening to tear from his throat. A part of him tried to think about what was going on outside—what Yaoyorozu was doing, if he was being held hostage of sorts, if he could move his legs to kick or squirm or do anything to free himself, but in the end, raw and absolute *fear* held him in place.

*Why does he know… why is he saying…*

“I’ll take that as a yes, if you’re so insistent on staying quiet.” His attacker sighed. “Anyways. Like I said, I need a small favor. Deku has been a little too active lately. I’ve been getting pretty fed up with him constantly running patrols in the areas I usually stick to. All I need is for you to let him know to change his schedule—now listen to me carefully, okay? I don’t want to repeat myself.”

*You… really, you…*

“This is what you’re going to tell him. Tuesdays, he’ll patrol the south side from noon to eight. Thursdays will be the west side from nine to five. Fridays, south from two to ten…”
“S-Shut– s-shut up, don’t—”

*I can’t, I can’t– everything’s spinning, everything hurts, so please, please, just stop…!

The spikes dug into his neck, pierced soft, vulnerable skin, and Katsuki screamed.

*Get off, get off, get OFF!*

“You’re a student, aren’t you?” The villain sneered. “Come on, Kacchan. Use that U.A. brain of yours. Don’t you know better than to resist like this? I don’t want to hurt you any more, but I will if I need to.”

*Am– am I bleeding again?*

“But this time, the villain stopped mid-sentence, and through the haze of terror fogging his vision, Katsuki swore he saw panic in his eyes and heard a curse under his breath.

“Well.” The villain spat, lips curling into some sort of disgusted snarl. “Unfortunately, I think our time is going to be cut short. I didn’t realize you brought friends.”

*Friends… friends… wait, does that mean…?*

The villain let go of his shoulder, lifted his knees from Katsuki’s legs, but kept the spikes against his throat for just a moment longer.

“Kacchan.” The villain’s eyes went cold, mocking, and utterly *knowing*. “Give your boyfriend a kiss from me, won’t you?”

And just as the last word rang out, he left.

*What… what just…*

Katsuki couldn’t move. Couldn’t think. Could hardly see ten inches in front of his face, or hear the shouting from what had to have been Uravity and Yaoyorozu’s voices. Someone knelt down beside him— took his head in their hands, so much more gentle than leather gloves and frigid brass had been.

*Yaoyorozu… Momo…*


“Look over him, Yaoyorozu. I’m going to get in contact with the other heroes in the area and let them know about this. I don’t think I’ll be able to catch up to this villain, but someone else should. Did you see anyone else with him?”

“…no, I-I didn’t. From what I saw, he was acting alone.”

“Perfect. I called for an ambulance right after I got off the phone with you, so as soon as that gets here, we’re going to get Bakugou to the ER to get these wounds assessed. Does he appear to be in shock? Is he responsive?”

“I, ah…”

*…shock?*
"I’m not sure, but he’s not… he looks dizzy. The back of his head is bleeding too, but I don’t know if it’s enough to be legitimate shock."

"Okay. Well, watch over him carefully, and make sure he keeps breathing. Make a towel to put under his head so he won’t bleed out on the pavement anymore. Don’t move him too quickly, and try to take off his bulkier equipment so that it’ll be easier to get him into the ambulance."

*What’s going on… what happened…*

"M-Momo—" He coughed, trying to focus on what she was doing. "The— t-the ER…?"

But no sooner did the words leave his mouth than a sharp, agonizing burst of pain shot through his chest and another god-awful scream tore itself from his throat.

"Katsuki, please, try to stay calm." Her words rang through his head, dull and barely heard through the static. "We’re going to get you treatment. Relax. We’ll– we’ll get this figured out, okay?"

Her voice was the one thing keeping him grounded.

*Get this… figured out… right, right, that first…*

It was all he could do to stop thinking about the fact that his attacker had mentioned him, mentioned *Deku*, and just try and focus on breathing despite how much each strangled gasp hurt. There was a quiet chatter in the background— Katsuki’s eyes had fallen shut some time ago, even what little light filtered into the alleyway too much to handle right now.

*I’m so tired… dizzy…*

And as soon as the ambulance arrived, Katsuki passed out.

"…healed his lung, but we couldn’t afford to expend any more energy to resolve the bruising. The wounds are clean, but… he’ll have to recover from those on his own."

"What about the rib damage?"

"Same deal there. He’s going to have to rest for a full day or two, at least, and he won’t be able to take on anything more than low-intensity training for a week or two. I imagine he’ll be incredibly sore— any movement involving his right shoulder is going to be difficult, as well as anything that could result in heavy breathing."

"…no longer than two weeks though, right?"

"Likely not. He’ll be just fine, nothing vital was hit that can’t be dealt with. The bruising won’t be pretty, but as long as he doesn’t exert himself, it’ll heal just fine."

*Huh… wait, where am…?*

Katsuki struggled to open his eyes, blinking back as soon as blistering white light seeped into foggy vision.

*My head hurts like hell…*

"And the concussion?"

"Again, just rest. We’ll send him home with painkillers, but the wound was healed. His head
shouldn’t bleed any longer.”

Any... longer?

He forced himself to try and move again, but as soon as his right arm shifted underneath him, killer soreness burned through it and forced it down again. Katsuki groaned, low and feeble, trying to adjust to... wherever... he’d wound up.

*Context clues. Look around... you’re not stupid, right? There’s white walls... I’m in bed, there’s people talking... Uravity and some other guy...*

Yeah, Katsuki knew where he was. Didn’t mean he had to like it.

...fuck. I... I didn’t think I’d be hospitalized.

But his chest hurt, his shoulder hurt, his head hurt, and for as much as he wished he could just up and leave, Katsuki was pretty sure the IVs were there for a reason.

“Oh, I think he’s waking up! I’m gonna talk to him for a bit, if that’s okay.”

It was getting easier to look around now, but somehow, Uravity’s face full of concern and lined with frustration was almost worse.

“Bakugou–” She started, and *fuck*– just hearing her voice pained him. “We– we’re going to have a talk after you’re feeling a little better, but hell… I’m just glad you’re safe.”

*I thought she’d be angrier...*

“You’re lucky that Yaoyorozu was able to act without hesitation and call me as soon as you were attacked, though.” She continued. “I wasn’t too far away, and because of that, we were able to take care of all of this with minimal overall damage. You’ve only been out for a little under two hours. And I’m here right now because I’m your current legal guardian. They used some quirk healing, so you were mostly asleep because of exhaustion, but...” She sucked in a breath, bit her lip. “Again, I’m just happy to see you awake. There’s other things we’ll have to deal with soon, like getting an account from you of what happened, but we’re doing our best to keep this situation quiet. U.A.’s faculty been informed, as well as your parents, but that's about it.”

*But... what about...*

“...Deku?”

A small smile twisted itself over Uravity’s lips, and she nodded. “Well, considering he was the one to apprehend the villain... yes. He’s at the police station right now getting things sorted out.”

*Wait, Deku was the one to apprehend him? Are you– you serious?*

The look on his face must’ve said it all, though, because Uravity continued without any verbal confirmation. “Yeah. I put out an alert, and he happened to be the closest hero in the area with the ability to take care of the situation swiftly. The villain wasn’t on the street any more than twenty minutes after he fled the scene.”

“How’d he just... appear?” Katsuki forced out, faltering at the end. “I didn’t... see him at all...”

There was a slight bit of apology in Uravity’s eyes, and she sighed. “Chameleon quirk. The guy could literally blend into his surroundings and become nearly imperceptible. Lucky for us, he
couldn’t avoid the wind Izuku put out, and ended up being captured fairly easily after he was caught off guard. Turns out, this guy’s actually been on the radar for a few weeks, and just ventured out of the spots we usually chase him out of. The area I sent you two to was supposed to be fairly safe, it’s a low crime zone, so I thought it’d be okay, but…!"

She stopped herself from saying much more on the subject, despite the frustration and anger beginning to show itself. “I don’t know why you and Yaoyorozu were attacked. Or, I guess, I don’t know how you were found.”

Katsuki tried to remember what had happened when he’d been attacked, but the details were blurrier than he’d expected. That much probably had something to do with the fact that his head was still killing him– he’d heard them mention something about a concussion, and with bitter clarity, realized that it must’ve happened when he’d hit the pavement.

What was that guy even using… some sort of brass knuckles? They were spiked… punched me in the chest a couple time, and he had ’em against my throat…

“I dunno…” He began, but just as he started talking, some sudden memory steamrolled through his brain. “…wait.”

He called me Kacchan. He called Deku… Deku. How the hell could I forget!? "

“I– I think I might—"

But he was interrupted before he could continue, Uravity shushing him quickly and quietly. “Save it for later, okay? We’re not looking for a testimony right now. You just get some rest.” She patted his not-as-sore shoulder. “Your parents will be coming by in a bit here. Yaoyorozu wanted to see you too, and some of your other friends from what I heard, and Izuku…” Uravity swallowed. “I, well… I imagine he’ll stop by soon. Said he’d drop by as soon as he finished up at the station.”

We were ’sposed to have a date tonight… did I fuck it up…?

Really, all he wanted right now was to fall asleep next to Deku, be held and told that everything was okay, it’d be fine, to hear someone that wasn’t a wanted criminal someone call him Kacchan.

With how things were going, though, Katsuki wasn’t sure how well those cards would play out in his favor.

“I wanna see him.” He mumbled, eyes finally falling closed again. “Miss him.”

“He’ll… he’ll be here soon. Just rest up, oka—”

A sudden sharp, hurried knock at the door cut her off though, and only moments later, he came in. Still decked out in most of his hero costume, sweaty as hell, and partly out of breath.

“Is he here!?” His voice came, and fuck. Katsuki had never heard Deku sound so panicked in his life. “He’s here, right? He’s—”

“Izuku, be quiet!”

Uravity had stood up at some point, and now face-to-face with Deku, Katsuki could’ve sworn there was some sort of threat in her stance. He couldn’t make out what she was saying as she leaned in close next to him, but while a part of Deku seemed to stay just as pissed, the anger marring his features seemed to die down a little.
“Sorry, sorry…” Deku mumbled. “I, ah. Villain’s in custody, I gave the police my report, and then got here as fast as I could after they let me go. You… you said he has a concussion, right? Shit, I shouldn’t have yelled, I’m—”

“Quit apologizing to me, and go let him know you’re here.” Uravity insisted. “Just– please, don’t freak out. He’s been through enough as it is.”

Deku, what’s going on…?

“I won’t, I won’t…”

He heard the shifting of Deku’s gear before he fully saw him, but to Katsuki’s relief, it didn’t look like he was injured at all.

At least the villain didn’t get him… that’s something.

His boyfriend sat down next to the bed, and this close, he could’ve sworn that Deku had been crying.

“Hey, you– you hanging in there?” Deku started, but Katsuki would be an idiot to miss the way his voice trembled.

“Yeah, s’fine…”

It’s not fine. I… nothing about this is ‘fine’.

“Just, uh… kinda tired.” He swallowed. “M’sorry… didn’t wanna fuck up our date tonight…”

“No no, don’t worry about that.” Deku assured him. “I– it’s fine. We can do it another time. I was just… shit, as soon as I heard you got hurt…”

Katsuki never thought he’d hate Deku’s eyes, but right in that moment, with them staring at his chest with nothing but absolute pity did he start to rethink that.

Stop that, please… I’m sorry, I tried, I just—

“I’ll do better next time.” He forced out, hoarse. “Promise.”

Don’t think of me like I can’t handle myself…

“It was my fault, too. I… I should’ve known better than to go out in public with you.” Deku bit his lip. “You were targeted. I know you were targeted because of me. I should’ve been more careful with all this…!”

Stop acting like you’re the only one who can take the blame…!

But he stayed quiet, didn’t push that boundary, and tried to shift the focus to something other than the attacker.

“Didn’t want this to be the first time you saw me shirtless.” He tried to joke, knowing it fell flat as soon as his voice cracked.

“Well, e-even though it’s all banged up, you…” Deku hesitated. “…you still have a nice chest.”

He was relieved for a moment, glad to hear the humor, but took back those thoughts almost as fast as they’d arrived.
"But, shit… you nearly got killed out there…! What would’ve happened if you’d been out on your own? What if there’d been no one else to help out?"

No, no… “But those what-ifs didn’t happen, I—”

“That’s not the point I’m trying to make, Kacchan!”

His tone was enough to make Katsuki freeze on the spot, and at the sound of his nickname, all he could remember was that god-awful villain right next to his ear, whispering *Kacchan, Kacchan, Kacchan.*

No… please, please, don’t ruin this for me…!

Thankfully, Deku didn’t continue.

“I… I’m sorry. Shouldn’t have yelled.” Watery eyes accompanied his words, and Katsuki tried to force that voice away, tried to focus on the here and now. “Get some rest tonight. When you’re feeling a little better, we can, um… we can talk about this in more detail. There’s other things I’ve learned about the villain, so take your time, come over to my place when you’re ready, and… we can go from there.”

Katsuki hated every bit of disappointment and frustration present in those words, hated how it just proved again—*again, again*—how much of a failure he was. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d really won in front of Deku, or really, if he ever had at all.

*I don’t have the energy to think on this right now.*

“I’m not happy about this, but I… I’m glad you’re safe.” Deku said, trying to force a smile and miserably failing. “I- I love you, Kacchan.”

*I… yeah, you too, but…*

When Deku reached over to hold his hand on his uninjured side, though, he couldn’t help but feel better. A little less broken, a little less wounded.

“L-Love you too.”

And for that moment, if nothing else, Katsuki knew he was in the eye of the storm.

“Call me when you’re up to it?”

“Mhm, yeah… gonna go sleep now, I think…”

His head was still throbbing, heart still pounding, but for right now… for this moment, at least…

*I’ll make it through.*

Katsuki was sent back to the dorms twenty-four hours later.

Since that first visit, he’d received hardly any word from Deku, but his family, friends, and mentors had come by to talk to him on more than one occasion, along with the police. He’d given what info he could, but left out some things that he couldn’t quite bring himself to share— the blatant taunting of his relationship status, for one, along with the awful, grating use of his nickname that had his every hair standing on end.
He shut himself in his room for the rest of the day, though, only going down to the kitchen for meals and mandatory meetings with Aizawa and Recovery Girl. He didn’t shoo his friends away when they stopped by, but couldn’t bring himself to find the energy to converse much, either. Uravity had scolded him in the hospital after he’d recovered a bit more, as well as his parents. It’d been much of the same— the you should’ve contacted me, you should’ve taken more caution, but also it’s okay, we’ve all screwed up before.

He’d been assured that his hero career wasn’t going to end just because of one shitty accident. His parents understood that while it was a crappy situation, in context, Katsuki had at least some reason for not calling for help right away. Yaoyorozu backed him up on that, too— she’d been there, agreed with his actions (albeit reluctantly), and despite her guilt for not being able to help more, gave clear reason for them not to be punished too severely.

But no matter how many times he received the assurance that he was okay, that there was no real harm done, something still wasn’t sitting right with him.

What is Deku gonna say about this…? What more does he know about why this really happened? How this happened?

The last thing he wanted to see was complete disappointment in his boyfriend’s eyes, but for as nervous as he was about their next confrontation, curiosity ate at him just as bad.

I wanna go out to his place. Wanna talk to him. Wanna… wanna have him hold me again.

His head wasn’t throbbing as much now, and while his chest still hurt like hell, the pain medication didn’t make it unbearable. His arm was still sore, breathing was still hard, but he wasn’t…

Well, it could’ve been worse. Could’ve been a helluva lot worse.

They’d told him he’d gotten away with twelve individual puncture wounds— four on his right shoulder, eight on his upper chest. With those came the bruising, visible and hidden, and with that, burning soreness plaguing his every move. Lastly were his ribs, two fractured and a broken one that’d pierced his right lung in the process. They’d managed to heal his lung at the hospital, but the majority of the recovery would just take time.

But I’m alive. He barely harmed my throat. Those were just minor, minor scratches, and I didn’t lose as much blood as I thought I had.

It was one accident– still an accident, yes, but one he’d managed to scrape through in one piece.

And it won’t happen again. I’ll be more careful. I fucked up, yeah, but I… I get it now.

No one could’ve prepared him for an enemy he couldn’t see, after all.

Another day passed with much of the same— sleep, eat, walk around a bit, sleep. He avoided his phone more than usual, the screen doing anything but helping his head. The only person he’d texted other than his parents, though, was Deku. It wasn’t much– nothing more than a gnight, ily that was only answered with a you too, kacchan.

Even for Deku, just those few words were… too little.

Maybe I can go see him tomorrow. The train ride shouldn’t be too bad, and all I’d really have to do after that is walk to his apartment...

His rest was in fitful bouts that night, mind plagued with all the info he didn’t have.
I’ll go tomorrow. I… I need answers. I don’t wanna live in ignorance for any longer.

A few texts that morning set him up for a trip later, though, and by the time the clock hit two, he was off. The walk to the train station wasn’t too bad, nor the actual ride, but Katsuki would be a fool to say he wasn’t hurting by the time he got off. He managed to make it to a bench off the side of the street, and with a hood over his head as the most meager form of disguise he could manage, tried to stay quiet and just breathe again.

**Why does it still fucking hurt…? I– god, this is irritating.**

But just a few long, painful breaths later found him on his feet again, forcing himself to keep moving.

**I can sit down at Deku’s. I’ll feel better once I get there. Once I can get rid of this damn uncertainty, I’ll… I’ll be fine!**

The walk up the stairs was the hardest part, and with a slight grimace, Katsuki couldn’t help but remember all the time Deku had spent struggling to recuperate and climb up the same damn flights. A part of him almost laughed– it was awful, really, but what else could he do? Like, **I feel you, Deku. Sorry you had to deal with this shit for months.**

His chest was in near-agony by the time he got to the top, though, and he had to stop and relax again before even thinking about knocking on Deku’s door.

**I won’t let you see me as weak. As broken. I can handle myself, and this was just… one mistake.**

Katsuki made his way to the door after a long couple minutes, and after one last exhale, knocked.

The seconds before it finally clicked open were the most nerve-wracking of the day. But when Deku’s face appeared through the crack and invited him in, he gladly complied, relieved to be there but admittedly on edge thinking about what his boyfriend would have to say.

“Glad you could make it, Kacchan.” Deku greeted, shutting the door behind him. “Are you hungry at all? Need to sit down?”

“Nah, I ate before I came out here, but… uh, yeah. I might crash on the couch for a bit, if you don’t mind.”

“Tired?”

“Tired as fuck.”

There was a bit of warmth damming up the concern threatening to break down his barriers, but Katsuki tried to take what he could get, pretend that everything was okay, and got comfortable on the couch he’d come to love. Deku sat down next to him– didn’t touch him, probably due to a fear of making him hurt worse, but Katsuki wasn’t sure he liked the distance more than the chance of a little pain.

**He still seems kinda upset… ugh, Uravity was cool with it, and my parents were flaky but understanding, but… this feels different, somehow.**

“I, ah… I really am glad to see that you’re doing okay, Kacchan…” Deku started, not meeting his eyes. “By the way, were you still planning on staying for dinner?”

“Mm, yeah. Got nothing better to do right now.” He sighed. “Thanks for opening up your schedule last-minute. Sorry I couldn’t, uh… plan all of this better.”
“Don’t be apologizing, it’s all good. I… I care about you, and I wanna be able to be there for you if
you need it, and so… it’s no problem, really. But, um…” Deku paused, and Katsuki could’ve sworn
he saw his hands clench a little more than before, brow creased in something like distress. “Are you
up to hearing about the villain who attacked you?”

“More than up for it.” Katsuki bit his lip. “Fucker said some shit when we were out there. He’s
locked up now, right?”

“Yeah, yeah, he is… wasn’t charged for anything more than a couple of robberies and armed assault,
but he’s in jail. The only good news is that he was acting completely alone. No allies, no friends.
Didn’t talk to anyone about what he was up to. Didn’t leak info to the press.” Deku bit his lip. “But,
god. You weren’t the only one he said shit too. He had some choice words for me when I finally
cought him, and I’ll be honest, seeing your blood on those brass knuckles wasn’t helping my mood at
the time, either.”

_Huh?_ “What’d he say to you? Some garbage about me?”

His boyfriend faltered at the question. “More about, ah… me and my choice in romantic partners.
Said some stuff I really don’t wanna repeat– frankly, it was downright disgusting. I’d had my
suspicions about the villain when we saw him at the park, but, um… I didn’t recognize him on sight
due to the nature of his quirk. Nobody had actually _seen_ what he looked like. So I guess it’s good
that he was kinda lured off the streets, but I… I didn’t want _you_ to be the bait…!”

“I mean, I made it out just fi—”

“That’s still not the point, Kacchan!”

Deku dragged a hand down his face, fingers bent and stiff at the knuckles. “You– I mean, you
realize how he found you, right? It wasn’t an accident. The only _accidental_ part of this was you
getting involved and being treated like some sort of checkmate on me…!”

Katsuki’s mouth went dry, and he was only able to stare as his boyfriend carried on.

“This villain– he’d been stalking me for a week or so. Knew where I lived, knew my schedule, but
didn’t know about _you_ until we went out to the park.”

He watched nails dig into scarred palms hard, too hard.

“We probably wouldn’t have been approached us if he hadn’t seen you with me. But to him, you
were a golden ticket…! The weak link in my life! The way to get me to bend to his demands! And
that– that is _exactly_ what I was so fucking afraid of in the first place!”

_The weak link…?_

“I’m not weak, I’m—”

“Just _listen_ to me!” Deku forced out, voice ragged and raw. “I– I know you’re not conventionally
_weak_, but the fact that you were treated like some pawn means that you’re already prime to be a
target, Kacchan! This– shit, t-this is what I’ve been scared of this whole damn time…!”

“This was just _one_ time, we can be more careful when going out, but—”

“This was our _first_ time going out! The first fucking time! There shouldn’t have been any precedent
for what to look for, no one except my best friends know that you’re intimately involved in my life,
and so people getting leads off of one date? One date that _should’ve_ been treated as an undercover-
ish situation to begin with?” His voice pitched up, fury-charged-fear taking control. “You tell me, Kacchan. What’s going to happen if more than just a single stalker gets word of this!?”

But for as much as he tried to understand Deku’s fear, Katsuki still couldn’t— still couldn’t—

“Why the hell do you care if people come after me?” Katsuki scowled. “I can handle myself! This time was just— it was a weird situation, you know, and if it’d been any different, I would’ve been just fine!”

At those words, though, Deku’s face only grew more strained, more tense.

“I never said you couldn’t handle yourself, but holy shit, Kacchan. Don’t you realize how close you were to being murdered on the spot? Don’t you realize how easily you could’ve been killed!? I’m sorry, but I really, really don’t like seeing my goddamn boyfriend being put in situations that could’ve been avoided had we kept things quieter!” His lips twisted into some strangled form, absolutely distraught. “And if you had called for help earlier, like the reports said you had the chance to, this would be a different story. But you— you went off on your own, ignored your teammate’s concerns, and tried to, what? Be your own hero? Put yourself in danger because you thought you could handle it on your own!?”

“So there, you admit it. You don’t think I can handle myself.” Katsuki accused, arms snapping against his chest. “And holy hell, do you really wanna start on the put yourself in danger tangent? You, of all people!?”

“Kacchan, I—”

“You’re no better, asshole! If anything, you’re worse!”

The room fell silent, each barbed word only serving to send pain shooting through Katsuki’s still-sore chest. Every breath hurt, and if not for the near-blinding anger drowning out just about every other feeling, Katsuki was sure it’d be a million times worse.

“I— I am your boyfriend, right?” He got out, cursing the tears welling in his eyes and streaming down his face. “So don’t you see me for more than just my body? My face? My lips?”

“Of course I do, don’t go saying that I don—”

“Since that first day, you’ve meant the goddamn world to me.” Tears blurred his vision further, further. “And to be able to train alongside you? Be let into your life? Be your goddamn lover!? Holy shit, it’s like a dream come true…! And I thought— I-I thought— honest to god, I thought that you held some of that same respect towards me, but I guess I was wrong, wasn’t I!?”

“Kacchan, stop talking, none of that is—!”

Shut up.

“I don’t need to be protected like some child, don’t need to be guarded like I’m some weak link, and I— all I want is for you to see me as the hero I am, Deku! I said I’d stand by your side, not lay at your feet!”

That’s it.

Katsuki wiped a trembling hand across his face, got to his feet, and didn’t— couldn’t— meet his boyfriend’s eyes. “I’m done talking. I’m going home.”
Please don’t ask me to stay.

“Kacchan– Katsuki, you don’t need to—!”

“I’ll text you at some point.” He grit out. “I’m not ending this shit. This– whatever we have. I’m just going home.”

He half-expected Deku to stop him. To tell him no. To tell him not to go, to apologize, to do something to keep him there.

“...i-if that’s what you want, Kacchan.”

Don’t reply. Don’t reply. Don’t reply.

Katsuki bit his lip, walked towards the door, and shut it without a single look back.

Chapter End Notes

hhaha plz dont hurt me and also plz play nice in the comments tyty
If you’re sad, here’s a link to chapter 20 to warm ur heart again
Also!!! Check out this cute as HECK art by @catskeez thats also their hc for deku and kacchan in this!!! (i know its supposed to be a meme but its so damn CUTE)
And as always, thank u to my beta @aetherlite, and my twitter is @aeronines! (and here’s curiouscat too)

EDIT 3/25: probably not gonna be a chapter next week bc i didnt get any free time over my so-called "break". ive got about half of it written at the time im writing this, but i dont wanna deliver something half-baked. sorry about this, and the next chapter will be up the tuesday after this coming one!
I fucked up.

He wasn’t sure if he wanted to shout, scream, yell—

I fucked up.

—cry, beg, plead—

I fucked up.

—stand, run, drag him back—

I...

—or sit there, eyes frozen on the door, unsaid words still on his lips while those same words stood to crumble to dust in his throat.

Katsuki had left. There wasn’t anything else to say.

Not for good. He said that he didn’t want to end anything. He—he said he’d text. He’s not gone. He’s not...

The horrible, horrible sound of the slamming door had branded itself in his memory, and for as much as Izuku wanted to convince himself that everything was fine, that everything would get better, that they’d get through this first barrier and be okay again, it was...

It was hard. Harder than he could’ve ever imagined.

Did it ever hurt this much with Kirishima? We didn’t fight that much, not really, but then again, that was...

Izuku swallowed.

We were only ever friends with benefits. Nothing more. No matter how much I might’ve loved him, that wasn’t... was never, really... the same.

A part of him still couldn’t believe that Katsuki had honestly thought those things, said those things about him. Maybe it had been in a fit of anger that those wild accusations— the suggestion that he’d only seen Katsuki for his physical traits and only kept him around for his body, and the dismissal of Izuku’s respect for his abilities— but god, it hurt.

Does he really think I think about him like that? Does he honestly think that I don’t care? That I just
want him around as someone to make out with and sleep in my bed?

Nausea coiled in his stomach, and Izuku pulled his legs to his chest, wondering why everything had gone so horribly, horribly wrong.

Why... why...? We... we made it through months apart... made it through so many training sessions and time constraints... made it through too much damn pining, but... after everything so far, he can't understand how much more I see him as? How much he means to me? How much I just wanna see him safe and happy and alive, for fuck's sake?

Angry tears pearled in his eyes, and Izuku couldn't hold back the string of curses that'd been just barely dammed back by trembling lips.

_Dammit, Kacchan! Why? Why?!

A part of him knew he should move. Get up. Do something. But just as strong was the urge to stay, sit, and watch the door that wouldn't open again. He wanted so bad to just believe that Katsuki would come back, all smiles and sunshine and the willingness to accept help and simple security.

But it won't be that easy, will it? Kacchan’s not the type to go back on his words... I doubt he’d just come rushing back in. That’s stupid to expect.

He wasn’t exactly sure when he managed to peel himself off of the couch, all stiff legs and stiff knees, and wander into the kitchen. Not that he was hungry, no. Really, it was just a matter of _what the hell do I do now._

_Should I call someone? Tell someone about this? Text Kacchan? No, no, that last one’s probably a bad idea... even so, though, I just..._

Izuku pulled his phone from his pocket, scrolled through he and Katsuki’s messages, but didn’t see anything that was inherently an issue. What was the problem with asking _how are you?_ What was the issue with an _is everything okay?_ He was a hero, and being a hero meant everyone’s well-being came first, including Katsuki’s—his boyfriend’s.

_Why is it so wrong to want to keep you safe...?_

When he looked down at his phone again, though, he saw someone different on it. Not Katsuki, not Ochako, but...

..._should I call Kirishima?_

There was no denying he was nervous, but at this point, nothing could be worse than the guilt and confusion and fear tearing every bit of him apart. It wasn’t as if it was hard to open up his contacts to call, but as the phone rang, rang, rang, he couldn’t help but feel sick to his stomach.

Thankfully, it was his friend who spoke first.

“Hey, what’s up?” Kirishima greeted. “You said you were taking the afternoon off, right? Is Bakugou over there too?”

..._wonderful. Off to a great start already._

“Well, uh—”

“Whoah, whoah. Are you sick? You sound awful, dude. Need me to bring you some—”
“No, I’m not… sick.” Izuku sunk into a barstool, elbow on the counter and forehead in his palm. “Just, um… Kacchan was here, but…”

“But?”

Izuku bit his lip, fingers curling into his hair. “He walked out. We talked for a few minutes— well, if shouting counts as talking, anyways… and I just… I—”

“Wait wait, hold up. You guys had a fight?”

“I mean, if we’re gonna put a name to it, sure! I guess— I guess that’s what that was, right!?”

Don’t cry. Not now. Not…

“He just— he came over, I was just gonna fill him in on the stuff with that villain, and I— I said that I didn’t wanna see him get killed, and he just started getting angry? Like, what are you trying to tell me? I’m not about to just let you be in danger if I can avoid it, and I just— I-I dunno, he said some stuff that really hurt, and I… I don’t…”

And, yep. There were the tears.

“You know I care about him, right!? I don’t just— don’t just see him as some goddamn bedwarmer! I don’t know what I did wrong, and he— he didn’t give me a chance to explain…!”

He was rambling, rambling, words streaked with tears and blurring into each other faster than Izuku could bother to separate them. At this point, it’d be a miracle if Kirishima understood a single sentence, but with the chaos ringing through his head and his voice, clarity was never an option.

“Hey, hey, Midoriya. Take your time. Get it out. I’m on break for a little bit right now, so… we can talk a little, okay?”

“I just don’t even know what there is to talk about…! I didn’t think there was anything wrong until he— until h-he started arguing back with me about his own damn safety!” Izuku’s voice broke off into a choked sob. “I don’t know what I did wrong, and I… I-I… I don’t get it, I don’t…”

What did I say that was wrong? What did I do that was wrong?

The phone nearly slipped out of his hands and clattered on the bar counter as Izuku kept crying, crying, wracking his brain for wherever the missing answer was.

What he did know, though, was that Kirishima was a saint for listening to his sob-fest and only providing the occasional let it out, it’s okay while Izuku wept and wept. He wasn’t sure how long he spent in incoherency, nor how Kirishima managed to endure his constant noise. That wasn’t to say he was ungrateful— so much the opposite, but shit.

Thank… thank you.

“…hey, Midoriya, do you need me to come over? Is just talking going to be enough?”

Izuku swallowed and shook his head, forgetting that Kirishima couldn’t see. “N-No, no… this is fine. Promise. I… I-I just don’t even know what to do…!”

Kacchan doesn’t… he doesn’t…

“H-He doesn’t hate me, does he?”
“Whoah, whoah, slow down. Breathe. Let’s take this one step at a time, okay?” Kirishima said, and for that moment, if nothing else, Izuku’s words were put on hold. “You’re not gonna make things better by making assumptions like that. Let’s stick to the facts, okay?”

Silence.

“Okay?”

*Listen. Listen. Don’t go… making assumptions.*

“…okay.”

It was quiet for a moment as Kirishima seemed to readjust himself on the other end, Izuku clenching and unclenching his fists slowly, slowly…

“All right. Take your time, but let’s start at the top, okay? You said he came over, you guys talked for a few minutes about the attack, then he walked out. How was he feeling when he came by?”

*How he was feeling…?*

“…tired.” His free hand found its way to the countertop, tracing mindless patterns over the smooth surface. “Still in pain. Even if he won’t admit how much he’s hurting. I… I know even just coming out here had to be one of the hardest things, physically, that he’s done in a few days.”

Seeing Katsuki in the hospital had been hard enough, but none of those visits had ever been easy. Just thinking about that first villain attack at his debut, or the training session that wound up with his boyfriend in the infirmary due to Izuku’s own actions were hard enough to stomach, but seeing Katsuki injured as a result of him again?

I… I just want to see him happy, that’s all, so please…

“I don’t think he’s the type to lie. The pain might’ve amplified things, or let down some barriers he’d forced up before. So we’ve gotta take his words into account, okay? It sounds to me like you were letting your feelings come first.”

“I mean, maybe I was, but it’s like… I mean, you know, right…? I… I’ve never really had like, a fight-fight, just…”

*Whatever… us two had back then.*

Kirishima was quiet for a moment, almost as if he could feel the weight Izuku was carrying. “We… that was always no-strings-attached, though, and it wasn’t– well, you know we weren’t—”

“I know, I-I know. I’m the one who let my damn feelings get in the way then, too.” Izuku sighed. “I just… don’t wanna ruin another relationship.”

“Midoriya, you didn’t ruin—”

“You don’t have to tell me that my unnecessary feelings weren’t what strained our– our friendship.” He mumbled, that last word still so awkward on his tongue. “It was never anything more than friends with benefits, you’re right, but… i-if I hadn’t gotten so attached, then I wouldn’t… well, I probably would’ve kept in better contact with you after third year instead of trying to cut ties to force my feelings away.”

But Kirishima only went quiet, and Izuku could practically picture the small, tired, slightly sad smile
on his face.

“Look. What’s done is done. We’re past that, and things are better now. And we’re not talking about what we were, yeah? We’re talking about you and Bakugou.”

*Right, right, it’s been... god, over two years since then. I can’t live in the past again. I won’t let myself be bogged down with everything that could’ve been.*

“You’re right, you’re right.” For as much as it hurt, he had to force himself to stay focused on the situation. “I guess the main part was that he seemed really hurt when I mentioned that he was the weak point in my life? Like, you know, in terms of hero work and all that, but it wasn’t... well, I meant weak as in vulnerable, but it just... god, I dunno. He’s a student, it’s not like it’s unreasonable to insinuate that he needs more protection, but he just got really offended, I think? God, I… I just want to keep him safe, so that he can grow into the role of a hero without being killed first...!”

Hospitals and bruises flashed to the forefront of his mind yet again, and for as much as he tried to suppress the feelings and stick to the logic, everything kept turning itself over and over and over again in his head.

Why is he so against me wanting to keep him safe? How does that imply that he’s weak? I’ve seen him fight, he’s not—

“Hey. Midoriya. I can hear you thinking. Relax, okay? I see what you’re saying. And I’ve got some thoughts, but I need you to calm down a bit before we can talk.”

*Calm down. Calm down. Right. Right. What did they say in therapy?*

Izuku made himself swallow, throat still dry, and breathe.

*In, out, in, out, in...*

“I... yeah.” He exhaled, nodding. “I’m here. I’m, ah... listening.”

“Alright, then. Wanna hear what I think?”

“...mhm. Please.”

He’d be lying if he said he wasn’t a little nervous, but...

*I need help. I don’t know what to do.*

“So.” Kirishima paused, and— “Am I wrong in saying that he ran off because he thought you were being overprotective?”

*Overprotective? “I mean, I didn’t think this was anything more than a normal level of protectiveness —”*

“I asked you what he thought, not what you think.” His friend pushed. “And if nothing else, I kinda see why he left now.”

...wait, did I... “Did I really screw up?”

“It’s, um... by the sound of it, it doesn’t seem like you’ve been listening to what Bakugou was saying a whole lot.” Kirishima hesitated. “And hey, dude, don’t take this the wrong way, but you’re not exactly... the best at hearing out to other people’s views and taking advice. In all the years I’ve known you, I’ve come to realize that you’re definitely the type of person who, uh, thinks they’re
usually right. Asserting yourself isn’t necessarily a bad thing, but you get kinda, well… stubborn.”

Izik’s throat went dry. “N-No, I’m not—”

“Right there. Listen to yourself. You’re doing it again, not hearing what you’re saying, much less what I’m saying.” There might’ve been a bit of a groan from the other end. “I know you care about him. I know you just wanna see him be safe. And he will be, I promise. But dude, you can’t treat him like he’s incompetent. He’s a student, yeah, but he’s a student in U.A.’s Hero Course. He’s not an idiot.”

“Oh my god, I never said that he was an idiot! Why– why are both you and him saying that… that I honestly don’t think he can protect himself.

“Midoriya… he’s interning under me. I’ve seen him get texts and calls from you enough times lately to see that he’s getting frustrated. Even if he hasn’t said anything about getting annoyed to me, it’s easy to tell that he’s not super happy about it. I mean, he obviously likes talking to you, I think it’s more just the constant, kinda… patronizing treatment that he’s not happy about.”

A part of Izuku felt like he was getting scolded too, but he held back those feelings, getting the sense that now would not be the best time to express it.

“We went through that same course, yeah? When you were a second year, would you have wanted someone constantly harping on you to stay safe at every turn?”

“W-Well, no…”

“Exactly.” Kirishima emphasized. “And this probably would be best to keep it between us, but… Bakugou’s got a lot of pride. Maybe too much, yeah, but he’s just trying to prove himself. He wants to win on his own merits. He’s hardly different from the way you were, Mr. I-Don’t-Ever-Need-Help. I won’t deny that he needs some amount of protection, and that he needs to learn to chill with his pride a bit, but you gotta understand that keeping your eyes on him so much is gonna make him upset. And if there’s anything that I’ve figured out from dating Ochako, it’s that you gotta communicate. Listen. Compromise.”

Win on… his own merits?

When Izuku stayed silent, some subtle realization working its way into his skin, Kirishima continued.

“… he’s your boyfriend, y’know. And I know he wouldn’t choose to be with someone he doesn’t trust.”

I… I thought I trusted him, but… was that more superficial than I thought? I mean, of course I trust that I can be myself with him, but I hadn’t really considered that he might… not want to be taken care of on the field.

Izik’s feet knocked against the side of the counter, discomfort and uncertainty tingling through his veins as he came closer, closer to something it seemed he was missing. “Is it really so wrong to want the people I care about to be safe and happy, though…?”

This is just… weird to think about. I never wanted to damage his pride, but is wanting to protect him really that bad?

“There’s nothing wrong with wanting that, not at all!” Kirishima’s words came out in a rush. “What I’m saying is that you’re watching him, uh, kinda like a parent would watch a child. I know, I know,
probably not the comparison you wanna hear, but… that’s the vibe I’m getting.”

Nails dug into palms, free hand clenched tight on the counter. “I’ve never thought of him like a child just cause he’s younger, he’s just… you know, inexperienced! And seeing recklessness freaks me out cause hell, I’ve been there too!”

“But think about this, ‘kay? If you’re not trying to keep him safe all the time, he probably wouldn’t feel like he’d have to prove himself as badly to be ‘good enough’.”

Wait…

“…you really think that’s how he’s feeling?”

*Does he really think he’s not good enough to… to be with me? Next to me?*

Izuku froze.

*When I rescued him. When he tied in the sports festival and I was gone. When I didn’t see him perform in the exams. When I didn’t show up to help him train during my accident– Ochako told me he’d done really well then. When I beat him in the damn games at the cultural festival, and the amusement park.*

*And… when I caught the villain that could’ve killed him, too.*

“I don’t wanna go making assumptions, but I’d say there’s a pretty good shot it is. And hey, It’s not an awful thing to have fights, y’know? It happens, and you just gotta work through it. Me and Ochako have always come out for the better, but… it’s a thing. Not an awesome one, but it is a thing.”

*Does he… shit, has he ever really…*

It would be a total lie if he said he felt better. That said, it would be a little closer to the truth if he admitted hearing that was reassuring.

*Is this really because he doesn’t feel like he’s won in front of me…?*

“I guess I’ll just, uh… wait for him to contact me again, then.” Izuku mumbled, some bit of misery welling up in his stomach. “I’ll… try and think on all that. What you said.”

“And what he said?”

“...*and* what he said.”

The noise on the other end had to be relief. “Alright. Sounds good. Anything else you need to talk about?”

“I, uh, think I’ll be okay for now.” Izuku sucked in a breath. “Thanks for putting up with all this. I… I really appreciate it.”

“It’s no problem, dude. You’re a friend who needed an ear, and I had some time to give. So don’t worry, ‘kay?”

“...’kay.”

“I’m gonna get going. But seriously, call or text if you need anything. I’m not far away.”
“I’ll keep that in mind. Yeah.”

There was a long, weighty pause before the line finally went dead with a mutual goodbye. Izuku checked his phone once more for texts– but still, nothing.

Kacchan will contact me when he wants to, I guess… and I… well, he needs space. I think.

He forced himself to shove his phone back in his pocket, and stood up with one look back at the door.

I care about him, and… he cares about me. We’ll figure this out.

In the windowsill, under too-bright, blazing summer light, familiar orange petals had started to shrivel.

...right?

Katsuki froze two steps down the hall.

Don’t look back. Don’t go back. Don’t talk to him yet…!

A part of him wasn’t sure what hurt worse– the thought of staying and listening to Deku whine about how he needed to be protected, the nauseating feeling of walking away from the one person who usually made him happy, or the horrible soreness gnawing at his arm, chest, and making each and every breath a vicious struggle.

Crying– crying won’t help. S’only gonna make this shit harder. I gotta– shit, even if it hurts, I have to keep moving…!

That wasn’t to say there weren’t tears in his eyes by the time he made it down the stairs, though.

I… I don’t wanna see him right now. Don’t wanna talk to him right now. He’ll just go back to that stupid, stupid, condescending bullshit, and…

Katsuki wiped his face with his sleeve, pulled the hood over his head, and zipped up the jacket with still-shaky hands before leaving the complex.

I can’t just sit by and let him call me weak. I can’t be someone who has to be constantly protected…!

Fuck, if… if Uravity, Red Riot, my parents, even Yaoyorozu see that I’m not doing that bad, then where the hell is he getting this shit from if not his own stupid fucking perceptions!?

To say he was upset was an understatement. For all intents and purposes, Katsuki couldn’t even remember the last time he’d been so completely and utterly pissed.

If nothing else, the walk to the train wasn’t nearly as hard as the one down the stairs. The tricky part was staying quiet– despite Katsuki’s usual composure when he wanted to keep it, frustration and simple pain were nearly enough to wrench a muffled hiss or two from his lips. He kept a low profile on the ride back, didn’t meet anyone’s eyes, and walked back to the dorms without any major issues.

But it was only when he arrived at the school gates that Katsuki realized that his friends would probably ask him why he was back early. Why he looked upset. Why he also looked as if he was about to punch someone in the face.

And really, Katsuki wasn’t sure he had an answer he was willing to give.
Yeah, I got in a fight with my boyfriend. The guy I’ve been pining over for years. Don’t know how to fix shit. We’ve only been dating for a month.

He couldn’t remember the last time he felt so sick.

I… really… I really do…

It was all he could do to shove the rampaging thoughts away and walk, walk back under the blazing afternoon sun and to the front steps of his dorm, sweat nasty under his clothes and heart heavy with the day’s events.

…I know I love…

Katsuki grit his teeth, opened the door, and hoped he’d be able to make it to his room before anyone saw him so he could cry in peace.

...god, I just want to hug him. I just want things to be okay. I don’t want him assuming I can’t handle myself. I want him, but I don’t want him watching over me like—like that.

He made it across the common room and all the way to the stairs.

I’m not made of glass, dammit…!

“...Bakugou?”

Katsuki didn’t look up. Didn’t wanna look towards the source of Todoroki’s familiar voice.

“I thought you weren’t going to be available toni—”

“Never said I was, did I!” He snapped, whatever impact the words might’ve had lost in the cracked delivery. “Not in the fucking mood, asshole. Get lost.”

Each scathing demand was a brittle shield, cracking and shattering at the edges. Katsuki would’ve run up the stairs if he could’ve—the only thing stopping him, really, was the agonizing pain and the fact that he wasn’t sure if he’d make it four flights running and still be breathing.

“I thought you were out with Valiant?”

“Shut up, okay!?” He shoved Todoroki out of the way, trying to scramble at least a few steps up past him. “I thought I said I wasn’t in the mood!”

He should’ve known better than to think that that would deescalate the situation, but Katsuki had been holding back the screaming and the shouting for too long already.

“...I’m going to go get Camie.” Todoroki said, and if Katsuki hadn’t been consumed by all the emotion flooding through him already, he’d have attempted to stop him. “Even for you, this isn’t… normal.”

“I don’t want to talk to you or her!” He hissed, climbing further away. “Just leave me the hell alone, alright!?”

Katsuki turned, ignoring the tears beading at his eyes and the violent trembling of his lip, and nearly ran right into the person he very much didn’t want to see.

“...holy shit, Baku.”
No, no—

“What— what’s going on?”

He couldn’t stop his eyes from flitting up to meeting Camie’s in time, and just that one look— that one look— was enough to break something in him.

...it’s gonna be my room or hers, isn’t it?

“I-I…” Katsuki faltered, shocked by how weak just that one word felt. “S-Shit… uh, could we go somewhere more private…?”

Even though he didn’t expect to be turned down, the urgency in which Camie nodded and ushered him to her room left him in near disbelief. Before he knew it, Katsuki found himself sitting on Camie’s bed, a blanket thrown at him and a pillow shoved to his chest.

But she sat down in a chair across from him, Todoroki beside her, and went quiet. All that Katsuki could see was worry in her eyes and a slight frown over her lips, not moving and yet so ready to listen.

She... what should I even...

The blanket was warm around him. Comforting. A blessing and a curse, really, because as soon as the word safe popped into his head did Deku come blasting to the forefront of his mind again, arms draped around Katsuki while telling him all about how much he cared for Kacchan’s safety. Acid disgust foamed in his gut, and nothing but bitterness fumed within him as he yanked off the blanket and shoved it away.

Don’t– don’t touch me. I don’t need to be protected, dammit...!

Just that movement must’ve been Camie’s first cue, though, because her eyes widened, slightly nervous now. She opened her mouth to speak, but before she could say a word—

“I– I’m fine.” Katsuki grit out, trying to hold back the frustrated tears in his eyes as his hands dug into the pillow in his lap. “Just fine. Chest ’n shoulder hurt. That’s it.”

But each word was forced out, hollow and far weaker than he ever imagined they could be.

“...not gonna make you talk if you really don’t want to, but. I know that’s not the whole truth.” Camie murmured, and glanced over her shoulder. “Hey, Todo. Get him some water.”

“I don’t want—”

“Crying makes you dehydrated, right?” Camie pushed. “I know you care about your health. Don’t be stupid about something small like this, okay?”

He bit back a retort, unable to really find a reason to fight that logic. “...fine.”

Todoroki left the room, and as soon as the door clicked shut, he felt much, much smaller than before. Katsuki wasn’t sure what name to put to his feelings— it had all blurred and blended together to create some concoction of frustration, anger, sadness.

I don’t want this. I just wanna be with him and be happy with everything again...! But shit, I can’t… fuck, I... I feel like I’m gonna be sick.

“Is– is there something wrong with not wanting to be protected all the time...?” Katsuki started, the
air a little clearer with Todoroki gone. “That’s not weird, right? To just– w-wanna take care of myself?”

*How is that bad? How is it wrong to want to live for myself? To be able to have people have faith that I can do things on my own…?*

“No, I… I’d say that’s normal.” Camie frowned. “Is this because of the attack?”

*Is it? “Uh… kinda, I guess.” He swallowed. “It… well, it was more the trigger than anything, I guess I’d just ignored it before, but… Deku, he just…”*

*It’s just Camie. It’s just Camie. She… she’s not gonna judge, right?*

“The way h-he’s been treating me, it just… feels like he doesn’t see me as a hero. Doesn’t take me seriously when I saw I wanna be his partner on the field. Feels like I’m just some– some thing to be shoved behind a glass case and looked at. Shit, I’m n-not just a fucking boyfriend! I can handle myself too, y’know!? Just cause I made one mistake doesn’t mean I’m incompetent, right? Right!”

“Wait wait, he said you’re inco—”

“Not exactly like that, b-but it’s like, shit, it just…” Katsuki’s mouth was dry. “Implications, you know? Said he didn’t think I could handle shit on m-my own, keeps asking me about my goddamn safety every day, a-and just– it just– I trust him, fuck, I *love* him, so why… why doesn’t it feel like he t-trusts me at all for what I’m going to school for? The same damn school that he went to!”

*Is it cause I can’t ever seem to win when he’s around? Is that why, huh?*

“It just– f-feels like I’m a goddamn failure every time I’m trying to do what’s gonna be my job, and he just wants to shove me away on the sidelines to watch! I– I-I’m gonna be a hero, yeah? So why, *why* the h-hell doesn’t he seem to see me as more than someone to sit on his lap and make out with him!”

Katsuki hadn’t even heard the door open again through the mess of tears streaking down his cheeks and into the pillow he’d buried his face in. It was embarrassing, embarrassing, so damn embarrassing to think that something as simple as *this* had him in so much distress.

*Everything hurts… god, why the hell does everything hurt…?*

He couldn’t hear the sounds of Todoroki and Camie talking as the static in his ears drowned out everything around him, couldn’t do anything as the horrible pressure threatening to burst through his skull kept getting worse, worse, worse.

*Please stop, please stop, just stop…!*  

This wasn’t losing against a villain. This wasn’t failing a test. This was…

*I love him. I’m learning to love him. I trust him so, so damn much, but…*

*Doubt* was the only word that came to mind.

*He doubts that I can handle myself properly. He doubts that I’ll be able to be more than just a boyfriend to him! Hell, he doesn’t even seem to trust me enough to go any further than making out with him!*

“…think they… fight… get Momo, she’ll… yeah, yeah, I’m staying…”
I don’t want you to think about me like that.

“I don’t wanna fight.”

“I just wanna know that you see me as an equal, dammit…!”

It could’ve been seconds that passed. Minutes. Hours. He didn’t know, didn’t care, couldn’t do much of anything except cry in a way that he didn’t know was physically possible.

Katsuki wasn’t sure he’d ever hated a feeling so much in his life.

By the time he managed to calm down a little bit, he finally noticed not just one, or two, but three people in the room. All three of his closest friends, staring right at him.

Oddly enough, though, there was something comforting about it.

They don’t… see me as weak.

Yaoyorozu was the first to talk.

“Katsuki… did, ah… did you and Midoriya fight?”

He wasn’t sure when she’d started using his first name– probably during the attack, but it didn’t matter if it was coming from her, really. All he could manage was a nod in response, though, just the word fight making him feel sicker than expected.

A glass of water was held out in front of his face, and somehow, he managed to take it. For his own sanity, he tried to ignore how much it was shaking– recognizing how bad it was would only make things worse.

“Did you leave?” Todoroki asked.

Another nod.

And lastly, Camie. “…you guys didn’t like, break up, did you?”

I’m not ending this shit. This– whatever we have.

He shook his head.

I’m just going home.

“Gotcha, gotcha…”

Katsuki brought the cup to his lips and drank slowly, slowly, water splashing up from the sides of it and trickling down his chin. It was messy, but for once, he could hardly find the motivation to care.

“Do you wanna talk about what happened…?” Yaoyorozu continued, as if testing the waters. “It’s alright if you don’t. But, ah… did this have something to do with your injury?”

Thinking about the whole thing in a more practical sense helped, in a way.

“Just, y’know, went over. We… w-we talked a little bit ‘bout the villain, I got more info, and… then
it turned into…”

I didn’t want you to be the bait…!

Katsuki’s fingers tightened around the glass, and it took every bit of focus to not break it.

“…the reason I… that I… was attacked.”

You– I mean, you realize how he found you, right? It wasn’t an accident.

He grit his teeth.

I know it wasn’t an accident. That doesn’t mean I’m weak. Helpless.

Between fighting Deku in his head and fighting his own failures, there was no way he could’ve ever been expected to keep it together.

But you– you went off on your own, ignored your teammate’s concerns, and tried to, what? Be your own hero? Put yourself in danger because you thought you could handle it on your own!?

Fresh tears swelled in the corners of his eyes.

You weren’t there, asshole! You– you didn’t see what happened! If Uravity, Red Riot, and my goddamn parents can see the situation for what it really was– a shitty-ass, bad-luck situation– then why the hell can’t you!?

“Baku. Hey, Baku. Look at me, okay?”

Camie.

“It, uh… feels like you’re spiralling again. You just gotta focus on the here and now, okay? Drink some more. I think you’re kinda dehydrated.”

Drink. Okay.

It was getting more and more mechanical, that motion. But he did as he was told, finding it easier to listen to those sorts of simple instructions than fight them. And yeah, maybe it did wind up clearing his head, if only a little.

“Sorry, sorry…” He swallowed, still dry despite having downed half the glass. “It… I dunno, he just… the villain attacked me cause… c-cause he saw me ‘n Deku at the park, and the guy had been stalking Deku t-to get back at him, ‘n thought I’d be a w-way in to achieve that, and…”


“…Deku, he flipped out, cause this… it was the exact reason he didn’t wanna go out. He’s scared, and I-I mean, I get why, but he just… acted like I wouldn’t be able to handle any of the consequences! And Yao.. Momo… knows that t-this attack was just shit luck, a-and I already feel shitty for dragging her into this, too…! If it’d been any other quirk, we… we’d have been fine, yeah?”

“…it, ah… likely would’ve gone a lot better, yes.” Yaoyorozu nodded. “I see what Midoriya is saying, but I’ve seen your skills firsthand. You’re certainly not incompetent.”

Katsuki finished his water, more than a little relieved by the agreement. “Y-Yeah, and I mean… I’m still a student, but it feels like he doesn’t have an ounce of trust that I’m gonna be okay. He’s a pro,
**and going up against way worse shit on a daily basis, but it’s not like I’m barking at him every second of the day to see that he’s alright. I trust that he’s gonna be okay. And if he’s not, then you know? It happens! Shit happens! That’s— fuck, that’s what we signed up for with this whole heroing thing...!”**

“...I mean, you’re not wrong.” Todoroki said. “Heroing isn’t the safest profession, and mistakes... they happen.”

“Exactly. But what do I get instead? A lecture on how I’m not the one who should be putting myself in danger, when, last I checked, that’s the whole damn job description!” He paused, catching his breath. “A-And, it’s not like I don’t want him to have my back, like, hell. I wanna be able to protect him in battle. I wanna be able to fight alongside him. But that— that’s not the same as hovering over every step I take and making sure I’m safe and secure.”

The small room fell silent, save for Katsuki’s small, pained noises at every breath.

“Hey, Baku, um...” Camie began, hesitating. “I totally get what you’re saying— like, really, I do, but... I feel like Midoriya means well? And, uh—” She stopped, just as Katsuki went to open his mouth. “Nope. I’m talking right now. You get your turn after.”

What is she...

“As... as tough as it is for him, he’s probably trying, you know? He’s been single for a while, right? And like, all he knows is hero work. Right now, this is probably just one of the ways he’s trying to show he cares about you.” She pursed her lips. “Look, when we were at the park, I... I could totally see it. It was kinda crazy, but I could like, feel the care you guys have for each other. It’s something special, yeah?”

Katsuki swallowed.

“I... guess you’re right. But I dunno, it’s like... like he cares about my well-being more than he cares about, kinda... me as a person. And yeah, maybe that’s just me. Whatever. But I can’t— shit, I can’t do this. I don’t think I can stay with him if this is the kind of thing I have to look forward to. I can’t do this if— i-if I constantly feel like I’m gonna be failing in front of him...”

“Hey. Look here. Don’t be all down, okay?” Camie continued. “Sometimes you gotta, like, compromise. You know, talk it out with each other. Figure out what works and what doesn’t. I think he wants the best for you, so let him know that the sort of thing he’s doing right now doesn’t have you at your best, m’kay?”

It... I dunno...

Katsuki forced a small, weak smile. “You make it sound so easy.”

“Well, aren’t you the one who never backs down from a challenge?”

...never backs down...

His chest hurt. His head hurt. His shoulders hurt, and his heart hurt. But some sort of nameless warmth wormed its way under his skin, and despite the beating he’d received over the last few days, physical and mental, Katsuki felt as if something new had opened up to him.

Huh.

“Yeah, that’s me.”
“Then this challenge is no different, right?” She pushed. “C’mon. I know you’ve got it in you, big guy.”

He wasn’t sure where he’d managed to find friends like this, but…

Shit.

“Course I’ve got it in me.” Katsuki said, with a bit more confidence that time. “I– I’m not gonna lose this. Him. I’ll make sure that we get our shit together.”

“That’s what I like to hear.” Camie grinned. “Get your mans. Work it out. Be the best couple out there, alright?” She paused. “Though, you’d be hard-pressed to surpass me ‘n Momo. So aim for second place, yeah?”

“I’m a be the best, you shit. Just watch me!”

“Then prove it, babe! Show me what you got!”

Even though the mood had changed for the better, Katsuki was still nervous. Upset. Not quite sure how to word things in his own head, much less out loud to Deku.

But I’m not gonna lose him. Not like this.

It was around seven or so when Katsuki left Camie’s room to go to his own, and soon enough, he found himself thinking again.

We were supposed to be having dinner about now. Maybe cuddling on the couch. Maybe he’d be holding me, maybe I’d be lying in his lap, maybe he’d be kissing me and saying shit with that goddamn gorgeous voice of his.

Maybe… maybe we’d have been happy. If I’d just kept my mouth shut, then maybe, maybe, everything would’ve been…

For as simple as that sounded, though, Katsuki knew he really wouldn’t be able to feel fine had that been the case.

But at the same time, I… don’t wanna go to sleep without talking to him again.

Katsuki only brought out his phone just before passing out for the night, though, and despite the warning his trembling hands gave as he opened it up, seeing Deku’s name in his message history hurt worse than expected. His boyfriend hadn’t texted him at all— and with a bit of a gut-turn, Katsuki realized that he’d probably respected his wishes in doing that.

I said I’d text first.

Nervous fingers hit the keyboard, and somehow, the awkward start to their potential conversation came easier than expected.

[Katsuki] hey

[Katsuki] just wanted to say goodnight

There were no I miss yous or I wish I was there, but he wasn’t there to show regret. That said, he’d expected an almost immediate response that didn’t arrive.

...does he not wanna reply?
But several minutes later, just as he was about to give up, the little Deku is typing box flew up on the screen.

[Deku] shit

[Deku] wait no

[Deku] hi

[Deku] um

[Deku] i didn't think you were gonna contact me so soon so aha uh

[Deku] did you make it back to your dorm sa

[Deku] sflaf shit sorryingore that

[Deku] god i probably look stupid but

[Deku] well uh

[Deku] goodnight to you too, kacchan

He could practically hear the nervousness in every single word, hear the anxious tapping of Deku’s fingers against the keyboard and see him sweating over his phone, trying to figure out what to say. What to not say.

[Katsuki] lol

[Katsuki] ill text u later

But, he had to force himself to stop just before the ily came out.

No more talking. Not right now.

[Deku] ah okay

[Deku] ill respond when i can

[Deku] and uh

[Deku] thank you, kacchan

Thank you.

Those two little words stuck with him as he shut off his phone, pulled the covers over his still-sore body, and finally, finally got to sleep.

“Yeah, it’s, ah– kinda in the back corner! Come through the door, I’ve got a black jacket on, and lemme know if you can’t find me.”

“Mhm, mhm. I’ll be there in a sec.”

Izuku swallowed, tried not to push it, and huddled back into the small seat. The back corner of the coffeehouse really was a decent spot– he’d talked to the owners a bit beforehand, told them he was going to be with a friend, and they’d guaranteed that any press attempting to enter would be shooed
away, and that they wouldn’t be given any special treatment.

*Loking for normalcy here. Looking for normalcy.*

“Left or right corner?”

“A-Ah, left!”

It’d been three weeks since their argument. Three weeks filled only with brief, awkward texts, short calls, and tiptoeing around the subject neither of them particularly wanted to discuss.

“Mm. I see you.”

And now, for the first time in three weeks, Izuku was getting to see his boyfriend in person again. Katsuki hadn’t wanted to meet at Izuku’s apartment, and he’d complied, realizing that he probably had his reasons for the request. Between work and Katsuki’s school schedule, though, finding any time had been tough to begin with. They’d originally wanted to go last week, but those plans fell through after Izuku had been called out on an emergency case that he couldn’t afford to turn down.

But, anyways.

*We’re here now. Not the most ideal situation, but it’s—*

“Shit, almost didn’t recognize you with that damn beanie on.”

Katsuki slid into the seat across from him before Izuku could respond, decked out in an open white, gray-patterned button up, complete with a white undershirt, black shorts, and black shoes. Really, it was unfair how good he looked, how low that shirt collar dipped, because for as much as they had to resolve, all Izuku wanted to do was drag him home and kiss him till he knew how much he was loved.

*But… that’s part of the problem, isn’t it…?*

“It’d be harder to avoid attention if I wasn’t covering up my hair.” Izuku said, though his eyes remained fixed on Katsuki. “A-Anyways. Um. Shit.”

*Off to a great start, huh?*

Katsuki squinted, confused. “Something wrong?”

“No, uh…” He hesitated, fumbling with his fingers. “Just– well, is it alright if I say that you look really hot right now?”

Something jumped in his stomach at the sight of a subtle red rising up over Katsuki’s cheeks, and Izuku was reminded for the millionth time of just one of the many reasons he loved him.

“..’spose that’s fine, yeah.” Katsuki said, more than a little flushed. “You ain’t too bad yourself.”

Neither of the two knew where to start. Knew what was okay to say. Knew what to do.

*This feels… different.*

“Mind if I get you a drink?” His boyfriend offered, and though Izuku hated the thought of him spending money when he was the one with the disposable income, figured that right now, Katsuki might take that as part of the whole treating-him-like-a-child… thing.
So, he nodded. Smiled a small smile.

“Yeah, um. If you’d like to.” He paused. “…maybe a mocha? With whipped cream?”

Katsuki grinned. “Whipped cream, huh?”

_Oh, you little_— “Really wanna start there, do you now?” Izuku’s face burned. “Yes. God. It tastes good. Let me live, Kacchan.”

“Alright, alright. If you say so.”

It was a quick trip there and back, though. Katsuki set his drink down in front of him, got back in his seat, and started sipping on his own.

“Glad you were able to snag some time off.” His boyfriend said, looking up from his cup. “Believe it or not, I have missed seeing you. In person. Y’know.”

“I’m glad too, and…” His mouth went dry.

This is harder than I thought.

“I… w-well, you know… I’m really, really glad to see you again.” Izuku admitted. “Can I say I missed you, too?”

_Can I say I’ve been nervous as fuck? Can I say a part of me thought you wouldn’t wanna talk to me again?_

“You’re so dramatic sometimes.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Shit happens. We… we’ll figure this out. ‘Kay? Just gotta, y’know… talk some more. About stuff.” He swallowed. “We’re still… I mean, we’re still together, right?”

No matter how much he wanted to, Izuku couldn’t forget the look on his face just before he’d walked out, nor those last, bitter, frustrated words he’d said. But—

_I’m not ending this shit. This– whatever we have._

“Y-Yeah, we’re… still together.” Izuku nodded. “I mean. As long as that’s what you want. I want it. I just– shit, don’t wanna make you feel like I’m– I love you so much, y-you know, a-and I…”

_Am I really gonna cry right now? On our first damn date since that fight?_

“I know.” Katsuki cut him off. “I love you. I do. So don’t go forgetting it, alright?”

His boyfriend stretched a hand out to him across the table, palm open and waiting.

“Alright?”

_He’s…_

Izuku’s hand found it’s way into Katsuki’s, fingers locking into his, and for the first time in weeks it felt like he could breathe again.

“…alright.”

“Good.” His boyfriend squeezed his hand tighter, and Izuku was nearly on the verge of tears just from that single, simple motion. “Promise we’ll figure this stuff out?”
He’s giving this a chance. A real, honest chance.

Whatever honeymoon phase they’d had was over.

“Yeah. I promise.”

Now, they’d be doing this for real.

Just as Izuku pulled his hand away, though, his phone started blasting in his pocket again. He cursed under his breath, yanked it out to turn it back on silent (Izuku realized quickly enough that he’d forgotten to do so after his brief call with Katsuki), but stopped when he saw the caller ID.

...Jirou? She doesn’t call my personal often. Huh…

“H-Hey, I’m really sorry, mind if I see what this is about real quick?” Izuku said, more than a little guilty when Katsuki nodded his approval. “Okay. Thanks. Won’t be more than a minute.”

The phone shot to his ear as soon as he accepted the call, and with a quiet sorry, s’gotta be quick, his friend began.

“Didn’t mean to bother you if you’re busy.” Jirou said. “But I just wanted to let you know that I, ah... won a coupon at one of my gigs recently for a free overnight trip to this ryokan with a private onsen. It’s about an hour’s ride out, and the place is for couples, and, well, I figured it’d be easier to contact you than Uraraka or Kirishima right now. If you want it, it’s yours, but if not, I’ll try to get ahold of them soon. It’s only valid in like, December, but if there’s anyone you’d wanna go with, then…”

Izuku had stopped listening after the words free, private, and for couples.

“Um. Yeah. Just a moment.”

He pulled the phone from his ear, covered the microphone, and stared straight at Katsuki with a growing, giddy smile on his face.

“...Kacchan, you wouldn’t happen to have spare time over winter break, would you?”

“It’s the middle of September right now, but I mean, yeah. I should.” Katsuki said. “Something going on?”

After a quick yes please on the tickets, thank you so much, Izuku hung up and put his phone away.

“Well, it’s only valid a few months from now, but I think I might be able to get something nice together. For us.” Izuku grinned, feeling miles better than before.

This argument– this conflict– we’ll get it all worked out. Not right away, probably, but...

Katsuki’s eyes lit up. “Oh, really?”

We both want this to work.

“Yeah. Really.” He paused. “I think I’ll keep it a secret for a little bit, but, um… know that we’ll have something to look forward to, I guess?”

A sort of light came over Katsuki’s face, and a bit of hope settled in Izuku’s chest along with it.

“...something to look forward too?” His boyfriend raised an eyebrow. “Hm. Well, I guess we’ll have
some time to talk before then, right?”

“Right. Yes. Absolutely.” He paused. “Things will be different. We’ll… I’ll make sure of it on my end. I— shit, I-I don’t wanna… god, I don’t wanna let things get too far before we deal with them again. Not like this.”


I… yeah. Understandable.

“Same.” He swallowed. “I have my reasons, just as much as you have yours, I’m sure. So I’ll learn too.”

This time, Izuku was the one to reach out his hand.

“For learning?”

The look on his boyfriend’s face wasn’t a smile, nor a frown, nor anything bitter or angry or upset. No— that was—

Katsuki put his hand in Izuku’s, held it close.

“For learning.”

It was a promise.

And we won’t break it next time.

Chapter End Notes

i know i keep apologizing for this stuff but sorry about the break last week guys adjsfl i thought id be able to make it but. Nope.
THAT SAID!!! If you havent already seen it, i put short lil thing up on my twitter yesterday as a sort of, “alternate version” to this chapter, read n enjoy and plz remember what date it was uploaded on:)
And another thing!!! Thank you SO MUCH to @polyhamart for this FUCKINB BEAUTIFUL DRAWING OF VALIANT!!!! I'M STILL CRYIN!!!!
Lastly, thank u so much to my beta @aetherlite, and i hope you guys enjoyed!!
“So, lemme get this straight. This person—”

“My friend.”

“Your friend, won a coupon for a free overnight trip to this place? Like, for real?”

“Last I checked, that was, in fact, the case.”

“...damn.”

Izuku couldn’t get over the small bit of wonder on Katsuki’s face as he stared out the train window and over flourishing scenery, the cityscape having only recently disappeared behind them.

“S’nice of your friend to offer.” Katsuki murmured, relaxing back into his seat. “Don’t think I’ve ever been to a private onsen before. I’ve gone with my family once or twice to group ones, but they usually leave me behind when they go out.”

“Hm, wonder why.” Izuku chuckled, only to receive a light smack in the arm in return.

“Don’t make me think about my parents having sex, asshole.” His boyfriend grumbled. “But, hell. You said that you started planning this like, two months ago?”

“Three.”

“Shit…” Katsuki let out a small sigh. “Time went by faster than I thought it would.”

Izuku managed a weak smile. “It tends to do that, the older you get. I just wish I’d have gotten to see you more….”

“Same here. Ugh.” His boyfriend’s head slumped against his shoulder. “I got my ass beat preparing for finals, and it felt like it was just exam after exam after exam. Break’s a fucking miracle.”

“U.A. doesn’t leave much time for slacking off, that’s for sure.” Izuku’s hand found its way to rest on Katsuki’s leg. “God, I missed you. Wish we’d managed more than five dates between September and now.”

“Five? I don’t think we can count the one you ran off in the middle of for an assignment a proper date.” Katsuki snorted. “Four-and-a-half, at best. And two of those doubled as training sessions.”

“Yeah, yeah… but, hey. I can’t say I minded kissing you while I had you pinned down on the beach.” He grinned as a barely-hidden flush rose up over Katsuki’s cheeks. “Come on, it wasn’t that bad.”
“...whatever.” His boyfriend rolled his eyes. “Maybe it wasn’t awful.”

Truth be told, though, combat training had been a touchy subject since their fight several months ago. It’d taken two months alone for Izuku to not feel nauseous at just the thought of raising his fists against Katsuki, and even once they’d started again, he knew he hadn’t been able to give it his all during those sessions. Seeing him on the ground hurt, and while Izuku had been trying to hold off on multitudes of checking-up messages, it was hard, so damn hard to think about the fact that there were people out there that could be out to hurt him, and that he couldn’t do a single thing about it.

And they’d tried talking about their fight. Tried. But for as many times as they dared to breach the subject, raised voices kept coming up, and no matter how much Izuku tried to wrap his head around what Katsuki was saying, it was just…

It hurts.

Not that Katsuki was much better, though. They’d manage to at least admit that they weren’t mad-mad at each other, and things were certainly less stilted and awkward, but it was more than obvious that a bit of strain was still there.

We can’t put it off forever. But for this next day, I…

Katsuki’s eyes had fallen closed, soft hair spilling across his face.

I don’t wanna deal with that stuff. We both need to relax. My work and his education have both been too exhausting to allow us to think about much else…

So for now, he’d leave the topic be for another day, treat Katsuki well to the best of his ability, and try to make this trip as relaxing and conflict-free as possible. The train allowed them a good start— the seats made it hard for people to see in easily, and it was simple enough to disguise himself for them to go out together. And he’d been well-assured that there wouldn’t be any issues at the ryokan itself, either. This particular one had a very good reputation, and in all its years of operation, hadn’t had any leaks of celebrity usage or spilling of private information. It was about as safe as they could get, and for once, Izuku was okay with letting his guard down for a little while.

The rest of the travelling went smooth enough, and yeah, watching Katsuki drift off to sleep on his shoulder for part of it was absolutely an upside.

Kacchan’s tired… said that he’d had a long week earlier. Finals had to have been rough, especially with his internship work on top of everything else. I kinda just want to let him sleep…

Izuku almost felt bad shaking him awake when they arrived.

And he’s been working so hard… he really is. At the very least, I can… make sure he knows that I know that.

Katsuki woke up fast enough, though, squinting a little under the mid-morning sun, and didn’t move away from his position pressed up against Izuku until they had to stand up to leave. That said, there was hardly room for regret after they got off the train.

“Damn…” Katsuki’s mouth hung open, a small overnight bag slung over his shoulder. “This place is gorgeous. And you said we’re only about an hour’s ride out from home?”

“Mm.” Izuku nodded. “Well, the ryokan is a short walk from here. They said we could check in just after noon, so maybe we can grab a quick lunch before going over there?”
“Yeah, sounds good.” His boyfriend paused. “But this place, it’s so… I dunno, peaceful? Reminds me of going up to the mountains. Y’know, nature, trees, being alone. All that.”

They took off into the heart of the small town, staying near the shadows as best they could.

“Oh, right! I remember you mentioning that a while back, Kacchan. That you, um, like to hike.”

“Mhm. Haven’t been in a while, but…” He pursed his lips, glancing out over their surroundings. “It’s nice. And I like this place.

Who’d have thought that the loud, brash, confident one of the bunch would be the one who liked being outside and alone in nature the most…?

For Izuku, it was just another thing to tack onto the list of reasons he loved him. The wonder in his eyes as he looked around the town, taking in patches of winter snow and ice and the subtle greens poking through various spots in the grass. He couldn’t say he was upset it was cold– after all, the onsen would still be amazing, and the weather gave the both of them an easy excuse to cover up.

This whole situation, really… it’s about as perfect as it gets.

Even here, though, Izuku didn’t know who’d recognize him and who wouldn’t. Getting food would be a gamble in and of itself, but it was a risk they’d have to take. The small ramen shop they stopped in wound up being a good choice, though, as they were able to get in with little difficulty and out with full, warm stomachs.

The ryokan was a quick walk across town after that. Katsuki stuck close beside him, not daring to reach for his hand, but it’d be easy enough to guess that they were a couple from the sheer lack of space between them. But thankfully, there weren’t many people outside to begin with, adding their arrival to just another list of things that had gone well.

Maybe going places outside of the city really is the best way to have our dates… not as convenient, by far, but to be able to not hide as much in public?

Katsuki’s eyes had blown ten sizes wider upon walking inside and looking around.

...well thank you, Jirou. This is the best thing we could’ve asked for.

And after a quick check in with the receptionist, they went out to their room.

“You didn’t tell me how nice this place was.” Katsuki mumbled, and Izuku could’ve sworn the red in his cheeks was from more than just the cold. “Your friend really won this trip…? Why’d she give it up?”

“I… well, she said it was for couples, and she’s single…”

“Even so!” Katsuki exclaimed, yet remembered to keep his voice down at the end of it. “Fuck, I’d come out here on my own. Wouldn’t turn down something this nice. And besides, it’d just mean I get the onsen all to myself, right?”

“Oh, do you want it all to yourself?”

“Well…” His boyfriend’s eyes flickered down to the floor. “…you wouldn’t be hogging it, at least.”

“Hogging it, huh? You’re saying you don’t wanna get in the onsen with me?”

Izuku knew he might be playing a bit of a dangerous game here, one that could far too easily go
south, but the look on Katsuki’s face was entirely worth it.

“Are… are you saying you would?”

They stopped outside of the entrance to their room, and just before stepping inside, Izuku leaned down to steal a quick kiss.

“I’m saying I could be convinced.”

Izuku could’ve sworn Katsuki looked about to explode on the spot.

So fucking cute… but, hng… I can’t treat him like he’s just some thing, remember? Not that I was trying to before, but… gotta pay extra attention to that now.

He shoved the anxieties to the back of his mind again, determined to not let them get the best of him for the night, and opened the door.

This is gonna be a good night. We… we’re gonna have a good time.

“Holy shit, Deku…!”

He turned and saw Katsuki staring across the dimly-lit room, seemingly stunned by the beautiful, warm-walled interior and the large, sliding door that led to the lush onsen in the back.

“I’ll be honest, I was expecting a decent room, but this shit?” Katsuki stood, floored. “God damn. Wow. Yeah, this is not within my budget.”

“Even with my paycheck, this isn’t… something I think I could do more than a few times a year.” Izuku echoed. “I’ll be honest, I’m not really sure why my friend offered it to me either. So, uh…” He swallowed. “Let’s not let it go to waste, right?”

The response he got was more than a little enthusiastic, and sure enough, Katsuki bolted away to drop his things almost immediately.

“I call washing off first!”

So fucking cute.

“Fine, fine. I’ll unpack.”

That said, he could admit he spent more than a little time staring at the perfect curve of Katsuki’s back as he rushed to strip down, and only had the decency to look away when his boyfriend moved to take off his pants. Some new heat fluttered up in his chest, and with a start, Izuku realized he hadn’t really considered the whole getting-naked-together thing for too long.

Shit. I didn’t… didn’t really think this far ahead. But I don’t wanna think about what his dick looks like right now. We– we are not having sex. Nope. Not gonna go there. We’re here to relax, not get hard.

“Ugh, fuck yes. S’already warm outside of the onsen.” Katsuki half-moaned, music to Izuku’s ears. “I’ll wash off quick, so you better come in soon, yeah?”

Making your voice sound like literal sex was one-hundred-percent unnecessary, Kacchan. Just what are you aiming for?

“Let me know when you’re done, okay?” Izuku managed, still trying to force himself not to think of
what Katsuki’s dick must look like.

*But oh god, what if I see it on accident? Would that be weird? He’s my boyfriend, but we haven’t really talked about nudity a whole lot yet! I mean, he seems excited about all this, but it’s still…*

He dared to take another glance behind him, nothing long, but got a glimpse of Katsuki’s ass on the small, short stool.

...*oh, fuck me.*

After setting out what little they’d brought, namely toiletries and a change of clothes for the way back the next day, he heard the showerhead shut off and a slight shuffle from the patio.

“I’m gonna go ahead and get in, Deku. Hurry up, we gotta make the most of this!”

“I’m coming, coming!”

Izuku went to take off his own coat and the fitted, long sleeved shirt underneath, but stopped as soon as he pulled it up past his stomach.

*I… didn’t even think about…*

It wasn’t as bad in that spot, but just the sight of thin, light scars snaking around his stomach and up towards his back, chest, and down his legs was nearly enough to make him stop right then and there.

*He’s… never seemed to mind, but… he also hasn’t seen all of this in person. They cleaned up the really ugly ones in that one photoshoot a while back, so this…*

Izuku’s hands trembled as he managed to drag the tight fabric off of his body, and bit of a cool winter breeze almost immediately hit his backside.

*I don’t want him to have to look at all… this.*

But it was only after he got his pants off that some sort of fresh, new panic flooded through him.

*Wait. My legs. Shit, n-no, I…*

If avoiding looking at yourself was a skill, Izuku was an expert. He showered with his eyes closed, wore clothing that hid his arms and legs at all times, and didn’t let people see anything past what they needed to see. And aside from his doctors, Ochako, and Kirishima, no one had seen the nasty scars on his upper legs from the accident, not even Katsuki.

“Hey, uh, Kacchan…?” Izuku started, doing his best to mask the wobble in his voice. “What’s the water looking like?”

*Did they did say it was milky? I– please, as long as he can’t see, it’ll be…*

“If? I dunno, it looks like water?”

“No, no, I meant like—” He shut his eyes, and let out a shallow, nervous breath. “Is… u-um, is it totally clear or not?”

“Oh. Yeah.”

*Oh, no.*
“S’there a problem with that? Don’t wanna see my dick?”

“No, no, your dick is fine! It’s just, uh—”

It wasn’t his dick that he felt weird about being seen– in all honesty, he felt far more comfortable with Katsuki seeing that than his legs.

“...n-nevermind.”

At least it’s not ugly. I know I have a nice dick.

But that meant… well.

I… how much of these can I actually hide…?

“How? Something wrong?” Katsuki asked from the onsen, and Izuku wished he could get the words out without it feeling like sandpaper in his throat.

“No, no, it’s… fine.” He grabbed onto his pants and with eyes closed, pulled them down, trying to make the process as painless as possible. If he just went for it, ripped off the bandaid, attempted not to think about the hideous, tattered, ruined skin hiding underneath, then it would…

No. No. Stop thinking. He… he’s said he doesn’t mind your scars, said he thinks they’re hot, so… I shouldn’t be so…

Izuku didn’t give himself the chance to even look at his legs again before wrapping a towel around his waist, shielding them from sight for at least the moment.

It’ll be okay, everything will be okay, and I mean… I don’t want to hide from him. I don’t want him to think I don’t think he can handle seeing it, and I wanna be able to handle it too, so I’ll… everything’s gonna be fine!

Finally, he walked out to the patio and seated himself on the shower stool, facing away from Katsuki. His boyfriend wouldn’t be able to see his legs from that angle, and though he’d get a nice view of the wreckage that was his back, Izuku could handle him knowing that much.

What he hadn’t really expected, though, was a sharp whistle from Katsuki and a small splash in the onsen. A part of him was afraid that he’d come to call him out for his back, but instead—

“Shit, Deku…!”

That’s…

Some sort of pleasant chill ran down Izuku’s spine upon hearing that low, awed tone, and all at once, so much of his insecurity about his back vanished.

“Knew you had a nice ass, but seeing it outta those shitty sweatpants you always wear? Hot damn. You’ve been holdin’ out on me.”

...o-oh.

So yeah, alright, maybe this whole bathing-together thing really was a good idea after all.

My ass, huh…? I guess it’s not bad, either.

Truth be told, Izuku had forgotten that Katsuki would probably be far more interested in that sort of
thing than scars marking up his body.

“Well, It’s not like I had any reason to show you earlier,” Izuku got out, trying to ignore the sudden warmth shooting through his chest as he washed himself off. “And it’s not like you’re about to stick your dick in it, either.”

“Right, right. ’Cause you’re gonna stick yours in mine, yeah?”

“Kacchan!”

Izuku’s hand froze around the small showerhead, and it was all he could do to try and keep from getting hard right then and there. It wasn’t fair— nope, wasn’t fair at all, really— that his boyfriend had a voice from hell that only threatened to drag him down deeper, deeper. God, he wanted it. Wanted him. Wanted to feel Katsuki’s hips between his hands, wanted to see the hot, heavenly, pleasure-struck look on his face, wanted to hear those low, sexy, wanton whimpers that only Izuku could bring out.

But… this isn’t…

“We– we are not having sex tonight.” He said, voice weak. “Even though you’re hot as shit, we’re… not tonight, okay?”

The last thing he wanted Katsuki to feel was that he didn’t trust him— firing up that conflict again would inevitably make everything far, far worse— but the same sentiments he’d carried for a year now still held true.

I’m not gonna fuck a seventeen-year-old. I’m not gonna let this relationship be built on sex. For as much as I love him— no, because I love him— that’s not how I’m gonna let this go.

“Not tonight, huh?” Katsuki finally replied, and Izuku could’ve sworn some of the energy in his voice had been sapped away. “…eh. ‘Kay. If you say so. Guess I didn’t, uh… bring any lube or condoms, anyway.”

Wonderful. Yes. Perfect excuse that doesn’t make me look like an asshole.

“Me neither, aha… but that’s okay.” He paused. “We’ll have plenty of fun tonight anyways, won’t we?”

“Course we will. Once you get your ass in here, anyways.”

“I’m coming, I’m coming!”

And as he got off the stool, set down the towel on a small bench off to the side, and walked around the edge of the onsen before getting in, Izuku realized that his scars hadn’t crossed his mind since Katsuki had started talking, not even once.

God… he’s amazing.

The onsen itself was fairly small. Big enough for two people, but not so much so that they’d be out of reach of each other. Wide, flat rocks lined the rim, and a soft veil of steam hovered around it that seemed to envelop Izuku whole as he slid down to the edge. But even with the calming, almost romantic atmosphere, the most beautiful thing there was for certain—

“You just gonna sit there and stare at me? Come on, dumbass. It’s nice as hell in here.”
...and, right when I’m waxing poetic about you. In-fucking-credible.

Well, his boyfriend did have his own unique sort of charm. That said, Katsuki wasn’t kidding— as soon as the warm water touched his toes, a different sensation trickled through him. He hadn’t had a chance to relax like this in so, so long, and as he sunk into the shallow pool, it was as if every inch of his body finally had a chance to just unwind.

Shit, this is…

“Holy fuck, Deku…” Katsuki’s voice sounded from beside him, and even through his lidded gaze, could see the look of sheer wonder on his face. Izuku was expecting something nice, maybe a compliment or two, maybe a you look good like this. Instead, though—

“If I didn’t know better, I’d have thought you busted a nut just now.”

Izuku’s eyes cranked open, jaw dropped, and for anything that Katsuki could’ve said— hell, even if it was just about his dick size or something— that was anything but what he’d expected to come out of his mouth.

“W-What?”

Katsuki, though, had the decency to look mildly ashamed.

“Your, uh…” His eyes hadn’t dropped down to Izuku’s waist yet. “Your face? When you, um… got in.” Katsuki’s hand went up to rub at the back of slightly-wet hair. “And you made a sound? Like you were moaning or something? I dunno, but it, uh… it was kinda hot.”

He wasn’t sure if the red in Katsuki’s face was from some sudden embarrassment or the warm water, but god. It was cute.

If we’re gonna be a little flirty, though… guess I don’t mind trying my hand at it either.

“Liked it, huh…?” He started, shame drifting further and further away by the second. “S’that all you like?”

“I-I mean, no…” Katsuki’s voice trailed off, sparks of nervousness in his eyes. “I just– wasn’t sure if was okay to, uh…”

Izuku wasn’t sure what was more perfect at the moment— the slight quiver of Katsuki’s lip under his teeth, the goddamn gorgeous curve of his collarbones, or his full chest, pink nipples hidden just under the surface of the water. He knew what he was trying to ask. He knew what he wanted to say. You won’t mind if I take the lead a little, will—

“S’it alright if I look at your dick?”

He froze mid-thought, stared at Katsuki, and noticed something new, something different. There was a hunger in those eyes, and for as much hesitation he might’ve held earlier, this…

Holy shit.

“Only if it’s okay for me to do the same.” Izuku whispered, barely heard over the slight hum of trickling water. But that was all the permission Katsuki needed, his gaze flickering down to the surface of the water and below. A part of him was screaming, screaming that he’ll see the scars, that he’s gonna leave, that he won’t want me if he knows how bad it is, but all that happened in response
was one of Katsuki’s hands coming down to settle on his thigh and brushing against all he’d worked to shut away.

“You’re nervous.” Katsuki murmured, other hand moving to cup Izuku’s chin, trailing down his neck, shoulder, chest— “Why are you nervous…?”

Izuku had been the one to lead their heavy makeout sessions, their slow teasing, their kissing and talking and everything else that went with it. But now, with Katsuki right in front, touching and feeling and caring about him, it was…

_He wants control. He wants in._

And all _Izuku_ wanted was to give it up.

“This… w-well, it’s just new…” He started, the words slipping out with a tad more raw vulnerability than he’d expected. “And, um…”

His breath hitched as Katsuki’s hand ran along his thigh, back and forth, back and forth. Slow. Gentle. *Intentional.*

*Katsuki…*

“It’s 'cause of these scars.”

Those words weren’t a question.

“...y-yeah.”

“You’re afraid I’ll hate them.”

He nodded, trying to hold back the tears welling at the corners of his eyes as Katsuki’s other hand crept lower, lower, tracing over every bit of himself he’d learned to be disgusted of.

“These ones are from your accident, aren’t they?”

“A-Ah, yeah…”

It was unfair, so _unfair_ how Katsuki managed to tear down every wall he’d built up, how he was able to shatter every crooked preconception Izuku had long established. He didn’t feel scared right now, nor afraid, nor embarrassed. No, this was—

_Vulnerability._

They were quiet for a moment, Katsuki’s thumbs rubbing small circles over gnarled skin, eyes never leaving Izuku’s legs.

“The media still blames you for everything that happened. I know they remind you of it whenever they get the goddamn chance. Tellin’ you about everything you failed to do. I’ve seen the reports a million times. I know what’s going on.”

_God, how can you sound so certain?_

“And I can tell you still blame yourself, too.”

_Why do I believe everything you’re saying?_
Izuku tried to recover, fumbling with broken words at the confrontation he hadn’t been anywhere near prepared for. “People… p-people died because of me, K-Kacchan. If— i-if I’d done better, been less mentally wiped, t-then I—”

“Shut up. Stop talking.” Katsuki interrupted, now level with Izuku’s gaze. “I want you to quit thinking about all the people that died, and start remembering the ones that lived.”

In that moment, Katsuki sounded like anything but a child.

“I don’t wanna see you hurting.” His grip grew tighter. “This happened so long ago, Deku. And just ‘cause— god, just ‘cause you still have these damn scars doesn’t mean it has to be a sign of your mistakes!”

And that— that was it.

“…twenty-three.”

“Twenty—”

“That’s— that’s how many people I saved. Back then.” Izuku said, the words coming out in a rush. “If I hadn’t been there, then… i-it would’ve…”

“Been worse?
“Been a lot worse.”

Katsuki nodded, and Izuku could’ve sworn there was a hint of a smile rising up on those lips. “You got these scars because you went to save. Could the circumstances have been better? Fucking hell, yes. Was it as bad as everyone seems to make it out to be?”

No. “N-No.”

His boyfriend nodded again and leaned in a little closer, hands moving more towards the insides of his thighs as his face found itself hardly an inch from Izuku’s own.

“So tell me, Deku. Are these scars something you should be nervous about, especially around me?”

There was only one answer, really.

“No, K-Ka—”

And before he knew it, Katsuki’s mouth was on the corner of his own, and a hushed, breathless whisper of right was all he could hear. What might’ve been a slight moan slipped out as warm lips trailed down his neck, kissing and scraping and sucking at every bit of bare skin they passed by. Izuku was warm, warm, warm from the water and warm from the lavish attention Katsuki was giving him. It was good, so good, and so easy to forget about the mess they’d been through in the past three months. All he wanted to focus on was the here and now, on the I want you’s and the more, please, and the kiss me, touch me, feel me.

“Honestly, I-I really thought the first thing you were gonna talk about would be… my dick…” Izuku said, ending with some rasped, breathy whimper. “‘Cause yours is… looks real nice…”

“Mm, good to know. But it’s… kinda funny.” Katsuki started, teeth digging into Izuku’s neck, biting and sucking and only coming off after a long, long moment. “It ain’t like I haven’t felt your boner before, but fuck, I…”
Shit, don’t say it, please, don’t say—

“I’ve never wanted to suck your dick so bad, Deku.”

And if he wasn’t hard already, he was now.

“I wanna—” Another bite, another moan, another trail of teasing fingers along ragged thighs. “I wanna feel you in me. I wanna touch all of you. ‘C-Cause you’re… fucking gorgeous, a-and I…”

Holy shit.

“K-Kacchan, you’re gonna be the death of me.”

I wanna feel more of you. I wanna know more of you, too.

“Then at least the last thing you see’s gonna be pretty then, right?”

“Pretty? Fuck, more like radiant.”

Izuku couldn’t remember the last time he’d felt so completely and so utterly at home, so safe in someone else’s arms. It’d never been like this with Kirishima— no, what he’d gotten there were touches born from pity, words that never dipped beneath the surface in the same way that Katsuki’s had. It was different. He had to keep reminding himself it was different. Kirishima was a friend, not a lover, and Katsuki— well, Katsuki was so far away from what he’d had before, so much so that the two experiences were near incomparable.

“Oi, y-you—”

He grabbed Katsuki by the shoulders, shifted, and spun him around against the side of the onsen turning to kiss him back. Warm water spilled over their faces, their shoulders, but Izuku could hardly find it in him to care as long as it didn’t get in his way.

Kacchan…

“If– h-hell, if you’re allowed to make me feel like I’m beautiful, then I’m allowed to make you feel that way, too.”

Teeth met Katsuki’s neck and dug in just so, just enough for Izuku’s heart to jump at the small whine that his boyfriend let out in return.

“Deku… h-holy shit, right– yes, r-right there…”

“Doesn’t hurt?”

“Doesn’t hurt enough, dammit…!”

Hot. So goddamn hot.

All that came out of Katsuki’s mouth was a breathless yes, yes…! as Izuku bit further, harder, the shuddered pleading and desperate, needy cries only a motivator to keep going, keep going.

“You– y-you know this is gonna bruise, right?”

“I-I’d be mad if it didn’t…!”

He wants this. He wants this just as bad as I do.
Izuku wasn’t sure how long they spent like that, their usual languid kissing swapped out for whatever hungry beast had possessed them. Katsuki wasn’t backing down, not at all, only asking for more, more, and fucking hell, give it to me…! And if just a bit of biting, a hint of tongue, and maybe something just a little rougher, a little more wild, a little more free than what they usually did was enough to get him looking like this, well– Izuku could hardly get his head around just how gorgeous he’d look in bed.

Just for a moment, he let himself pull back and admire what had become of his boyfriend– cherry-red bruises blossoming over his neck, collarbones, and near the top of his chest, almost matching the hue of Katsuki’s glistening eyes.

Beautiful.

“You’re so sensitive…” Izuku murmured, his own trembling hands sliding over steam-slicked shoulders, thumbs resting on the marks that he’d left. “God…”

“If you think I look good, then fuck. You should see yourself.”

“No no, not right now…” He paused, kissed Katsuki again, slower, gentler. “Right now, all I wanna see is you.”

His boyfriend’s face flushed a deep red, and those lidded eyes in combination with the slight o shape of his mouth were nearly enough to make Izuku come on the spot.

I… I wanna do more, but… is this…

“H-Hey, is this too much…?” He asked, only for the simple question appearing to draw some sort of frown over his face instead.

“…would’ve stopped you earlier if it was, you know.”

Wait. Shit. Was that…?

A small hint of panic sparked in his chest, and Izuku was afraid the shoddy reprieve from argument they’d woven was starting to fray. “I-It was an honest question, Kacchan. I just wanted to make sure that—”

“I’m making sure of myself, okay?” His boyfriend said, the slight scowl only more visible now. “Just, like… hell. You… you’re not saying that ’cause, I dunno, you don’t think I’m mature enough to do this shit, are you…?”

Oh, no…

“Oh, no…

“But of course I think you’re mature enough, b-but this is just new, and…”

I don’t wanna argue today. Not here. Not now.

Luckily, Katsuki seemed to sense the start of the familiar tension too, and backed off with a sigh. “I– yeah. Sorry.”

But the moment was gone, and for as much as he wanted to just go kiss Katsuki again and forget about the very thing that’d held them back for so long now, he wasn’t going to be the one to force it. He sunk back towards the opposite end of the small onsen, just far enough apart to steady themselves from the high they’d just fallen from.
“Maybe we should, um, use the onsen for what it was meant for instead…?” Izuku asked, relieved as Katsuki managed to crack a small smile at those words.

“Are you tryna’ say this shit wasn’t made for necking?”

“Well, maybe not, but… I can’t say I really mind that use, either.”

This was good. Better. Not teetering on the brink of argument.

“A-Anyways, uh… maybe we should just, you know, take a bit to relax?”

His boyfriend dipped his head in agreement, and despite the bit of worry that had just arisen, Katsuki really did look damn good marked up like that.

*Marked up by me. No one else, just me.*

“Mm. Works for me.” Katsuki paused, and shifted just enough for Izuku to get an even better look at the map of messy bruises spattered on his neck and chest. “Maybe we can try again in a bit, though…?”

The surface of the water had stilled, for now. Izuku nodded, then let himself close his eyes and relax as best he could. It was nice, really. Comforting, nostalgic warmth seeped into weary bones, and for the first time in months, Izuku felt what had to be some semblance of true tranquility.

*If this is what relaxation is like, then shit… I really should’ve used those spa coupons Kacchan gave me back then before they expired.*

“…hey, Deku?”

He didn’t open his eyes, but acknowledged him with a small *mhm?* as Katsuki went to continue.

“That, uh… that stuff I said about your scars earlier. You– you believe me, right?

*Believe you…?*

“I mean, it’s… hard to kinda, y’know, change how I’ve been feeling just like *that,* but… yeah, I believe you.”

“Mm. Okay.”

*It’s still… so strange, to even think about the fact that he cares so much.*

They both fell quiet after that, only the slow, constant trickle of water and the slight hum of the open air around them keeping them company. If nothing else, it was nice to be able to look up when he wanted to and see his boyfriend safe and content, adjusting to the comfort of the onsen as easily as Izuku had. And if he really wanted to, he could open his eyes, take his time to roam over Katsuki’s lean, muscled body, stare at the perfect curve of his hips and trace them beneath the water, all the way down to his cock. It really *was* nice, and Izuku couldn’t say he was much better than his boyfriend was— he hadn’t given a blowjob in years, and yet, it was as if every bit of Katsuki’s dick was just *begging* to be sucked.

*Not today, not today, but…*

It was almost the end of December, mere days from the new year.

*His birthday isn’t too far off. April twentieth. And maybe this year, I can… give him something a*
Izuku was sure that he’d gained a few years on his lifespan from just marveling at Katsuki, though, drinking in the sight of toned arms and the too-full chest that he wanted to wrap his hands around more than anything else. Some part of his mind thought back to his couch at home— about his boyfriend sitting in his lap, back tucked against his chest, and Izuku’s hands wandering around to push up his shirt and play with those small, perky nipples.

“Like what you see?”

That voice was what pulled him back out of his fantasies, the soft, subtle smirk accompanying it only serving to bring a smile to Izuku’s face.

“A-Ah, yeah. I do. A lot.”

“Anything in particular?”

“Your chest.” He said, the words out before he even stopped to think. “It’s… it’s really, um… sexy.”

“...sexy, huh?”

“Y-Yeah, if that’s… if that’s okay.”

They were still testing boundaries, seeing what was okay and what wasn’t, but thankfully, Katsuki seemed pleased by his response.

“Working out has its benefits. But you’d know that too, wouldn’t you?”

There was something more in Katsuki’s eyes, something curious and maybe, just maybe, a little dangerous too.

And all I wanna do is play along. This… this back and forth isn’t so bad, I guess.

“Oh?” The word carried with it a teasing lilt, and Izuku could’ve sworn his boyfriend’s eyes dialated at the sound. “Why, is there something you like about me, too?”

But all of his confidence fell as soon as Katsuki’s tongue peeked out, ran along his lips, and met Izuku with a look that radiated so much more power than he ever could’ve imagined.

“Get out of this onsen, get inside, and I’ll show you what all I like.”

...oh, shit.

He wasn’t sure what moved first— his arms, legs, or his brain trying to comprehend the fact that Katsuki had just hit him dead-on with the most piercing, most arousing words he’d heard in years. There was no yes, no no, just an if you say so, Kacchan. I’ll do it.

But when he found himself flat on his back inside their room wearing only a pair of hastily thrown on boxers, Izuku realized that this was the closest he’d gotten to getting laid since high school.

Is it bad if I say this is almost better than getting fucked? Kiri, you were fantastic, but I don’t think the sound of your voice made me hard on the spot like Kacchan’s does.

And as Katsuki crouched over him, clearly inexperienced but too damn excited to care, Izuku realized his biggest problem would be keeping himself from grinding against Katsuki’s crotch and coming right then and there.
If I’m gonna get off, it’ll be in the bathroom. I’m not— I’m not letting this go too far. Not now. Not even though he looks so damn perfect right there.

“Spread your legs further apart, Deku. No need to be shy.” Katsuki ordered, and all his body knew how to do was obey. It was different this time— easy to forget about why he’d been so nervous to begin with, and he was comfortable— yes, comfortable— with Katsuki being the one to see his body as intimately as this.

“You trust me?”

Those words alone shouldn’t have been sexy, but the low husk of Katsuki’s voice and the care in which they came out only sent heat flaring through his chest. It was all he could do to think of what to say back, to try and remember a time when he hadn’t felt this open to Katsuki or anyone else.

“Y-Yes.” He wavered, held still only by the steady hands on his shoulder. “Course I trust you. God, you don’t even know.”

Katsuki eyed him up again, wet hair wild on his head and dripping onto Izuku’s chest, but nodded. “Mm. ‘Kay. You’re gonna tell me to stop if you need me to, right?”

He’s… this is like…

“Y-Yeah. I will.”

_Just like the first time we made out. He’s… he’s trying to take care of me…?_

That was all the confirmation Katsuki needed, though. He shifted backwards, more between Izuku’s legs rather than over his chest, knees on the floor as his head bent down towards his legs, his scars, and kissed them. But Izuku flinched on instinct, hardly even realizing he’d done it himself, and just like that, his boyfriend stopped.

_No. I-I didn’t mean to, I just…_

“K-Keep going.” He begged, chest heaving. “Please.”

His boyfriend didn’t question it, just nodded and bent back down, too-soft lips on too-rough thighs. Izuku felt anything but worthy, but Katsuki was insistent on treating him like he’d fallen from the heavens.

“You’re fucking beautiful. Every inch.” He said, and when Izuku went to reply, found himself immediately cut off. “No exceptions, got it?”

_Kacchan…_

“…got it.”

Izuku’s toes curled as Katsuki worked up one leg and down another, avoiding his crotch but touching everything else he could find. Eventually, that mouth rose higher, higher, so much so that he could’ve sworn he’d risen to another plane of existence.

_He makes me feel like…_

“You’re so goddamn gorgeous.”

_Makes me feel like…_
“Every piece of you.”

Makes me feel…

“And fuck, your scars are still hot.”

Like I’m worth something.

He had to hold back a laugh— it was ridiculous, really. Absolutely, one-hundred percent ridiculous that this high schooler had managed to worm himself so deep into his life, and that he, in full faith, was willing to accept that. Katsuki wasn’t much younger, yeah, but the fact that he’d been a part of Izuku’s life, big and small, through all the shit he’d been through in the past two years?

This is crazy… if I’d known back then, at that first rescue, just where we’d be now…

No. Now wasn’t the time to ask how this had happened.

“I… I-I love you, Ka—”

“I know.”

Izuku squinted. “Won’t you let me say it, then?”

There was a short huff from Katsuki, the start of what might’ve been you already have, but by now, he’d made up his mind. With one hand moving up to grab at Katsuki’s shoulder and the other on the floor to prop himself up, Izuku flipped their positions and bent down, mouthing at Katsuki’s neck, chest, and all the way down to his stomach.

“H-Huh? Wait, did you not like—”

“I loved it.” Izuku assured him, kissing him to shut him up. “And so, I’m gonna ask you the same thing. You’ll tell me to stop if you need me to?”

“I—” Katsuki’s face burned a bright crimson, and for as composed as he’d been on top, being below left him crumbling apart in Izuku’s crooked hands. “Y-Yeah. You know it.”

“Perfect. God, you’re perfect.”

His boyfriend stilled, almost in some sort of disbelief. “Wait, you… you really mean that?”

Izuku kissed his chin, his collarbone, his chest. “Have I ever lied to you, Kacchan?”

Some sort of hushed realization passed over Katsuki’s face, and he shook his head. “N-No.”

Exactly.

“You made— make— me feel good.” He whispered, hands running along Katsuki’s sides, all along the tight curve of his body and around his gorgeous waist. “I don’t wanna be the only one feeling good right now.”

The arguments were out the window. The pain was gone, for now. All that they had was the pleasure, the trust, the love that they shared.

And Katsuki, this time, accepted it.

“I-I… yeah. Okay.”
But he seems a little nervous still, so…

“Where do you want me to touch you?”

Give him a bit more control.

Izuku let him take his hand, nervous but wanting, and moved it towards his chest. There was a need in Katsuki’s eyes, an utter r awness he’d never seen before, but there wasn’t a shred of doubt, either.

“Right there?”

His thumb hooked itself on Katsuki’s nipple, and from the sudden nod and breathy yes he got in return, moved his free hand to the other one as well. It was unreal, really, how breathtakingly handsome his boyfriend was like this, all shivers and twitches and stutters of yes, keep going, feels good, so good…!

“Like this, huh?”

“W-Why the hell do you have to ask…!”

This time, it was his turn to smirk. “Mind if I take it up a notch?”

Katsuki looked confused for a moment, but realized fast enough what he meant as soon as Izuku lowered his head to his chest, mouth hovering just above where his fingers had just been.

“...oh. You’re serious. O-Oh my god.” His boyfriend’s voice trembled, barely coherent. “Fuck, please…!”

Yeah, maybe it wasn’t technically sex, but the look on Katsuki’s face would have almost been enough to convince him it was. That said, the noise that left his boyfriend’s mouth as soon as his tongue met too-sensitive skin was exquisite, so much better than the groaning from any cheap pornos or the fantasies dancing in his head. This was Katsuki, falling to pieces from just a little bit of nipple play, and it was all too real.

Beautiful.

“R-Right– f-fuck, use a little teeth—”

Incredible.

“Hng, go to… ‘other one, y-yeah…!”

Absolutely ethereal.

Katsuki let out a moan so loud, so free, and Izuku was half-convinced his boyfriend had just come in his boxers. He drew off with a small pop, slick spit coating Katsuki’s chest and trailing from his lips. All that met him in return was an almost panicked look on his boyfriend’s face, a sudden I need to use the bathroom, and a near-sprint towards the small room tucked in the corner of their space. There was no question what he was doing in there, not from the slam of the door and sounds he was trying to hide. Izuku couldn’t say he was in a much better position, though, and as soon as Katsuki came out of the bathroom looking dazed and content as hell, he took his place and rubbed one out as fast as he could. Was it the same as doing it where Katsuki could see? No. Was it the best orgasm he’d had in a year? Fuck, yes.

He tried to wash and calm his violently shaking hands, then stumbled back out into the main room
shortly after doing the best he could. Katsuki was sitting on the floor, limp and a little more worn than usual, only coming to attention upon noticing Izuku joining him.

“Deku, you’re fucking… fucking amazing.” He managed, exhaustion heavy in his voice. “Holy shit.”

“I could say the same about you.” Izuku replied, weaving a hand into his boyfriend’s hair. “Didn’t realize you had it in you. All that, ah… confidence. Yeah.”

“Pulled it out just for you.” He said, but Izuku could’ve sworn there was something else in there, something hesitant, nervous.

Is… wait, is he okay…?

“I, uh… think I’m gonna nap for a bit.” He said, not meeting Izuku’s eyes. “You– you’re fine. Promise. I’m just, um, kinda tired. Yeah.”

He wanted so bad to ask what was going on, why he was suddenly acting so distant when only minutes before he’d felt as if they couldn’t be any closer.

“You sure?”

If nothing else, Katsuki did look beat. Maybe exhaustion really was all it was, but still– something felt off. He wouldn’t– couldn’t, really– push it without fear of firing up the you worry too much argument, but he’d have to ask later for more clarity.

“Yeah, I’m… sure.” Katsuki nodded. “I’ll, uh, probably be up for more later if you want…? But it’s just been a long-ass week, and I’ve got plans with friends coming up tomorrow too, so… uh. Yeah. Just gonna sleep for a bit, ‘cause something tells me we ain’t gonna be getting a whole lot of rest later.”

Ah, okay. Just tired.

A part of him was worried it was all still connected to the fight they’d had, that maybe Katsuki had been a bit overwhelmed by everything they’d done, that he’d realized he really was disgusted with Izuku’s body and didn’t want anything to do with him, but—

No. No. This… this is a step forward. Maybe we didn’t talk things out about that argument, but the fact that we were able to do this means something, right?

“…Alright.” Izuku finally said, pulling his hand away. “I’ll wake you up before dinnertime if you want? I think I’m just gonna get back in the onsen for a bit.”

“Sounds good.” Katsuki agreed, the small, honest smile over his face letting him feel some sort of relief. “Treat yourself nice in there, ‘kay?"

Izuku snorted, and kissed him. “I’m not about to get off while I’m in the onsen, if that’s what you mean.”

“Never said you had to do that.” His boyfriend murmured, his lip curling up with the hint of a tease. “Just enjoy yourself. I’ll back at it after dinner, ‘kay?”

He was sure that they were both doing their best to just stay in the moment at this point, almost to distract themselves from the things they both needed to fix. But it was easier this way. Better this way. More comfortable this way.
“I’ll be ready when you are.” Izuku said, and let his hand cup Katsuki’s cheek, and run all the way down his chin before letting go. “Okay. Sleep well, alright?”

“I will, I will. I—” Katsuki’s voice broke off before he could finish his sentence. “Yeah.”

He’d half-expected an I love you, but out of the heat of the moment, that may have been too much to ask right now.

Things are still hard… we can’t pretend to solve it all with just a little touch. And we won’t.

Izuku didn’t push the topic and simply stepped away after one last kiss, and watched as Katsuki curled up on the futon to sleep.

This… this has been good, though.

Water pooled around him as he sunk back into the onsen, yet for as nice as it was, nothing could beat the feeling of his boyfriend around him.

I wanna make this relationship work, more than anything else.

He swallowed, closed his eyes, and forced himself to think of what they’d just done together instead of all that had happened before.

And that’s what we’re doing. Making this work.

Inside, Katsuki was sound asleep, his lean frame cloaked by the futon in place of Izuku’s arms.

Right?

Chapter End Notes

“aeron plZ JUST LET THEM FUCK” eventually i swear
BUT HOLY HELL GUYS. HOLY HELL. LOOK AT ALL THIS GOOD ART
SHIT CAUSE IM STILL DYING
First: a SPICY FEELIN KACCHAN W/ A VALIANT BODY PILLOW by @polyhamart!!
Second: a goddamn GORGEOUS RENDITION OF KACCHAN AND HERO SUIT VALIANT by @deanvspanties!!
And third: THE EXACT IMAGE I HAVE OF THE BEACH HUGGING SCENE FROM CH 14(in .gif format!!) by my WIFE @catskeez!!
(also: because of all the incredible art yall have made, i finally got off my ass and made a masterlist of all the outside content created based off of this fic that you can find HERE!! I’ll be linking this on all the future chapters as well!!)
So thank you as per usual to my amazing beta @aetherlite, and my twitter can be found @aeronines!!
a little miscummunigaytion

Chapter Summary

camie_is_a_good_friend.exe

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

_Bzzt. Bzzt. Bzzt._

Katsuki was trying his best to convince himself that the sound was just a part of his dreams. Something he could shake off, shut away, deal with _later._

_I'm tired. Go away._

But his phone kept ringing, kept buzzing, and all he could do was bury his head into his pillow and hope it'd stop.

_Bzzt. Bzzt. Bzzt._

Really, though, it _was_ past one in the afternoon, and on this day in particular— New Year’s Eve— Katsuki knew that his friends had crafted plans of some sort for them. But, _god._

_Don’t wanna move right now, don’t wanna go anywhere right now, and I really, really don’t wanna talk to anyone right now._

Some of the grounchiness was simply due to early-morning crabiness, not helped by his oversleeping during winter break thus far. Yeah, yeah, his friends just wanted to plan something fun, but…

_I only got back home late last night… I’m tired as shit._

They’d only left the ryokan around noon the day before, and on the ride back, Deku had suggested getting dinner and heading over to his place for a bit. And after having one of the best getaways of his _life,_ Katsuki had found himself hard-pressed to turn down a little more. Last night had been dim lights, warm water, warm _bodies,_ and of course, his boyfriend, looking sexier than Katsuki had ever remembered seeing him before. The brief continuation they’d had at Deku’s place had been filled with much of the same, too— intense makeouts, not-so-innocent feeling-up, and low, suggestive whispers that’d only drawn them closer, _closer._ It’d been amazing. Incredible. _Sensual—_ almost overwhelmingly so. Katsuki could still hardly believe that they’d done all of that, gotten so close for the night and so far away from all the worries holding them back. But something still nagged at the back of his mind. No matter how good last night had felt, it’d been more like—

_Bzzt. Bzzt. Bzzt._

“Holy _shit,_ why won’t you just…!” Katsuki hissed at his phone, but finally grabbed and shoved it against his ear if for no other reason than to shut the damn thing off. “Camie, I _swear_ to god—”

“…uh, Kacchan?”
“Shoot, sorry, did I wake you up?” Deku’s voice dipped to a worried wobble, near bordering on panic. “Ah, my bad, I—”

“S’fine, it’s fine.” Katsuki sighed, trying to rub the sleep from his eyes. “Did you need something?”

“Ah, ah…” His boyfriend paused. “Well, I just, uh… wanted to ask how you were feeling. That’s, um, that’s all. If that’s okay.”

When Katsuki didn’t immediately reply, Deku continued. “Just cause like, it’s pretty normal to wanna see how someone’s doing after a trip like we had? I-I don’t wanna be pushy, but I noticed you seemed a bit off for a while, and I—”

“I’m fine.” I know why he’s asking, but… “Promise. Kinda, uh, sore. But that’s all.”

“Sore?”

“You fucked my neck up, Deku.” Katsuki mumbled, yet couldn’t stop the slight tingle of thrill down his spine. “I haven’t gotten to look in a mirror yet, but you bet your ass I feel it.”

“…o-oh. Well, ah… you looked really hot last night. When you let me, uh. Do that.”

He sounds so much more nervous than he did before… guess I’m not the only one, huh?

“Wanna see what it looks like?”

“Oh my god, yes.”

At the very least, they weren’t on the topic of I was worried about you anymore. And Katsuki knew bringing up the physical aspect of their relationship would be a fairly effective way to shut things up right now.

“Lemme hang up, I’ll send you a picture.” He said, and to his relief, Deku didn’t object. But only as he forced himself to sit up and roll out of bed did he actually realize how damn sore he was. His neck, chest, and the insides of his thighs had gotten plenty of attention, and for as much as he’d enjoyed being on the receiving end, nothing could’ve prepared him for how it’d feel after all was said and done.

Not that I, uh… really mind. S’kinda nice. To know that he still wants me this way after that goddamn argument even though we can’t seem to talk about that shit without going at each other’s throats.

Katsuki hadn’t told his friends much about what happened after he and Deku had finally started talking again after the argument. He knew Camie was dying to know, knew that Momo was a little worried, knew that Todoroki was wanting more of an answer from his less-than-subtle comments and questions.

Did you guys make up?

Kinda.

How was that date you went on?

S’fine.
Was your training session last night good?

Would’ve been if he was willing to fight back.

The only information he’d let them in on about the ryokan trip was that it was out of town, about an hour away, and that they’d be alone together. Yet even with just that little information, they wouldn’t shut up about him possibly ‘getting some, for once.’ Maybe he wanted sex, maybe he wanted intimacy, but what he wanted above everything else was simply some sort of resolution.

It feels like we’re both trying to avoid it. Neither of us want to yell again. I don’t wanna fight him, and he doesn’t wanna fight me, and...

The onsen had been the easy option. Did it help? Maybe. Did it fix?

Katsuki pulled his shirt up and over his head before stepping in the bathroom, looked in the mirror, and stared.

God, no.

Had it been hot? Yeah. There wasn’t a bit of room for doubt there. Katsuki could see and viscerally feel every bit of Deku on him, solid proof that he wasn’t just there as some throwaway toy. He knew that each one of those damn bruises matting his throat, collarbones, and chest came from a place of genuine want, and knew that Deku wasn’t the type of person to be intimate with just anyone.

It was special, for sure. Super special.

And it’s the biggest goddamn distraction we could’ve had.

His phone trembled as he held it up to get a picture of his chest, but Katsuki took care to make sure his face was cropped out enough so that his boyfriend wouldn’t have to see just how miserable he felt about it now, too.

It was good. It was. But it was just...

Katsuki shoved away the thoughts, sent the picture to Deku, and tried not to think too hard about how he really felt about the situation.

[Katsuki] nice, huh?

There was hardly a second before Deku is typing popped up on the screen again.

[Deku] oh m

[Deku] oh my god

[Deku] holy shit no wonder you're sore

[Deku] it doesn't hurt too bad does it???

He bit his lip, still more than a little irritated that Deku hadn’t answered the basic question he’d asked, and instead reverted back to the same-old, same-old mantra of worry, worry, worry.

[Katsuki] I wouldn’t have asked for more if I couldn’t take it, yknow

[Deku] i mean i. I know that but
Deku: aha wow

Deku: sorry just a sec i. gotta run to the bathroo

For a moment, he was confused– but only for a moment, as right in that message lay the answer as to just how Deku felt about him right now.

Katsuki: you know, you don’t have to act like you’re not getting off to that

To me.

All he got in response, though, was silence. Anticipation. And at that point, there was no doubt that once again, his boyfriend had cast aside the potential beginnings of an argument for something a little more physical.

But it is easier, right…? If we stopped worrying so much about everything else, if we just focused on the making out and the touching and feeling and quit caring about the other shit going on, then we’d be happier, right? Maybe?

Katsuki looked up in the mirror again, stared at the now-purple bruises, and yet, couldn’t summon a single bit of the passionate lust he’d been consumed with during the trip.

It’s easier, but it’s…

Deku: kacchan!!

Deku: look i mean its just

Deku: hard to uh. not get hard. when i look at you and just see all of me on you you know?

Deku: shit im sorry if that sounds weird but uh after this weekend i feel like uh

Deku: i mean

Deku: does it. um. bother you?

He didn’t have to think long about that question, at least.

Katsuki: doesn’t bother me

Katsuki: not like like I’m much better anyways

It would be useless to pretend like his Valiant-themed dildo wasn’t hiding in his nightstand drawers right now, and denying all the times he’d gotten off while staring at gaudy pictures of Deku in torn hero gear or in that goddamn pinup photoshoot would be a crime.

Deku: ...oh. thats um

Deku: i guess shouldnt be that surprised but uh. wow

Deku: if you want i could maybe ah

Deku: send you some decent pictures later…?

Katsuki’s throat went dry from some combination of surprise at his boyfriend’s forwardness, excitement at the prospect of getting personal photos– more like lewds, really, and the fact that it’d
be so easy, so easy, so simple to just go ahead, get off, and move on.

It’s… not like this kind of stuff isn’t fun, but I’m so tired of remembering that damn argument every time I see his face.

Typing out his next reply wasn’t as easy as the first few.

[Katsuki] if u want

But there was some sort of strange silence that followed this time, and when his phone finally did go off several minutes later, Katsuki almost didn’t wanna look.

Don’t wanna see his gorgeous face. Don’t wanna see his perfect body. Don’t wanna see—

[Deku] hey, um

[Deku] kacchan, can i call you again?

That was… different.

[Deku] im sorry, i really dont wanna push but im just

[Deku] youre worrying me a bit

[Deku] i know. i know you hate it when i say that

[Deku] but its just

[Deku] something feels off and i dont know what!

[Deku] i dont know if i screwed up over the weekend. if i went too far or something, i dont know if youre really feeling okay. youre just

[Deku] not saying anything

[Deku] and i know, i know you dont have to but i

[Deku] i.

[Deku] are you really happy, kacchan?

Every nerve froze on end as he stared at that last message and read it over, over, over again.

Am I... happy?

He’d been happy over the weekend– he’d been happy when Deku was crawling over him, making him feel good, treating him right– and he’d been happy to take care of Deku when he needed it, too. But in those minutes post-orgasm, right as he’d hit the pavement after falling from cloud nine, something else had made itself crystal-clear to him.

I… don’t wanna think about this too much right now. It’s early, and I’m tired, and I’ve got shit to do with other people today, and…

[Katsuki] i’m fine

[Katsuki] sorry for worrying you
[Katsuki] can’t call rn friends wanna go out

[Katsuki] tonight?

Untruths were better than lies, but Katsuki hated making the excuse to begin with.

[Deku] im taking the night shift tonight. wont be home until at least 6 am. new years eve means i have to stay longer cause people like to do stupid shit on holidays

[Deku] but if you really cant talk right now or you just dont wanna hear me any more then i get it. its fine.

[Deku] ill check my schedule and see if i can get another day or two free while you're on break

[Deku] please text me if you wanna make plans. or wanna talk. or just. wanna do anything really

[Deku] ill do my best to not keep you waiting

[Deku] have fun with your friends

[Deku] i really, really enjoyed spending this weekend with you, kacchan.

[Deku] and im sorry if i did something wrong. but please, dont forget that i

[Deku] i love you

No more typing, no more conversation, no more trying to push for more. Katsuki knew he was just putting off this confrontation, just as scared to have it as he was to put it off. Yeah, he did want to talk about whatever this awkward barrier was, but…

I… I don’t know how.

The better part of him knew not to leave his boyfriend on read, to not let him wonder, wonder, and keep asking questions Katsuki didn’t have an answer to.

But the other part, the vulnerable, desperate, nervous part, had no idea what to say.

What won’t make everything worse…? I don’t want him to be feeling shitty after that weekend.

It was probably pathetic, but he couldn’t come up with a response aside from a measly u too. Deku didn’t respond– didn’t have a reason to, really– so Katsuki shoved his phone back in his pocket, clenched his teeth, and tried to remember just how he’d felt so damn satisfied not twenty-four hours ago.

Thankfully, he had a different problem to shift his focus to right now, one that revolved entirely around the current state of his neck and chest. The winter temperatures made it easier to make excuses, but still…

Katsuki ran a hand up along his neck, tracing messy bruises till they faded to whispers just below his ear.

How the fuck am I gonna hide this?

In all honesty, he really, really hadn’t thought they’d be this dark.

Well, he did say they’d bruise. And I said…
“...I’d be mad if it didn’t.”

_Fuck._

If he was in the dorms right now and not his parent’s house, Katsuki was sure this wouldn’t be as much of an issue. It’d be harder to call up Camie and ask her to come over and give him fucking _hickey advice_ while his parents were sitting _right downstairs_. He’d considered himself lucky enough that they’d been asleep by the time he’d gotten home last night, and while getting to his room had been easy enough, Katsuki hadn’t really considered the aftereffects of pleading _harder, harder!_ at his boyfriend to its full extent.

_Okay, yeah. This one’s on me._

He sighed, wandered to his closet, and thumbed through the rack of black t-shirts to find one of his two decent turtlenecks interspersed in the mess, still clean. Katsuki shucked it over his head fast enough, ran back to the mirror, but was disappointed almost as fast as he’d been relieved. The turtleneck ran fairly high, yeah, but not high _enough._

_Dammit._

Nervous fingers curled against his leg as he ran through his short list of options, not sure of what to do. None of his shirts would cover it up, he hardly owned (much less knew how to use) makeup, and shutting himself in his room all day would probably lead to his parents trying to check up on him and his friends getting overly concerned about what was going on. A part of him considered texting Camie and asking for advice— hell, it wasn’t as if he’d never seen her and Momo walking around with one or two showing— but at the same time, he wasn’t sure if _now_ was when he wanted to have that conversation.

_Especially because I never told them where I was going to begin with._

Just as he turned to go back and dig through his closet, though, his phone rang _again_. Katsuki grit his teeth, tried to quell the nerves bubbling up in his chest, and pulled it out in the hope that his boyfriend wasn’t going to try and push a conversation right now.

_Deku, please, I don’t wanna talk about shit over the phone like this. I don’t wanna—_

But when he looked down, the caller I.D. almost surprised him. This time, it actually _was_ Camie.

_Shit._

His first instinct was panic— he wasn’t ready, didn’t know what to do, but _not_ answering had the chance of coming off as more suspicious.

_She’ll just call again if I don’t pick up. Get it over with._

Katsuki sucked in a breath, shoved the phone against his ear, and prayed for the best.

“Hey, what’s—”

“You’re going out with us tonight, right?” Camie clamored, cutting off any chance he’d have to start. “I booked a karaoke room downtown! It’ll be fun, and yeah, I _know_ you just got back from your sex vacation, but just cause you and your hot boyfriend are having fun doesn’t mean I’m about to let you forget about us.”

Wait— “I-I’m sorry, did you just say _sex vacation!?_”
“Uh, yeah?”

A furious heat flooded through him, and all at once, his worries were directed someplace else. “We—holy fuck— I didn’t even tell you where we went, how did—”

“One– you didn’t answer my texts last night. Two– you said you guys were going away for an overnight trip, and three– you’re not denying it.” He could practically see Camie’s grin on the other end. “Look, Baku. Did you really think you could keep something like that from me for too long?”

“I-I mean, I’m telling you, we didn’t really have—”

“Oh, but did you have fun, babe? My bad, should’ve asked that first.”

...fun.

“...yeah. I did.” He managed, and despite his former reservations, if Camie was already under the impression that they’d fucked, then maybe—

“Aw, that’s awesome!” She said, her excitement a stark contrast to how shitty he felt right now. “Oh! And I was gonna ask, did you wanna invite him along? I think we’ve got room for one more, and he might be able to snap us some drinks, too… sounds fun, right?”

“I– do you really think that a fucking pro would go buying drinks for us!? I bet he’d rather be caught dead.” Katsuki hissed, appalled that she’d even bring up that sort of thing. “Besides. He’s on duty tonight, watching out for all the idiots that are gonna be drinking and doing stupid shit. I’m not about to go and make his life more difficult.”

“Fine, fine. Party pooper.” Camie mumbled. “But yeah, you better come. The reservation is from seven up till midnight. I’ll send you the location and all that, so you better get your cute ass over there. Oh, and I think Todo said something about his internship partner like, inviting himself along too? So I need you out there in case the guy’s weird and needs to be chased off, m’kay?”

“Got it, got it.” But despite his agreement, Katsuki couldn’t say he was particularly thrilled about having a newcomer joining them right now, especially with his current… predicament.

*This is your chance to ask. Use it.*

“Real quick, um—” He began, trying to figure out how to get the words out. “I’ve just got a, uh, small bit of a problem, and I know you’ve dealt with this shit before, so I just need some advice ‘cause it’s kinda not small actually and—”

There was a soft laugh from the other end of the phone, but nothing demeaning. “What’s going on?”

*Just. Get it out.*

“Don’t laugh.” He mumbled, finally letting out a long sigh as he dragged a hand down his face. “How do you– h-how the fuck do you cover up a hickey.”

Silence.

*Shouldn’t have said anything. Shouldn’t have said anything. Shouldn’t have—*

“Where is it, babe?” She asked instead, far gentler than he’d expected.

...oh.
“Just, uh…” Oddly enough, talking to Camie wasn’t as difficult as he’d feared it would be. “You can still see a couple over my collar, and I don’t have anything that runs higher than this turtleneck…”

“You don’t have any makeup, do you?”

“Not that I really know how to use…”

“Hm… well, have anything you could wear on top of your shirt? Like a scarf or something? It’s cold, so you should be able to…”

He’d stopped listening after the word scarf.

“Y-Yeah. I’ve got something like that.”

_Haven’t worn it in a while, but…_

The call fell quiet again, but for the first time that day, his heart rate had started to settle.

“Alright. You gonna be okay? Need me to come over or do anything beforehand?”

He considered that idea for a long moment, but eventually settled on a no. “Nah, s’okay, I think it’s… under control now.”

_I can figure this out._

“Mm. Well, if you need anything, I’m here, ‘kay?” She reminded him, and just hearing the sheer _sincerity_ in her voice was enough to make him wonder why he’d been so nervous in the first place. “And get some rest, okay? You sound a little tired.”

_Tired, huh?_

“Yeah, yeah.” He brushed it off, trying to ignore the fact that those words sounded so much like Deku’s. “Don’t forget to send me the location. I’ll make it out there on time.”

“I know you will. I was just thinking more about…” Camie’s voice trailed off, and Katsuki couldn’t quite figure out why. “Sorry, nevermind! I’ll see you later. Just don’t forget to take care of yourself, babe.”

She hung up first, leaving Katsuki to sit as her voice crackled away and went silent.

_Do… do I really sound that shitty? Deku was acting weirder than usual after our call too…_

But he didn’t want to dwell on that right now. Didn’t wanna remember how distraught Deku had seemed in just a few texts or how _concerned_ he’d been for Katsuki’s well being.

_I’ve gotta shower, anyways. I’m supposed to have fun tonight. Can’t go out there and look constipated in front of Camie and the other shits right now._

As he took off his shirt and went to hang it back up, though, Katsuki caught sight of the scarf he’d told himself he’d wear later. Black, orange, soft, and _beautiful_— last year, he’d worn it three or four times a week. Now, though…

_That’s the scarf Deku got me last year for Christmas._

He hadn’t touched it in months.
Don’t think too hard about it.

The turtleneck was shoved back in the closet in a single sharp, frantic movement, and he sprinted back towards the shower before he had the chance to contemplate what it meant. Scalding water burned away the worry, and for as refreshing as the shower was, the only thing running through his mind were thoughts of teasing fingers, whispered words, and things that could only be said in the privacy of the cozy ryokan. There’d been something there, something real.

Am I just making too big a deal out of everything? Should I just try and forget about that shit? Let it happen?

Fingers clawed trails of shampoo through his hair rougher than they should’ve.

Why can’t I just enjoy the memories of the physical stuff we did together?

Katsuki definitely didn’t cry in the shower, not at all.

I… I just wish I knew what to do.

The rest of the afternoon passed by in a blur. He grabbed leftovers from his fridge and ate while his parents were out, tossed and turned in bed till he gave up on trying to nap, and opened and closed he and Deku’s texts at least a dozen times in search of an answer to whatever was clouding their relationship. TV hardly served as enough of a distraction, and pulling out his damn dildo to masturbate nearly made him sick. Everything reminded him of Deku, too fresh and too raw.

All I want is for things to be easy again.

But the clock ticked by, by, and before he knew it, the time to leave had arrived. Katsuki made himself presentable, washed his face five times over before he was sure the tearstains were gone, pulled on his turtleneck and a pair of jeans, and stared at the one thing he could barely bring himself to touch.

Don’t be so dramatic. It’s just a scarf.

He only managed to wind the fabric around his neck after a minute or so of hesitation, and despite its soft texture, Katsuki felt as if he was choking.

Just. A. Scarf.

Violently shaking hands grabbed his wallet and phone, and it was all he could do to not slam the door behind him.

Don’t be ridiculous.

But as he hurled himself downstairs, one final, mildly unexpected voice stopped him.

“You’re heading out again, Katsuki?”

Why the fuck are you already home, Mom?

“Yeah.” He muttered, moving towards the door. “We’re doing karaoke tonight.”

Katsuki didn’t like the tense silence that followed, not one bit.

“Same friends that you spent the weekend with?” She asked, and while it was an honest enough question, he hated the slight sharpness lurking in her words.
“...yeah.” He grumbled. “We’re just tryin’ to take advantage of break. I’m leaving.”

“When do you think you’ll be back?”

“Later tonight.”

“Hmph. Someone’s chatty.” His mom crossed her arms over her chest and looked more than a little suspicious, but she didn’t push it. “Don’t be a dumbass out there. I better see your ass back here tomorrow morning.”

“I’ll be fucking fine.” He scowled, turning away. “Bye.”

Katsuki made no effort to keep from slamming the door that time, and yet, a part of him couldn’t help but wonder if she’d realized he’d been out with someone over the weekend who wasn’t from his immediate friend group.

Wonder if she thinks I’m dating someone... I don’t think that she’d hate Deku, anyways, but she’s the last person I wanna bring up relationship stuff with.

Now, though, it was time to focus on the moment instead of the image he’d conjured of his mother giving him the talk again.

The trip to the karaoke place was fairly easy, and Katsuki was more than a little relieved to see that they’d grabbed a mid-sized, private room. He wasn’t sure what lengths Camie had gone to to secure the location for them on this night, but he was damn thankful for it and for her.

She’s too fucking good for us, really. Her and Momo both.

He wandered into the facility, down hallways filled with echoes of screeched-out pop music, and finally found the room Camie had reserved at the end. The door opened with an easy click, and Katsuki shut himself in with one last, short breath and a promise to stay calm and relaxed.

“Baku!” Camie greeted, throwing up her hand in a cheerful wave. “You didn’t ditch on us after all!”

“You shit, I told you I was coming.” He huffed, and grabbed a seat on the bench next to her. “I ain’t about to lie. But, uh, thanks for getting this together.”

“Yeah, but I mean... if I were you, and I had a hot pro hero as a boyfriend, I’d peace the hell out of here to go get some new year’s dick instead of doing karaoke.”

“I told you, he’s busy.” Katsuki hissed. “And we—”

“Camie, what!?” Yaoyorozu interrupted from her girlfriend’s other side. “I– I thought you wanted to be here! If you wanted to have sex, we could’ve just gone to my house!”

His friend flushed, an awkward, slightly-nervous smile on her face. “Well, um! There’s always afterwards. Unless you’d be down for getting it on in front of—”

“Would you shut up with all the sex talk!?” He snapped, and suddenly, all of his thankfulness was starting to drain away. “Is Todoroki here yet? God, I need someone who’s not so fucking horny on main to drown out the sound of you assholes.”

“Oof, that’s rich, coming from the asshole who literally asked me for hickey advice a few hours ago.” Camie mocked, a shit-eating grin spreading over her face. “Nice scarf, babe. Real subtle. Knew you had it in you.”
“You told me something like this was fine!”

“Oh yeah, it’s totally fine. Never said it wasn’t obvious what you’re hiding, though.”

Katsuki would’ve stepped out the door right that second had something not slammed against it first, followed by the sound of some strange, muffled arguing before the door was opened and Todoroki, along with some other guy, practically fell in.

“I’ll be honest, when you said tag along, I was thinking that you meant more along the lines of just walking next to me.” Todoroki scowled at the guy beside him. “Not physically latching onto me and refusing to let go.”

“But it was more fun that way, right?” The guy said, his perfect smile far, far too bright. But Katsuki couldn’t quite pin a name on him, despite feeling as if he’d seen him before. The newcomer was definitely familiar, but he wasn’t sure who it’d been that had that same dark, messy hair, deep brown eyes, and a face that sparkled with nothing but false pleasantries. “Come on, Todo. You didn’t shove me off, now did you?”

Todoroki only narrowed his eyes, though, and nearly elbowed his supposed friend in the chest. “You would’ve grabbed back on again, and I’m not so stupid as to go using my quirk in public. Quit acting like I was thrilled about it.”

If nothing else, Katsuki was fairly sure he wasn’t the only confused one in the room.

“Um… Todoroki?” Momo started, standing up and walking over to them. “Just, ah… just who is this?”

“You didn’t tell them about me?” The newcomer said, absolutely aghast. “After all we’ve been through together… hm, I don’t know how I feel about that.”

_After all they’ve been through…? Huh?_

“You’re more than welcome to stay quiet.” Todoroki said, voice stark. “Just because Gale isn’t here to deal with you doesn’t mean that you’re free to pull out your idiocy again.”

_Just because Gale isn’t… wait._

“Oh, so play nice?” The newcomer started, smile widening into something more akin to a grin as he stuck a hand out towards Momo. “If you say so. Hi, I’m—”

“This is my internship partner.” Todoroki cut him off, and sighed. “And he’s not going to be irritating tonight. I can assure you that he’s not always this weird.”

“Not sure how I feel about that, coming from you.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Whatever.”

“What— Bakugou, he’s a decent training partner. And once he knocks off the act, he’s really not too bad.” Todoroki frowned. “I would’ve made him stay behind if I really thought that—”

“Wait, wait. Bakugou!” The guy waved at him, interrupting anything else that Todoroki could’ve said in his defense. “Don’t you remember me?”

_Huh?_

“Sorry. I’m not one for wasting energy thinking about people that don’t matter.” He said, mildly annoyed. “I—”
“I don’t matter?” He replied, almost in some sort of slight shock. “You don’t remember when I nearly beat you in the sports fest first year? When I had you pinned down in front of the whole stadium? Come on, it hasn’t been *that* long. I know I couldn’t have forgotten a face as pretty as yours, and so—”

“I think I found your problem.” Katsuki growled. “You *nearly* beat me. Last I checked, that means I won.”

But the guy just stuck his hand out again in Katsuki’s direction this time, and cocked his head. “Then let’s have a proper introduction, shall we? I’ve always looked up to you— you’re so cool, so *fiery*, and your passion has always made me wanna be stronger, too!”

“Hey, knock it off with the—”

The hand shot forward, wove itself between Katsuki’s own, and held tight. “I’m Shindou! Shindou Yo. Come on, don’t you remember me, Bakugou?”

Those too-pretty, too-*knowing* eyes bored holes through his skull, and all at once, he remembered.

*Oh, god. Really? This guy?*

“You’re the fucker with the earthquakes.” He said, getting only an excited nod in response. “You put up a goddamn challenge, at least.”

“Oh, I know I did. I only lost cause I got cocky.” Shindou said, smiling again. “But you— oh, you were fun to fight. I remember how you looked under me. You were squirming around, practically *begging* me to stop.”

That grin turned to something more intense than Katsuki would’ve liked, and he wasn’t sure if he was imagining the vibrations running through his body or if Shindou actually had decided to use his Quirk in some sort of mediocre intimidation tactic.

He’s just fucking weird. *Not a threat, though.*

With some mild amusement, a part of him found that he wasn’t all too surprised that he and Todoroki had somehow wound up partnered together.

“Why the hell are you here?” He said instead, ignoring the clearly suggestive side of his comments. “Look, I know Todoroki’s an idiot, but I don’t think he’s so stupid as to spend a bunch of time with someone who’s gonna act like this twenty-four seven.”

And finally, *finally*, Shindou let go. “Good question.” His face switched to something less forced, something more tired. “Honestly? I was bored. Todo usually knows how to give me a good time, and I heard he was going out tonight, so I figured well, why not? Let’s have a proper introduction to the people he spends time with outside of practice!”

That, in the very least, sounded a bit more truthful.

*Huh.*

“So… what’s the deal? You guys just friends?” Camie asked, having been watching the whole situation plan out. “Or are you—”

“Just friends.” Todoroki said, shooting Shindou a look that said *not a word.* “As well as my internship partner. Gale took us both on because of our more elemental-like quirks, and… it hasn’t
been too bad lately.”

Katsuki would be willing to bet money on there being more than just friendship there, but decided not to push it. “...alright, then.”

“Well, maybe we should go ahead and get food?” Momo announced, turning everyone’s attention back to the important matter at hand. “I’m a little hungry, and maybe while we’re ordering, you guys can put together a list of songs you want to sing?”

*Thank god, a distraction.*

“Sounds great, babe!” Camie answered. “Alright, alright. Buckle up kids, let’s get going.”

Katsuki sat back down on the bench next to Camie as Momo sorted through the menu, and he pulled out his phone to search for something to sing along to. While he wasn’t huge on the whole singing thing (playing the drums was more his style) he wasn’t totally opposed to it either. They’d gone out on shorter karaoke trips in the past and had a good time, but usually it was just him and Camie screaming their lungs out in a booth until their voices were gone. Never had he heard Todoroki sing, and the only thing he’d heard from Momo was a single rare moment when she’d sung something so graceful, so beautiful– which was why he was so surprised when he glanced over at the short list of heavy rock songs she’d left with Camie, so different from the near serenade he’d from her heard before.

“Those– are those for Momo?” He asked, only receiving a steady nod in return.

“You bet. She’s a badass, Baku.” Camie said, glancing up to see Momo across the room, asking Todoroki and Shindou what they wanted. “And she’s *my* badass.”

“She really is, isn’t she?” Katsuki murmured. “Keeps all of our shit in line, that’s for sure. Well, you and her, I guess.”

“Mm, you think so?” She laughed. “I’m glad. Someone’s gotta watch out for you while you’re off chasing pro hero ass.”

The rest of the group was fairly distracted, as Momo had her hands full dealing with figuring out what to order with the ‘help’ she was getting from Shindou.

*Guess I... might as well tell her what happened while they’re busy. What we did over the weekend and all that.*

It was hard to get started, just like earlier that day had been, but he was banking on it being easier to keep talking once he started.

*Just gotta get the words out to someone.*

“Camie, uh… this past weekend?” He started, quiet. “Deku had a friend who won some free tickets to this ryokan a bit away from here, and we, uh… had a private onsen with our room.” He couldn’t meet her eyes, not yet. “I– I know what I asked you earlier. But we didn’t have sex. Just made out a lot, and…”

*It was fun? I felt good? He felt good?*

His phone was practically burning a hole through his hand, those worry-filled messages still haunting his every thought.
Are you really happy, Kacchan?

“And?” She asked again, more to get his attention than probe for an answer.

The words were pushing at his throat, and for as much as just being with his friends was a bit of a break from the feelings warring and tugging at him, everything was begging to come out, come out.

“Do… do you remember that fight we had a couple months back?” Katsuki started, the words chalky in his throat. He waited for a nod, and when he got it, continued. “I-I mean, we’ve tried, but it just…”

Just say something, dammit…!

“I hate fighting with him like this. Even though it hasn’t really been like, fighting-fighting. Just ignoring all of it.” He got out, fumbling with what to say. “I-I just– we never really talked shit out, and now it’s like… I mean, it feels fucking good. The– the physical stuff. But hell, I…”

What? What is it? What’s my goddamn problem?

It was as if a dam had broke– Katsuki couldn’t hold back the feelings any longer, could hardly fake the neutral face he’d tried to cling to all the way to the karaoke place.

“A- Am I crazy…?”

I just…

“It feels good– great, even, so why the hell can’t I stop thinking about that damn fight?”

I’m so tired, and…

“I love him, but it just… it feels like we can’t fucking talk to each other! Like we’re just trying to cover all this shit up with kissing and hugging and sitting naked in an onsen together instead of just figuring out what’s going on! That’s– yeah, maybe I’m crazy, maybe I don’t know jack shit about relationships, but I think that’s kinda a problem, right!?”

He only broke off when his voice tipped into a sharp crescendo, and all of a sudden, realized that every eye in the room was on him.

Oh, no.

Even Shindou was looking.

What am I gonna… what did I just—

“Quit staring.”

Wait—

“Go out in the hall for a minute or something.” Camie continued. “Give us a little time.”

“I’ll go ahead and grab some food, then?” Momo’s voice echoed, worry barely masked over with her question.

“That works, babe. I’m gonna keep him company for just a minute. I’ll let you and the others know when we’re done.”
Katsuki wasn’t sure what was going on, what all he’d just said, but before he had much time to think about it, the room had cleared out and left him alone with his best friend. A hand came up to his shoulder—Camie’s hand—and stayed there.

“They’re gone.” She assured him. “It’s just me. Promise.”

Where do I even go from here?

“Do you wanna talk a bit more?” She asked, only gentle, only understanding.

Do I?

His eyes drifted down to the phone in his hands, no new messages from Deku on it since their ‘talk’ earlier that day. Trembling fingers punched in the code, and he pulled up their conversation and handed it to Camie before he could think twice.

“I– I got back in late last night, and we called for a bit today, but…”

Camie scrolled through his messages, features drawn up in a pensive, contemplative crease. Katsuki was well aware of her ability to be serious when it came down to it, especially with people, and right now she really did feel like the only one he could trust.

“…hoo, boy.” She murmured, reading the messages over once more. “Alright. I have some thoughts, but… is there anything else you wanna say first?”

In the back of his mind, he knew this had to be quick. They wouldn’t have much time to spend on this conversation if they didn’t want to keep everyone waiting. So—

Just gonna listen, for now.

“Let’s hear it.”

She set his phone back in his lap and met his eyes, yet Katsuki could’ve sworn there was some sort of sadness behind them.

“All of this feels like a classic case of miscommunication, babe.” Camie pursed her lips. “He wants to figure stuff out too, but it feels like neither of you really know how. That much is obvious, at least.”

“I– I just…” He swallowed. “I don’t get it, ‘cause before then, everything felt mostly alright. Yeah, he was kinda overprotective, but I should’ve just gotten over that. Now he’s afraid to ask me even something as simple as how I’m doing, and I don’t mind a bit of it, it just felt like a lot before hand, and I… I kinda feel like I just fucked it all up…! L-Like, he doesn’t seem to have any issues just sticking to the physical stuff, and I mean—”

Katsuki pulled his scarf off, tugged down the collar of his turtleneck, and let Camie stare at the vivid bruises ringing his neck.

“I– I loved it. This. Being able to be close like that… but when we’re not sucking face or feeling each other up or sleeping together, it doesn’t feel like those same feelings are there nowadays…!”

“Hey, can you look at me?”

It used to be easier.

“Near the start of this relationship, it just… it felt kinda perfect, yeah? And now we’ve been officially
dating for almost six months, but it feels like things have just been falling apart ever since that one damn argument!”

“Please, just look at me.”

“I don’t wanna– f-fuck, I can see a future with him, and I—”

“Katsuki, look at me!”

Camie’s hand shot to his shoulder, gripped it tight, and didn’t let go. “Just breathe. Please. You’re freaking out a lot right now.”

_Breathe, breathe, just…_ 

“I’m not going anywhere.”

...right.

Katsuki let his eyes fall closed, if only for a moment.

_Calm down. Calm down. Just relax a bit, and…_

“It’s… it’s just…” He started, finally coming back to some sort of clarity. “I don’t want everything to end before it even begins because of this one thing… and it’s not like everything’s bad, cause he still makes me smile, laugh, that kinda shit, but...” Katsuki paused. “’S’just like there’s some sort of cloud hanging over us, and... it won’t go away.”

His friend was quiet for a long moment, didn’t tell him any simple platitudes or give him any hopeful smiles. Camie– no, she was—

_She’s not just trying to make me feel better._

“Alright.” She finally said, letting go of Katsuki’s shoulder. “Like I said, it’s… easy to tell that he wants things to be better, and I know you want to get all of this figured out too, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“So here’s my question, ‘kay?” She paused. “Just– just why are you so afraid to talk to him?”

_What? “Afraid?”_

Camie nodded. “You heard me. Every time you say _‘I don’t know how to talk to him’, _you’re afraid. I think Midoriya is too, but he’s not here right now. So I’m talking to you.”

Katsuki frowned, still not understanding. “I- how is that fear? I mean, I _don’t_ know how to talk about shit like this, ‘cause I’ve never done it before, and—”

“There’s no right way to talk about this stuff.” She pushed. “When we talked to you right after your fight, you seemed so much more confident in figuring stuff out. But you guys have waited like, months! And all that time has just made it scarier! If it hasn’t gone away on its own after that long, then it probably won’t without some sort of intervention, y’know?”

_She’s… yeah, okay, that makes sense._

“I don’t want to see you feeling this bad anymore, Baku.” She murmured, and reached up to brush the hair from his face. “I didn’t want to bring it up because I didn’t want to stress you out anymore.
But Midoriya can see it too, and hell, babe. You guys just need to be honest with each other. Honest about what you want, what you like, what you don’t. All that stuff.”

Just be honest…

“It’s not just your job, Baku. But you’ve gotta let Midoriya feel like he can reach out to you. And I’m glad you had fun on your trip! I’m really, really glad! So deal with all this, yeah? Talk it out, try not to be afraid of saying what needs to be said, and just try not to let this stink up your relationship for much longer.”

I… yeah.

Katsuki’s fingers closed around his phone, his head finally a bit clearer, and mentally flipped through when he’d be available again.

When can we see each other again? Take a trip like that again?

“Should I text him?” He asked, quiet. Camie gave him a short hum of approval, and before Katsuki allowed himself to think further on it, he opened up his message history again to say something.

“Yeah, do that, and I’ll go tell them they can come in again.” She patted him one last time before standing up, and Katsuki’s fingers finally hit the keyboard.

Just… get the conversation started. He said to text whenever.

Talking didn’t feel nearly as impossible with his best friend at his side, after all.

[Katsuki] hope u have a good night at work. That u dont have too many dumbasses to deal with n all that

[Katsuki] i was looking at my schedule n maybe we could do something in february like another weekend thing bc the onsen was rlly fun and i loved spending time w u like that and

[Katsuki] i wanna be able to get away with u for a bit again. Just us. If that’s cool

[Katsuki] srry for all this cause ur probs on duty n i know i shoulda sent somethin earlier but

[Katsuki] i love u

[Katsuki] for real

It was far more rushed, less thought-through than his messages usually were, but this time that sort of muscle-memory seemed to be the thing to serve him best.

I shouldn’t overthink it right now. Just talk to him again.

Katsuki looked up to see the door opening again in front of him just as he sent the last message, not expecting a reply till at least the next morning or so. Admittedly, it was kinda embarrassing to have to meet the eyes of all the people he’d just had a near-breakdown in front of, but nobody seemed to have minded the wait. Apparently they’d wound up getting food in their brief few minutes outside the room, and returned with a cheerful chatter and plates of food soon set on the table for everyone to chow down on.

But best of all, nobody asked him what had just happened.

Thank god.
Katsuki went to go reach for an empty plate to pile up with appetizers, but was met with a sudden odd look from Shindou as soon as he grabbed it.

“Oh, hey! Looks like you fun last night.” He grinned, gesturing at his neck. “Haha, I figured you were the type to like it rough!”

For a split second, he was confused. But that moment didn’t last long, because as soon as the connection was made between the strange pointing and the sudden chill on the back of his neck did he realize that holy fuck, I forgot to put the scarf back on.

“I– for fuck’s sake, I didn’t have—!”

“It’s okay, Bakugou.” Shindou shrugged. “I figured that’s why you were wearing it anyways. The few times I have seen you around, you never bothered to dress decent!”

Oh my god.

“Why the hell are you even here!?” Katsuki bristled. “If you’re just gonna come up here to insult me, then—”

But he stopped mid-sentence as soon as the phone in his pocket buzzed with the notification of a familiar text tone. Logically, it could only be from one person, and talking to Deku far, far outweighed the thought of having to interact with Shindou anymore.

Hm… wonder what he…

[Deku] ah im actually just about to leave for patrol!!

[Deku] and yeah!! february works!! ill look at my schedule and we can pick out a weekend to do something!!

[Deku] and just, um

[Deku] aha

[Deku] i love you too. so much

[Deku] hope youre having fun with your friends bby:) 

[Deku] thanks for texting me. ill talk to you later<3

Katsuki could feel a bit of a stupid, relieved smile growing over his face as he read over those messages again, again.

He doesn’t sound angry, at least. So I guess—

“Ooh, who are you talking too?” Shindou interrupted, sticking his head far too close into Katsuki’s personal space. “Huh? I don’t know anyone named Deku.”

“Oi, fuck o—”

As he went to shove Shindou away, though, his phone buzzed with something new. He stole a quick glance down at the screen, just expecting another message, but instantly regretted not shutting off his phone when he had the chance. Because Deku— awkward, amazing, well-meaning Deku— had thought that right then was the perfect time to send a selfie in his hero suit.
[Deku] i know i never sent you those pictures i said i would earlier, but um maybe this’ll do for now?

The picture was nice, really. Deku’s smile was as bright as he’d remembered, and there was undoubtedly a spark of happiness and relief in his eyes. And yet, for as good as the picture was, Katsuki found himself completely and utterly frozen.

Not now. Not right now. Holy shit, I love you, but could you have possibly chosen—

“Oh. Oh, really now?” Shindou murmured, curious. “Pro Hero Valiant, hm…? Interesting.”

Katsuki would’ve been more than willing to give him a bloody nose right then if not for the building conduct.

“I don’t wanna hear one word.” He seethed, shutting off his phone like he should’ve done earlier. “Okay? Only the people in this damn room know. And now, that fucking includes you. Got it!?”

“Of course, chief!” Shindou gave him a thumbs-up and a cheeky grin. “My lips are sealed! Not one word of your hottie pro hero boyfriend is leaving this room!”

Katsuki didn’t like the feel of this, but in the very least, Todoroki seemed to trust Shindou enough to at least let him join them. He was annoying as all get out, yeah, but…

I don’t have much of a choice but to hope he keeps his mouth shut, do I?

“I know you’re a two-faced fuckhead, but you better keep that promise.” He reiterated, hands clenched at his sides. “I think even you could understand why we have to keep this shit under wraps, right?”

“Right, right.” Shindou nodded. “My lips are sealed. But god, he’s a catch. Though I guess it’s not a surprise he’d be into someone as cute as you!”

“Quit it.” Todoroki grabbed Shindou by the collar and shoved him away from Katsuki. “And now that you know he’s taken, I really think you should knock it off with the flirting.”

He’s just a nuisance. Like some sort of fly that won’t get out of your face, but with better looks.

But as Todoroki apologized on Shindou’s behalf to him and went away to strike up another conversation, Katsuki checked his phone once more to stare at the slightly-grainy selfie Deku had sent. Quick fingers zoomed in on his smile, freckles barely visible in the poor lighting, but the joy in his eyes and the easy smile on his face and the bruise on his—

Katsuki’s heart stopped.

Holy shit.

No doubt about it. He didn’t think he’d managed to get anything to stay on Deku, but that—

That’s a whole-ass bruise on his neck. Oh– oh my god.

And somehow, just seeing that— that physical proof not just on himself, but on Deku, too— made everything seem that much more real.

He really does want this to work. He wants me, and…

Fingers trailed up to brush against his neck, still tender and sore.
I want him, too.

Chapter End Notes

i hope y'all enjoyed this chapter!!! As always, thank u so much to my beta @aetherlite (especially this week my dude u the best), and feel free to hit me up on my twitter @aeronines or my curiouscat if you're looking to ask a question or so!! and lastly, here's a link to all the art that's been made based off of this fic!! next chapter is one of the ones i've been hyped to write for some time, and really(read: REALLY, REALLY) fucking excited for it so i hope y'all like it next week too
“You got your clothes?”
“Check.”
“Food?”
“Check.”
“Sleeping bag?”
“Check.”
“And please, tell me you have the tent.”

Izuku nodded, phone propped up between his shoulder and ear. “Check, check, check. Just cause I haven’t done this much before doesn’t mean I can’t read a list!”

“Yeah, well… I’m gonna be the one to make sure you’re not making any stupid beginner mistakes.”

Katsuki mumbled from the other end of the phone. “I’ve got all my stuff together, so you better not screw this up before we start, Deku.”

_Not gonna screw up the short time we have together. Not gonna screw up the camping trip we’ve had planned for weeks now._

“Give me a break, Kacchan. I read over the list you sent like, ten times!”

Izuku protested, but cursed when he realized that he’d forgotten to throw in his water bottle even after looking through his new, basic camping gear more than he’d have liked to admit.

“…someone’s a little quiet, huh?”

“Shove it.”

“Forgot something?”

“I said _shove it._”

There was a small, short chuckle from the other end, and for as much of a little _shit_ his boyfriend was being, it was still kinda cute.

_And it’s… it’s nice to hear his voice again. This week has been so long, too many patrols and incidents, and god. It’s been like, a month since we’ve gotten to spend any extended amount of time_
together. I’m ready to see him again.

“You… you are just about done packing though, right?” Katsuki asked, more hesitant this time. “I’m not too far from your place right now, and I was just gonna go wait for you once I got off of the stop, and—”

“I’ll be down there in a few minutes, don’t worry.” He assured him, looking over his stuff once more before zipping up his bag, slinging it over his shoulder, and grabbing his keys. “Is the weather still alright? I haven’t gone outside this morning, but the forecast said it would be sunny and relatively warm for February, so I just grabbed a coat and—”

“It’s good. Shouldn’t be any issues. Just get down here, ‘kay? I don’t wanna be standing around waiting for you for too long.” Katsuki huffed, and somewhere in the background, Izuku could hear the familiar sound of the train coming to a halt. “I miss you. S’been too long. Don’t wanna waste this time while we’ve got it.”

“Ah, me neither. And I’m—” He stepped out the door, pulled it closed, and locked it behind him. “I’m leaving now! Be right over.”

“Alright, alright. See you in a minute.”

His boyfriend hung up as Izuku raced down the stairs of his apartment building, camping gear strapped to his backpack and anticipation quickening his every move. There wouldn’t be much skin-to-skin contact like the onsen had allowed them, but even through the barrier of thick jackets and warm hats, he was excited. It’d been too long, too long since they’d been able to see each other again for real, and until they met up and got to the hiking trails, Izuku wasn’t sure the feeling of being away from work for a whole two days would sink in. They’d been trying to text regularly, yeah, but most every conversation had ended with a bitter aftertaste. Izuku couldn’t put words to just why it felt so off, so strange, but in more than one way, this small trip felt like it could be their make-or-break for good.

*Something… something has to give. I don’t know what’s going on, not really, but I just…*

Izuku’s breath hitched when he saw Katsuki standing at the end of the street, his own backpack secure on his shoulders over a dark, warm-looking coat. It really wasn’t bad outside– while January had been ripe with scathing winter chills, February had graced them with pockets of relief, days where the cold would lighten up enough to let them consider doing something like this. It’d taken too much deliberation between them to even figure out when, where, and *what* to do for the weekend, but finally, finally—

*We’re going out for the next thirty-six hours, and no one else is gonna get in our way this time. It’ll just be me, him, and the trees.*

Katsuki raised his hand up in a small half-wave, a thin smile over his face. “You really did make it, huh? Well, points for effort. If nothing else, you look ready for a camping trip.”

“I am ready! More than ready!”

“Yeah, yeah. We’ll see if you’re still saying that tonight.” Katsuki murmured, but there was no hiding the small hint of humor in his weary voice. “We’ve got a train to catch, and I don’t wanna be late to this one. You sure there’s nothing else you need?”

“I’m sure.” Izuku nodded, and with a small step forward, he reached out to pull Katsuki into a hug– only for his boyfriend to shake him off not a moment later.
“We’re still in public.” He mumbled, and for as true as that was, it still didn’t explain the awkward hesitation in his every move. “Let’s, uh, just get going.”

*Does… does he not want me to touch him…?*

“I– yeah, okay. You’re right.”

*Just go along with it for now. It’s fine.*

Katsuki turned, motioned for him to follow, and for as much as he was looking forward to what was to come, it was as if just another small part of him had cracked.

*Off to a great start, huh?*

But there was a chance that his boyfriend wasn’t just saying that to push him away. Maybe it really was just because they were sorta-kind in public, maybe once they got on the hiking trail it’d be better, maybe—

“This way, Deku.” Katsuki pulled him out of his thoughts, and Izuku could only stumble towards him and follow. There was a good chance he was overthinking everything, yeah, but still– unlike how titillating the onsen trip had been, dwelling on this one only served to nurture the worst of his fears.

*It’ll be better once we get on the trail. Once we get out of the city. It’s about an hour-and-a-half ride out there, and we’ll both probably sleep on the train, so… maybe I’m just tired. That might be it.*

Thankfully, they dodged the ‘are-you-gonna-talk-first’ game when the train pulled up upon their arrival. They found a seat and sat down with their gear, Katsuki by the window while Izuku sat in the aisle seat. The shuffle of other passengers filled the train, but for as loud as it was, Izuku still felt as if the deafening silence between him and Katsuki was threatening to drown him. His boyfriend had turned towards the window, one elbow propped up on the sill as his other arm lay limp in his lap. It would be easy enough to just watch him, to just wait and wait for something to happen, but that…

*Then we’d still be stuck, right? Stuck in whatever this place is? Stuck, unable to escape?*

The other passengers had begun to settle around them, and fell quiet as the train rumbled to a gentle start.

“Are you, uh, gonna try to sleep…?” Izuku started, eyes still fixed on his boyfriend. “The hiking spot’s a little ways out there, so…”

“I might.” Katsuki shrugged, jacket riding up and over his neck. “Dunno yet. Sometimes it’s fun to watch the scenery and stuff.”

“Aha, yeah… I can see that.” His tongue lay heavy in his throat. “Weather’s nice, huh?”

“We talked about that earlier.”

“Right, right…”

*Why is this so hard?*

“Was, um, training fine this week?”

“Told you about that already, too. But being back at school’s been fine. It’s still barely the middle of
the semester, so not much has happened.” Katsuki sighed. “Saw my friends for a bit a few days ago. Todoroki’s been dragging this asshole along with him wherever we go— or, well, the asshole has been dragging himself along with us. But, uh yeah. We went and saw a movie.”

“O-Oh, yeah! The, um, that new rom-com that came out, right? I think I remember you mentioning it.”

“Mhm. It was cheesy as all hell, but I guess it could’ve been worse.”

And again, silence.

Izuku forced a small laugh, unsure of what else to do. “A-Ah, well, that’s good. Maybe that’s something we could do too, if you wanted…?”

“Going to a theater isn’t too public for you, then?”

“I mean, it’s in the dark, and—”

Something poked his shoulder— nothing hard, nothing weird, just—

“H-Hey, um… P-Pro Hero Valiant?”

Ah, shit.

Katsuki fell quiet as Izuku plastered a smile on his face, and turned to face the person who’d poked him. “Hi there. Something going on?”

The guy— who looked to be no more than some middle-aged, run-of-the-mill man— sat in some sort of shock upon Izuku actually responding.

“O-Oh, oh my god. It’s really you!?” He was nervous, yes, but more excited than anything else. “I– would you mind if I got a picture? Or an autograph?” The man rubbed a hand across his forehead, and a part of Izuku could’ve sworn he was sweating. “My, my daughter is a huge fan of yours, she talks about you all the time, a-and—”

“W-Well, aha, I don’t mind an autograph if you’ve got a pen I can borrow.” Izuku replied, slightly wary about the fan but sensing that the enthusiasm honestly was perfectly innocent. “You, um– you said it was your daughter who was a fan?”

“Yes! She loves you, watches all your fights, your interviews, and reads all the articles about you…!” The man continued, barely able to contain his elation. “She– she always tells me about how she wants to be just like you. A-A strong, amazing, kind hero like you!”

Like… like me, huh…?

Realistically, he knew the things people saw on the news were the incredible parts— the inhuman, plastic, one-sided parts. They’d see his strength, his success, and his failures all in the same vein, and while Izuku hadn’t been much better at looking behind the screen growing up, it always felt odd to see people want to be like those parts of him.

If they saw everything that was wrong with me… if they really saw in, saw all the nights I’ve spent crying my eyes out or all the nightmares I’ve had because of this damn job, then would they really…?

No. That wasn’t it.
They wanted to be the hero on the screen, the unfailing, unwavering, unfa...\textit{Valiant}. Nobody wanted to be like \textit{Izuku}, someone kept hidden so far from the public eye, buried deep, so deep, deep enough that only a chosen few would ever really come to know him.

“U-Um, is this okay?” The man asked, handing a small pen and pad of paper to Izuku across the aisle. “I don’t have anything else, but—”

“This is good!” He managed, shedding the spiralling thoughts away. “So did you just want an autograph, or— wait. Actually, um, what’s your daughter’s name…?”

“O-Oh! It’s…” The man continued, and told Izuku not just her name, but also showed him a few pictures of her. She was just in middle school– young, just like he’d been, but confident and determined to become a hero like him. And yeah, for as much as he disliked hearing the \textit{just like you} phrase, he couldn’t say \textit{all} of those qualities were awful.

\textit{Maybe not all of me is a hero, but... the parts that are aren’t so bad for someone to aim for, right?}

He signed the note with the girl’s name and small smiley face, followed by his own name and a \textit{‘you can do it!!’} in big letters. The man was more than grateful, and kept showing Izuku picture upon picture of his daughter, told him stories about her on the rest of the ride there, and thankfully, didn’t ask about the person sitting right next to him. Katsuki might’ve fallen asleep, but Izuku wasn’t about to draw attention to him to check. Right now, they had to be strangers, no question about it.

\textit{Because for as kind as some fans might be, there’s some risks we can’t take. Not when we’re still in semi-public like this.}

But the remainder of the ride was easy enough, and Izuku found himself enjoying the quiet conversation he’d struck up with the man more than he’d expected. That said, saying goodbye wasn’t hard, and he did wind up turning to nudge Katsuki awake when they arrived at their stop. They might’ve gotten a stare or two as they hauled themselves off the train together, but with so many of the passengers asleep, the risk was really next to none.

\textit{Now we’ve just gotta find the trail, get hiking, and—}

“Hey, Deku.” Katsuki said, not wary, not nervous. “Back there, when you were talking to that guy, uh…”

Izuku’s gut clenched just at hearing him, partly afraid of what he had to say.

“...that was, Pretty sweet.” He kicked the ground in front of him, not meeting Izuku’s eyes. “Asking for that kid’s name and all. I saw what you wrote.”

\textit{Oh...?}

“A-Ah, I mean, it wasn’t much—”

“You took the time to have a whole-ass \textit{conversation} with a fan, and you wrote something special for his daughter. Maybe I’m not as familiar with that shit, but it’s more than I’ve seen most heroes do.” Katsuki shrugged, and started walking out towards the edge of the trees. “Maybe I wanna be like you in that way. Y’know. How you’re always kind to people and all that.”

...\textit{how I’m always kind}?

He couldn’t see it super clearly from where he stood, but Izuku could’ve sworn Katsuki was blushing.
“Maybe… maybe this will go well after all.”

“Agh, no more waiting around!” Katsuki huffed, and marched off towards the trail. “Let’s get going. If we can set up camp in a couple hours, we’ll be good to go. Gotta get there before it gets dark.”

“I’m coming, coming!”

It was a clear day aside from the thin wisps of clouds in the sky, the sun’s rays trickling through the thin, winter-struck canopy of leaves above them as the two disappeared under the cover of the forest. Katsuki had been up on this trail a number of times before—though it was a fairly popular spot in the warmer seasons, winter months usually found it abandoned but for a select few. Conversely, Izuku hadn’t ever been much for hiking. For as athletic as he was now, so much of his childhood had been spent pouring over videos and comics and wandering in the footsteps of pro heroes. But these were the trails Katsuki had grown up wandering in—always outdoors, often alone, but never afraid.

And now, walking behind him as his boyfriend led the way with a confident step, Izuku couldn’t help but fall in love a little more.

He looks at home right now.

“There’s a stream up ahead.” Katsuki called out with a toss of his head. “Don’t be stupid, watch your step.”

Warm rays of afternoon sun streaked through his hair, and Deku could’ve sworn he’d laid eyes on an angel.

He looks... happy.

Under the trees like this, and among dust, dirt, and vegetation, it was comfortable. Quiet. As if the nature around them had taken their voices up in a gentle hold, only allowing the occasional sound of birds or the shuffle of scurrying squirrels through. Their silence didn’t always have to be awkward, and even with only the rare comment on the terrain from Katsuki or a glance back to make sure Izuku was okay, something felt right about this.

Even so, I’d love to be laughing with him right now... just talking with him, holding his hand, maybe giving him a kiss or two every once in a while...

But this moment, as it was, was still good.

“Think we’ve got another half-hour or so.” Katsuki murmured, eyes fixed on the spidery, spindly tree branches. “Then we can set up camp, get a fire going, and— o-oh, shiit—!”

His boyfriend stumbled over a rock right at his feet, and before he could work to balance himself with the added weight of the backpack, tripped into the small, trickling creek in front of them. Katsuki cursed, thick mud mucking up his pants and cold water dripping from icy fingers. It wasn’t a deep ditch by any means, but that didn’t stop Izuku from running up and stretching a panicked hand out to him.

“You okay?” Izuku blurted out, only for Katsuki to stare at his hand with some sort of wary, uncertain look.

“I’m fine. S’happens.” He muttered, and hauled himself out of the shallow creek bed, completely ignoring Izuku’s offering. “Don’t worry, none of the gear got wet.”

“That’s— Kacchan, that’s not what I was worried about, I just...”
Wanted to know if you were okay.

“N-Nevermind.”

Izuku could’ve sworn he saw a slight, nearly imperceptible shake of Katsuki’s head, but didn’t move to confront him again. He was right, it was just one little thing, and he was fine, but…

I… I wish reaching out to you didn’t make me feel sick. I wish it didn’t hurt you.

They continued on along the trail in a different kind of silence. Stark, empty, and far more frigid than before.

I wish I didn’t worry this bad about him. This tension is probably my fault. ‘Cause if I… if I didn’t care so much, this would all be easier. Right?

Izuku sighed, tried not to think about how close they had to be to their breaking point, and kept walking.

He’d told himself over and over that now wasn’t the time for that question, that they could just deal with it later, but as time went on, whatever bond they had left had only been growing more and more brittle. Izuku was anything but an expert on relationships, and while the main response he’d received to his worries with friends was just talk it out, you’ll be fine, he had no idea where to even start.

After spending so long living in a pyramid of lies, finding even the most meager scaffolding of truth among the cobwebs and dust stood to be one of the most difficult trials he’d ever faced.

How much longer can I fool myself into thinking I’m okay with this situation?

Combat came naturally after years of practice. Sex was a familiar escape. Words, though… words were barely-charted territory, despite all of his time spent in therapy trying to clear the fog bit by bit.

What do you want, Izuku?

I want him to be happy.

Branches crunched below his feet, the soft yellows of the sun melting to an orangish glow above him.


Katsuki’s halo had shifted to orange, spikey, soft, and dappled just like the flower he’d held onto for so long now.

I… I want…

“Campsite’s just up ahead.” His boyfriend reminded, the life in his voice having been washed away with the slow trickle of the creek. “We’ll make it there on time.”

I want us both to be happy. Together.

“R-Right, yeah. Got it.”

I’m not going to let this slip away from us so easily. Not now, not when there’s still so much we could be…!

The tensions were high as the temperature was low, but Izuku fixed himself with a new
determination. If this was their shot at reconciliation, their last real shot, then…

I’m going to take it. I won’t let this—this thing we have together—go without a fight.

There had to be something he could do, something to get the words going and feelings running, something that wouldn’t result in screaming and burning anger and frustrations beyond belief. Couples got through fights all the time. There couldn’t be some sort of secret to it, not really, so just what was he missing?

What’s our key? What do we need to do?

“Alright, here it is.” Katsuki said once more, stepping into a small clearing off to the side of the forest. “Not too big, not too small. I’ve camped up here a few times, and it’s usually pretty quiet. Haven’t run into anyone else at night here before.”

“Ah, that’s good to hear.”

The area really was nice— a small fire pit sat near the center of the clearing, ringed with stones and littered with fallen wood at the perimeter. It probably hadn’t been used in a while either, if the untouched branches and small pebbles scattered around the area were anything to go by.

Katsuki was right, of course. This was a good spot.

A good spot for making out, and maybe a good spot for making u—

“You wanna set up the tent?” His boyfriend said, interrupting his thoughts for what had to be the tenth time that day. “I’ll go find some decent firewood if you can go ahead and do that.”

“Oh, um, sure!” Izuku nodded, dropping his bag to the ground and pulling the compact tent out of it. He’d wound up investing in a new one made for two— all Katsuki owned was a one-person tent, and as nice as the prospect of curling up tight with his boyfriend was, Izuku felt as if being that close might just make things worse.

Plus, I’m not exactly small. Kacchan’s like six or seven inches shorter than me, and, uh… muscle mass is a thing, too.

In short, the two-person tent had definitely been a good idea. However, when Izuku began to open it up in search of directions of how to set it up, some sort of slight panic began to set in. He didn’t expect that putting the tent up would be super easy, but the mess of rods and fabric and stakes he was faced with only served to confuse him more and more the longer he looked at it. The instructions that had come with it had gone missing (a part of him vaguely recalled leaving them at home) and so, after several minutes spent on his knees trying (and failing) to pitch the tent, Izuku nearly gave in and called for help.

“Um, h-hey, Ka—”

“You’ve never set up a damn tent before, have you?”

...shit.

“W-Well, um, I’ve set up some similar stuff out on rescue operations, but…” He paused, realizing that that was probably the worst thing he could’ve said when considering his poor history of having to find help from other heroes when it came to arranging the medical tents. Even those, though, had been a different (and to some degree, simpler) structure than this one.
But ever-capable Katsuki simply crouched beside him and shooed him away. “I’ll take care of it. Grab some firewood, ‘kay? Make sure it’s dry.” He jerked his head off to the side. “There’s some bigger logs off to the edge of the trees that someone must’ve left behind, so take those next to the fire pit and throw some thinner branches for kindling in there. I already got some tinder, so don’t worry about that, alright?”

“A-Ah, right! Sounds good.”

Truth be told, he didn’t know what most of those words meant, but it seemed easy enough.

_Easier than the damn tent, anyway._

A few minutes into juggling branches in his arms and hauling logs over, though, he looked over to see Katsuki getting to his feet in front of the perfectly erected tent. No weird bends, no awkward poles sticking out, and no fabric poorly stretched over the frame.

Izuku had never been so turned on in his life.

“You just gonna stare at me, or are you gonna get that in the fire pit?” Katsuki complained, but Izuku could hear the bit of pride hiding beneath the rough words. “Come on, that’s the _easy_ job.”

“I’m getting it! Aha, sorry, sorry…”

“S’okay. Actually, you can just dump those over here and I’ll get it set up.” His boyfriend instructed with simple confidence, pointing to the side of the pit. “I know you’re strong, so bring those logs over here, yeah?”

_Yeah! I’m strong!_

“You got it, boss!”

_Something I can do!_

He could’ve sworn Katsuki cracked a small smile at that, red sun making it almost seem as if he’d flushed at the small declaration of _boss._

_I’d let you boss me around any day, Kacchan._

Izuku ran off to collect more sticks before he could think on that further, though, the implications of Katsuki ordering him around far more potent and arousing than he’d expected. Now was the time for wood, yes, but not _that_ kind of wood.

_We’ve gotta make up before we can go do that stuff again, after all._

It was like magic, watching Katsuki work. All Izuku did to contribute was dump the sticks and logs at his side, but it was his boyfriend who arranged it all in a structured, efficient, and nearly _artful_ manner.

“Can you go grab the matches? They’re in my bag, lower left pocket.”

“On it!”

Katsuki lit a match, tossed it into the kindling, and watched as the first flames of a small fire began to crackle to life before them. It was certainly pretty, seeing those small bits of red and orange flare up into gentle yellows and whites, but so much more so was the earnest smile on his boyfriend’s face, fire dancing through his eyes and tickling his cheeks.
I… I’ve never done this sort of thing, but it’s kinda, uh—” He started, but just as the words left his mouth, Katsuki turned to face him instead of the tiny fire. “…kinda beautiful.”

“Beautiful, huh?” Katsuki whispered, and in the evening light, looked like something out of a fairytale. “You’re a sap, Deku.”

A scarred hand came up to cup at Katsuki’s face, thumb running along sun-kissed cheeks. “Do you really mind?”

“No, I…” This time, it was his boyfriend who leaned in close, chapped lips brushing his own for only the briefest of moments. “I don’t mind. Not with you.”

Not with me, huh…?

Katsuki didn’t go much further than that, though, hesitating as soon as he met Izuku’s eyes. “We should probably get the rest of our gear unpacked. And I gotta go piss. You get the food out, and I…I’ll be right back.”

“Alright, alright.”

Because of course, things couldn’t be fixed that quickly.

He got up to dig through his bags for what food they’d brought— nothing much, just some trail mix for snacking, sliced turkey, cheese, and bread for dinner, as well as ingredients to make s’mores for dessert. Katsuki had objected at first to those, but gave in to Izuku’s pleading eyes despite his boyfriend’s groaning that s’mores ‘weren’t all that’ and were ‘too unhealthy for his school diet’. Izuku had pulled his pro hero card and objected those claims in their entirety, and convinced him to treat himself a bit. It didn’t take long to pull out the food, and as he was rolling out his sleeping bag, Katsuki returned from his bathroom break.

“I’m kinda hungry. Might go ahead and eat.” He said, pushing past Izuku and into the small tent. “You want anything? I was thinking about making a grilled cheese.”

“Just cheese? Here I thought you were the one talking about how unhealthy this was to begin with.”

Katsuki’s faced burned, and an awkward hand came up to rub at the back of his neck. “Well, uh… I could add some meat. Make it a melt. That’d be fine too, I guess.”

“I suppose that means that having a s’more or two shouldn’t be a problem either then, yeah?”

“Fine, fine! I get it, asshole.” He grumbled, but the resistance in his voice was little to none. “I haven’t had s’mores in a while anyways. But, uh… yeah. Gonna go make that melt. Did you want one, too?”

“Oh, sure! Extra cheese, please.”

“Hmph, no surprise there.”

“You said you didn’t mind me being cheesy.”

“Sappy.” Katsuki grinned. “There’s a difference, you know.”

“Sure, Kacchan. If you say so.”

Izuku brought a couple bottles of water out to the fire pit, watching the flames flicker and grow as he settled down at Katsuki’s side. With each and every swift, natural movement, it was easy to see that
his boyfriend knew what he was doing. It was fun to watch too, if nothing else. Dextrous hands folded simple sandwiches together, then moved to cook them over the fire in the midst of the dropping temperatures. The sun was falling fast, fast, but…

*If nothing else, we have a good view of the night sky.*

“Here. Eat it while it’s hot.” Katsuki said, and handed him a sandwich. “Tell me how it is, alright? S’been a while. There’s enough left if you want a second one, too.”

“Ah, thanks. This should be plenty for now, but maybe later?”

“Hm. Suit yourself.”

Minutes later, Katsuki joined him with his his own sandwich(es) and set to chowing down. Conversation wasn’t needed here either, not with food filling mouths and trapping anything they would’ve said behind flimsy grilled-cheese barriers. At least it wasn’t uncomfortable, wasn’t too awkward, just…

*Uncertain.*

Izuku might not know how to push for a conversation, but Katsuki obviously wasn’t any better off. Instead of talking, his boyfriend moved to scoot closer and rest his head on his shoulder as they finished eating, some semblance of intimacy in the absence of real words.

“You… don’t mind the weather, do you?” His boyfriend asked, hand running up to intertwine itself with Izuku’s. “I know it’s kinda cold, but…”

“You’re like a space heater, Kacchan. Even if it’s cold, it’s not so bad when you’re here, right?”

Katsuki managed a short laugh, only leaning in closer against him. “Thank my quirk for that one. But you’ve got all that muscle, too… can’t imagine you get cold all that easily, either.”

“Not that easily, no. Comes in handy sometimes.”

“Like when you get your suit torn off in the middle of fights?”

“H-Hey, it doesn’t happen *that* often!”

“Oh, really now?” Katsuki chuckled, squeezing his hand tight as his other moved towards the inside of Izuku’s thighs. “I dunno… those gossip rags sure do seem to have a hayday time every time you start losing clothes.”

“Oh my god, Kacchan.” He groaned. “That’s why I leave that garbage to my PR manager. I don’t think I’ve had the pleasure of setting eyes on those trashy things since I started working.” But then he stopped, some sudden realization crossing through his mind. “W-Wait, you don’t look at that stuff… do you?”

Katsuki’s silence was more telling than anything.

*…you’ve gotta be kidding me.*

“Kacchan, you— holy shit, you *really—!*”

“There’s a few decent pictures of you in those, alright?!” Katsuki exclaimed, burying his head in his hands. “M-Maybe I check it out every once in a while, ‘cause if you ignore all the headlines and the articles then there’s, y’know, some nice shots!”
“If by nice shots, you mean unwarranted pictures of me taken in as lewd a manner as possible, sure.” Izuku said, unable to tear his eyes away from his boyfriend’s embarrassed face. “If you want something better to get off to, you can just ask, yeah?”

“Ain’t like I get off that often to those!”

...oh... oh my god. I was joking.

Some sort of mortified look came over Katsuki’s face as he realized what he’d just said, and all of a sudden, he was scooting away from Izuku’s side and trying to pretend he hadn’t just let that all slip out.

“H-Hey, hey, it’s okay!” Izuku started, not sure how to remedy this situation. “I, uh... well...”

“You what, Deku?”

Yeah, what? What were you gonna say, Izuku?

A part of him was frozen, but another small part— a small, dangerous, part, had an idea.

Maybe... just maybe...

“How about we play a game, Kacchan?” He started, a slight tingle running from his hands to his feet. “A secret for a secret.”

When a bit of confusion passed over Katsuki’s face, he continued. “I mean, we’re alone up here. It’s about as quiet as it gets, yeah? So... I dunno, if you want, maybe we could just... share a little?”

“...oh.”

He wasn’t sure what response he really expected, but—

“I... I guess what’s said up here, stays up here. Right?”

Here goes nothing.

“Right. Yeah. Of course.” Izuku lay back on the dirt, then patted the ground beside him in an invitation for Katsuki to join. This was all new, so new, but some small voice in the back of his head was convinced that maybe this was what they needed after all.

“Course you’d wanna lay in the dirt.” Katsuki mumbled, decidedly less embarrassed than before. But nonetheless, he joined Izuku on the ground and stared up at the dimming night sky. The stars were barely visible right now, but the moon had risen up over the horizon, just barely peeking above the trees.

“Were you gonna start?” His boyfriend eventually asked, not avoiding the confrontation like he’d been half-expecting. “Come on, I wanna know whatever it is the great Valiant has been hiding.”

“Fine, I’ll start, even though you did a pretty good job of kicking things off yourself.” Izuku grinned, only to earn a light elbow to the ribs in response. “Alright, alright. Well, um...”

What to say, what to say...? Nothing super dramatic, but...

“So, um, you know how I had my ears pierced?” He finally said. “I know they’re not right now, I haven’t gotten it redone yet since the earthquake, but... ah, well, I got it done to begin with ’cause I failed a dare in my third year of high school.”
“Oh? You failed?” Katsuki probed. “Please, continue.”

“It wasn’t anything bad! Just, y’know, stupid high school things… Kirishima and Ochako— a-ah, Red Riot and Uravity—”

“I know who they are, dumbass.”

“Right, right… well, they dared me to sneak into our homeroom after hours and, uh, draw a giant dick on the blackboard.” Izuku sighed. “But with my incredible luck, Aizawa caught me halfway through doing it— I didn’t get away fast enough, didn’t finish, and wound up getting my ears pierced as the price for failing. Not that I really regret it, but, aha… it was kinda fun. Aside from the whole getting-chewed-out part.”

“Hmph. Sounds like something you’d do.”

“W-What’s that supposed to mean!?”

“Accept a stupid dare. Then fail.” He paused. “You’re pretty impulsive, Deku. S’not always a bad thing, but it’s definitely a thing.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever.” Izuku pouted. “Your turn.”

Katsuki fell quiet for a moment, but didn’t take too long to come up with something. “I might’ve said it before, but, uh… I have a lot of your merch. I mean, not that much, ‘cause there’s not much out yet, but… ever since that day you rescued me, I kinda, y’know, wanted to see your face near me. Might be a little stupid, but…” Katsuki let out a small laugh. “It made me feel safe, y’know? And it always helped remind me that you— you, more than anyone else, was who I was gonna work beside one day.”

“What the hell, Kacchan.” Izuku murmured, glancing over to see his boyfriend looking right back. “How dare you go calling me a sap when you’re, you know, doing all that?”

“You don’t think it’s weird?”

“No, I think it’s cute as fuck. Oh my god, let me kiss you.”

“H-Hey!”

“Do you mind?”

“A-Ah, well… no.”

Izuku fell back onto the grass with a smile, just the smallest taste of Katsuki’s lips having sent a fresh wave of heat coursing through his veins.

“That was a lot tamer than I expected, Kacchan. You’re gonna make me look like a perv at this rate. But ah, okay, I’ve got another one.” Izuku’s teeth tugged at his lip. “So, going along with the first thing I said about the piercings…”

“I know you don’t have a dick piercing. I’ve seen your dick.”

“I wasn’t gonna say I have a dick piercing!”


“Well, uh…” Heat rushed to his cheeks, a stark contrast to the cool air surrounding them. “I really
liked having my ears pierced, yeah? I always kinda wanted to get another piercing or two, and while most external piercings aren’t super great to have in the field, ah… I’ve always wanted to get a tongue piercing. Thought it’d be interesting. I’ve been told I’m a good kisser, and I’ve always been curious how it’d feel with a little something more.”

He’d honestly expected a response, even if it was just something small. But Katsuki had gone silent, dead-eyed, and it took a you okay? from Izuku before he managed to reply.


The stutter in Katsuki’s voice was horribly noticeable, and it took all of Izuku’s self control to not point it out right then and there. He wasn’t given a chance to speak next, though, because his boyfriend somehow found his words and decided to do his part.

“I-I guess, if we’re going on that sort of tangent, uh… I-I kinda, um, didn’t tell you the full truth earlier. I might have a big folder on my computer that I’ve compiled over the past two years. Of those shitty gossip rag pics of you, and—” Katsuki gulped. “Y-Yeah, I use it. Sometimes. Once or twice a week at least. Sometimes five or six. Oh, god.”

For as much as he disliked those shitty magazines with their shitty articles and their shitty headlines, the thought of Katsuki getting off on a regular basis to semi-lewd pictures of Izuku was…

That’s hot. Holy shit.

His mind was immediately flush with scenarios— if Katsuki ever played with his ass, stuck his fingers in his mouth, cried out Izuku’s name with his hand wrapped around his dick when he came all over his bedsheets. How many times had he been responsible for Katsuki pleasuring himself, for getting him hard and hot, for driving that teenage arousal further, further, further till he was moaning and writhing in his bedsheets like it was the best thing he’d ever felt.

“You gonna say anything, Deku?” Katsuki asked, snapping him from his fantasies. “Don’t leave me hanging. I-If I’m gonna say that, you better match me, ‘kay?”

Match… that. Oh boy.

“R-Right, right. That’s hot. Yeah. Okay.” He stumbled, trying to focus again for at least a little bit. “Well. I guess, if we’re just expanding on stuff, then… I don’t just want that piercing for kissing, you know. In high school, I learned that apparently, I… suck dick pretty good, too.”

If Katsuki had malfunctioned before, he’d fully short-circuited now.

“O-Oh. Y-You, uh… you suck dick good. That’s, um. That’s nice to know. A-And with a tongue piercing! Yeah, y-you should, uh, do that. I’ll pay.”

I love seeing you all flustered.

“I’ve been considering it a lot more recently.” Izuku chuckled, relishing in the way his boyfriend’s face only grew more and more strained with every word. “Now I have a reason to think about it again, anyways.”

“O-Oh, right…! A reason to think about it! Because—” Katsuki’s voice cracked. “‘C-Cause you. Wanna. Suck my dick.”

“Yeah. I do.” Izuku said, amazed at himself for managing to stay so casual about it. “I like making you feel good, Kacchan. That’s not to say I don’t get anything out of it either, but… well. The way
you look when we’re making out is really, really nice. I wanna see it more.”

That said, the way Katsuki looked right now, so flushed and so utterly vulnerable— was almost just as good.

“...there’s, uh, one more thing I have to share. If we’re going this far.” Katsuki mumbled, trying to compose himself a little more. “I– well, um. Do you remember Yaoyorozu Momo? Er, u-uh, Creati?”

“Your friend, right? Isn’t she also interning under Kirishima and Ochako?”

“That’s, uh… that’s right. Her quirk is making stuff from her body, and she’s dating Camie, and after the first year sports fest, she was kinda… convinced… to make a sort of gag gift for me. By Camie. Which explains most of this, but, um. They realized that I had some sort of a crush on you before I did, a-and, well…” Katsuki sucked in a breath, as if trying to calm down. “She thought it’d be funny to get Momo to make me a– a V-Valiant themed… d-di...”

He couldn’t hear the last part of Katsuki’s sentence, not with his hands shooting up to cover his mouth and his voice dropping to less than a whisper. Izuku cocked his head, confused.

“Sorry, I couldn’t hear—”

“She– s-she gave me a fucking Valiant themed dildo, alright?!” Katsuki sputtered, voice pitched up in some sort of cry. “O-Oh, my god. I can’t believe I’m telling you this. You– you better not tell anyone, and I mean anyone, you hear!?”

Izuku wasn’t sure if he heard, not really, because every gear spinning in his head had ground to a stop all at once.

**A Valiant. Themed. Dildo.**

“You– you said you have a dildo. Themed after, um, me?”

All he got in return was a small nod from Katsuki, who had rolled over on his side in order to avoid every chance at eye contact. “Y-Yeah. I-I. I wasn’t gonna use it, not at first, but I just got curious once and gave it a shot because I have needs too, y’know! And it was kinda good. Kinda really good! And so I kept using it and eventually I asked Momo to make me a bigger one cause I felt your hard-on at practice one time and so now I’ve been using that one and—”

*Kacchan has been fucking himself with a dildo themed after me since the start of his first year.*

Suddenly, he didn’t feel so self-conscious about his own Katsuki-centered wet dreams and fantasies.

“Kacchan, that’s– oh my god. That, um, might just be the hottest thing I’ve ever heard.”

His boyfriend’s voice was trembling, quivering, and for as much as Izuku understood why, all he wanted to do was kiss the fear right out of him. “...you… y-you really think that?”

“Holy shit, yes.” Izuku breathed, reaching to hold Katsuki’s hand again. “You’re gonna have to show me this at some point. In person. I– I wanna see this.”

“You wanna hold what’s been up my ass more times than I can count?”

“I mean, I’d assume you clean it off.”

“Well, duh. But it’s…” Katsuki faltered, and though he was obviously thoroughly embarrassed, a
slightly choked laugh worked its way from his throat. “I-I thought you’d find it too… too weird.”

“Weird? The thought that you like getting off with something that’s supposed to be like me?” Izuku kissed his cheek. “No, no. Fuck, I mean, it’s not like I never fantasize about you. And that you have friends that would do that… well, whatever their intentions might’ve been, I guess it all worked out in the end. Right?”

This time, Katsuki rolled back over to look at him for real. “…right. You’re right.” He paused for a moment, almost as if trying to decide what to say next. “I… if it’s alright, I do have a question for you. You don’t gotta answer if you don’t wanna, but, um…”

Izuku had known the moment that the red left his boyfriend’s cheeks that whatever he had to say was serious.

“You kept mentioning all that, uh, sexual stuff you did back in high school.”

… oh, no.

“Were you… were you dating someone else then…?”

And for as turned on as Izuku might’ve been, those words alone were enough to shatter the mood.

...dating.

“I-I, well, uh. It… it was kinda complicated.” Izuku’s stomach turned, but this was something they’d probably have to talk about at some point, anyways.

**What better time to tell him than while we’re letting all this stuff out, anyways?**

“In second year, I briefly dated my friend Ochako. Uravity.” He swallowed, but the thought of the relationships he’d had with his friends still left a bitter taste in the back of his throat. “It, uh, didn’t last very long. I think we only kissed once, nothing further. But in third year, I…”

Kirishima’s face flashed through his head again, smiling, giving Izuku what he’d thought he’d wanted and needed. What he’d thought might one day lead to something more, something like love.

“You don’t gotta talk about it if you don’t wanna.” Katsuki reminded him, a twinge of worry teetering on the edge of his words. “I figured there’s a reason you’ve never really talked in detail about it after this long, but—”

“N-No, it’s fine. It’s just that, um…” Izuku’s voice trailed off again, and for whatever reason, it was still so hard to find the right words. “Third year was really, really hard. I-I’d kinda, ah, bogged myself down with school and my internships, and well… K-Kirishima asked me once about having a little sex to relax cause I’d been so stressed out, and I…”

**Just one condition, alright? I don’t mind helping you out a little. I mean, I think it’d be pretty fun too! But I just wanna stay friends. Is that okay, dude?**

“It was supposed to be just a friends-with-benefits thing. And it was. We never went on any dates, never did typical couple-y stuff, never really made out unless it was while we were having sex. And I kinda…”

Yeah, that’s okay! I get it! It won’t be an issue, I promise.

He’d thought in those short bouts of lust and pleasure and need that maybe, just maybe, there’d been
something more.

“You, uh, fell for him?”

“I… yeah.” His hands were shaking, shaking. “I– I thought– I-I honestly thought I loved him. Asked him out at the end of the year. I wanted more. I– I begged him to stay, to find an apartment with me, to actually be my partner, b-but he… he said no. Like I’d known he would’ve. Like we’d agreed on from the very start.”

*I’m not crying, am I? I’ve cried enough over this. I don’t wanna cry anymore over him. It was years ago. I know for a fact that I’m over it.*

“Hey.” Katsuki murmured, a hand coming up to press against his cheek. “Hey, Deku. I’m here. S’okay.”

“I know, I-I know, it’s fine now, but I just… god, I let that mess me up.” He shuddered. “I started shutting everyone else out. Isolated myself big time. Didn’t want help, didn’t think I *needed* help, but when I rescued you, it just…”

*What am I saying, what am I…*

“You… y-you gave me hope, Kacchan. Honest to god, you gave me hope. I don’t know what the hell it was you saw in me back there, but when you said that you wanted to be by me, it…”

His boyfriend’s thumb smeared wet tears from his eyes, never leaving, never failing.

“You made me feel like I was worth something back then. Like I wasn’t broken. A-And now, I know that I don’t need you in my life to feel like that, ‘cause therapy, reconciling with my friends, meds, and just general better life choices have been helping me more than you could ever know, but it’s… you were the light of my life. Then, and now. F-For different reasons, but…”

*I’m sorry, I’m sorry for saying all this, I—*

“I think I get it.” Katsuki murmured, so much more serious, so much more *gentle* than Izuku had ever heard him. “And I think that I’m kinda… kinda the same. ‘Cause back when you saved me, you were my *hero*. My idol. And I guess, for a while, I… kinda forgot that there were so many other sides to you, too. I thought– and still think– that you were the most amazing hero, yeah?”

*Oh, Kacchan…*

“You didn’t make me feel weak for not being able to escape on my own then. And now that I *know* you, I still think I love you. Not ‘cause you’re some front-page, big-name hero. But because you…” He hesitated, and Izuku could’ve cried again at the wobbly smile that came over his cheeks. “Because you… you make me feel at home.”

Moonlight merged with firelight, and in the small space that they’d made in the comfort of the camping ground, Izuku was *safe*.

“I– I-I know that we’ve had something going on.” Katsuki continued, hushed but far more certain than he’d been for months. “I know that things have been kinda weird. And I know what I said back when we argued, and that I still hold my claims, but I… I still love you. A-And it’s ‘cause of that, ‘cause I love you, ‘cause I wanna be able to be with you that I said it.”

*Yes, god, same here…*
“I don’t wanna be a burden as a hero, or to myself, or to you, and so… that’s, I think, why it feels so weird when you were constantly trying to check up on me. It made me feel like I wasn’t capable of handling myself, and yeah. I fucked up a little when I was attacked. I know that much. B-But when you immediately started implying that I couldn’t take care of myself well enough, you, the person I’d always thought never saw me as weak, it… it hurt. A lot.”

Kacchan, I…

“After all, h-how am I supposed to be your hero partner if you don’t trust me to defend myself? If I feel like I keep having to work to prove my own worth every step of the way?” He paused to wipe his face, trying to stay composed. “I– I wanna be a great hero. The best hero. And just ‘cause you’re my boyfriend, just ‘cause I’m younger than you, just ‘cause I’m less experienced than you doesn’t mean I can’t pull my own weight…!”

Izuku swallowed.

I think I get it. For real.

“Back then– I think, after you were attacked, it reminded me of the first time I met you.” He bit out, but for some strange reason, it was as if he could finally put words to the tumultuous thoughts that had been rampaging in his head for months. “I wanted– needed– to save you. I couldn’t see you as a hero right then.”

Katsuki nodded, and for the first time in so long, it felt simple to just speak.

“And that… that was my fault. I know I messed up. I should’ve tried to be more understanding of your situation, especially because your own mentors had resolved things with you easily enough…!” He hugged his chest, just trying to breathe, breathe. “But god, I was scared. I was so, so scared. I want to see you safe, because you mean the world to me, but I… I know I can learn to figure out when the right times to do it are. I’m going to learn to trust you on your own, to not let my emotions get the better of me, ‘cause I wanna see you by my side on the field, too!”

“I know. I-I know you do.” Katsuki nodded, and Izuku could’ve sworn he was on the verge of tears with him. “I get it. I see it. I should’ve tried to see why you were so worked up before yelling back, a-and I’m sorry for not letting you in as much as I should’ve, and for just ignoring this shit, and for not saying anything before it got so bad…!”

“It’s okay. It’s okay, Kacchan.” Izuku assured him, pulling Katsuki in close, so close. “I should’ve done something too. S-Shouldn’t have pretended that just focusing on the physical stuff would make things better. I don’t wanna build this relationship on that, don’t want it to be something like I had with Kirishima, ‘cause Kacchan, you—”

Kacchan– Katsuki, you—

“Y-You mean too much to me for that. I’m not gonna let all of this fall apart because of one argument.”

“Same here.” Katsuki whispered as small, starlit crystals swam in his eyes. “I really, really, really think I love you, Deku. And I wanna work through this shit together with you. I don’t– no, I’m not gonna run anymore. That’s a promise.”

“Is it okay if I say that back?” Izuku asked, and when Katsuki nodded, nearly cried again. “I-I… I love you. So much. We’ll make this work, as long as you want it to.”

That’s a promise.
“You haven’t given me a reason to want to end it yet.” His boyfriend curled closer against him, breath warm against his face. “I love you.”

“I love you.”

“Are we really gonna be the couple that does this?”

“If… if that’s alright? Can we?”

He could practically feel Katsuki’s eyeroll. “If it makes you happy, sure.” A pause, and then— “But I love you more.”

“Little shit.”

“You like that about me, don’t you?”

“Hm, maybe a little.”

The small bit of teasing died down as soon as it started, though, and for as dark as it now was outside with only the stars and the fire for company, Izuku was warm.

“I… I’m really glad we could do this, Kacchan.” Quiet, soft. “Thank you for talking to me. And maybe, ah… maybe what happens on the camping trip doesn’t just have to stay at the camping trip after all?”

“God, I’d hope not.” Katsuki snorted. “Wouldn’t wanna go through that conversation again.”

“Which part? The secrets, or the—”

“You know what part I’m talking about!” He exclaimed. “But I mean, um… if you’re talking taking things back home… if you seriously are considering getting a tongue piercing, I’d be… y-yeah, I’d be totally on board with that.”

“I may be able to work something out.” Izuku kissed him on the cheek. “Your birthday’s not too far off, right? April twentieth?”

“Mm. Yeah. Just gotta finish out this last semester’s exams, then by my birthday, it’ll be third year. S’kinda crazy.”

“What’s crazy is how much you’ve grown.” He praised. “Your skills have improved so much just over the course of this past year, and—” Something bubbled up in his heart, refreshed and revived. “I’m excited to see how my soon-to-be hero partner does in all the years to come.”

“Cheesy.”

“Oh, shut up.” Izuku grumbled. “Let me be cheesy. You’re not much better.”

“Never said you couldn’t be. I was just stating the facts.” Katsuki snuggled up closer to him, head tucked beneath Izuku’s chin. “And y’know, maybe I don’t wanna do a whole lot of growing. Maybe I like being shorter than you.”

“You know I didn’t mean that kind of growing!”

“I know, I know. Just messin’ with you.”

“Mm, well you know what I know?” His voice dropped to a low, intimate rumble. “I know I wanna
see you fuck yourself with that Valiant dildo of yours. And maybe I wanna use it on you a little, too. See how it sizes up to me.”

Some sort of choked, muffled sound was coughed against his jacket, and with a small smirk, Izuku held him tighter. “Like the thought of that, hm?”

“W-Well, it’s not bad, but shit. You are not allowed to go giving me a hard on right now, ’cause like hell am I gonna whip my dick out in forty-five degree weather any longer than I need to. Just pissing was bad enough!”

“Alright, alright.” Izuku consented, almost unable to contain the giddy smile on his face. “Sometime after we get back, then?”

“Y-Yeah. Sometime after. That works.”

Quiet again, but a comfortable quiet. With Katsuki nestled in his arms, and nothing else to disturb them aside from the sounds of the forest, he wasn’t sure if there’d ever been a time he’d felt more at peace.

“...still want me to make some s’mores, Kacchan?”

“In a bit, just a bit… s’nice here.”

God, I love him.

“M’kay. Sounds good.”

It... yeah, it really is nice here, with just the two of us.

The world outside was harsh, windy, and dangerous– and while they’d push through those barriers when they came, for now, if only for a little while—

Katsuki sneezed against his coat, and he couldn’t help the oddly warm squeeze of his chest when he realized how cute he was with his nose scrunched up like that.

Just for now, this is perfect.

Chapter End Notes

i hope yall enjoyed cause i sure loved writing this even tho it gave me feelings. Also ill likely be taking a week break bc of some stuff i have going, so don’t be worried if there’s no chapter next week!!! I’ll be back after that!!!
edit 4/26: im really bad at predicting my writing patterns apparently. with the way things are rn i think i will be uploading next week after all LOL

BUT FOR THE FUN STUFF, THANK U SO MUCH @poppinbith for an AMAZING piece based off ch 24’s onsen scene featuring some kacchan staring at deku’s scars, and here’s where you can see all the art that’s been done for this fic!!! And if u wanna hmu, here’s my twitter and curiouscat too!! (also: i finally put together a bit of a playlist for this fic, and im linking it here on the single condition that i wont be judged for my music, so check it out if u want!! It’s in chronological order based on the events of the whole story!!)
the center of an explosion

Chapter Summary

remember last week when i said i probably wasn’t gonna upload? I lied. (also how the FUCK is this at 200k im just. heck)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Roll over, Baku… there’s more room on that side.”

“Gross, no way… Todoroki’s rank-ass breath is over there.”

“I… I brushed my teeth earlier?”

“Oi, just ‘cause… just ‘cause you look like a goddamn peppermint doesn’t mean you smell like one.”

“Ugh, you both need to shut up. M’tired…”

“Yeah, well, me too. Be quiet.”

“Excuse you, I said shut up first! Don’t tell me what to do, Kacchan.”

“Oh my god, I how many times do I have to—”

“What on earth are you all doing down there?”

At the sudden shuffle of footsteps above them, Katsuki looked up with a strained, tired tilt of his head to see Yaoyorozu standing over them, completely and utterly baffled as to why the three of them had collapsed on the common room floor. Truth be told, he was quite comfortable with his face smashed into the carpet and limbs splayed out in careless direction, but maybe okay, yeah, maybe it would look a little weird to people walking in.

“Well, I’m here because—” Camie started, shifting over to stare at Katsuki. “I came in, saw Baku lying down here, and figured ‘hey, that looks nice’, so I joined him.”

“Look, I was up past like, midnight studying for the written exam.” He groaned, head dropping back onto the carpet. “Came back from the exam, and, didn’t feel like going upstairs, so… floor.”

There was a snicker of more like past eight beside him, but before he had the chance to elbow Camie, their other companion opened his mouth.

“I’m just here because they were.” Todoroki chimed in unhelpfully. “It’s not bad, though. A little rough on the back, but not bad.”

“Princess.”

“Says the one who was too lazy to walk upstairs to nap.”
“I said I was tired. Not lazy.” Katsuki grumbled. “Be quiet and let me sleep.”

“...I suppose I understand why, then, but... no less weird.” Yaoyorozu sighed. “Well, I wanted to ask if you all got the news they just sent out regarding the practical portion of the final?”

“Ugh, I don’t even wanna think about school right now.” Camie complained. “C’mon, can’t a girl catch a break?”

“This is finals week. We’ve been over this.” Yaoyorozu repeated for what had to have been the tenth time in the past few days. “Come on, off the floor. If you really wanna go relax, we can do it in my room, Camie.”

“No, babe, come join us…!” Camie yawned, and patted the ground next to her, which also happened to double as Katsuki’s ass. “Oh, huh… not as flat as I thought.”

A weak fuck off was all he could manage, and for as mentally exhausted as he was from the strain of the written exams, the practical portion was going to be a beatdown.

*I’ll make it through, though... after tomorrow, we’re done with the year. A couple weeks for break, and then we’re going into the first semester of third year in April.*

It still hadn’t hit him yet.

*Next year is gonna be my last year of high school.*

Just the thought that he’d nearly made it through two blew his mind.

*And it’s almost been a year since me ‘n Deku first kissed.*

Almost more ridiculous than every other school related thing, though, was that.

*It’s been great talking to him again... actually being able to call, text, say good morning and goodnight and I love—*

“So what was that thing about the practical exam you were asking about?” Todoroki interrupted, bringing his thoughts back to what was admittedly the more *important* topic at hand. His phone still had unread messages from Deku that he wanted to check, but even that had been bested by his exhaustion for the moment.

*A little longer won’t hurt. Gotta focus on this stuff first.*

“Aizawa sent out a message that mentioned we’d have some pro heroes joining us for our final. Nothing more, nothing less.” She said, and finally sat down on the floor with the rest of them.

“I’m... not quite sure what that will mean for the exam. What situation we’re going to be in. Or even *who* it is that will be here.”

“Wait, wait.” Katsuki said, suddenly much more awake. “You serious about this?”

“Oh, big surprise. You hear someone say *Pro Heroes* and all at once, you’re alive.” Camie drawled, and flicked him on the forehead. “Did Deku let you in on anything about this? Is your boy toy gonna be joining the party?”

“Quit calling him Deku. That’s *my* name.” He hissed, well aware that he was playing right into Camie’s hands. “I haven’t heard a thing. S’not like Deku’s been here much anyways in the few times we’ve had heroes come and help out.”
I miss seeing him at practice, but… I dunno. Maybe the distance has been good for us. Maybe the fact that he hasn’t been watching me get beat up at practice is for the better.

“Well, why would he?” Todoroki commented. “He and everyone else should stay out on the field. With the massive spikes of crime we’ve been getting, how can we really afford to have a group of heroes come help out in a contained environment like U.A.?”

Yaoyorozu shrugged. “I mean, I’m sure they’re going to arrange this with care. And even so, it is only for one day, and this is the only notice we and probably most other people have gotten. In all honesty, I don’t believe that will be much of an issue.”

“I’m with Momo.” Katsuki concurred. “I’m just wondering what they’re gonna have us do. Are we gonna be fighting heroes? I mean, it could work, but we’d probably have to do it in teams or something.”

“Unless the hero was handicapped in some way.” Yaoyorozu added. “But I almost feel like that would be too bland of a challenge for this exam, because it’s our final… hm. I’m not sure what’s going to happen, but I wouldn’t be all that surprised if it wound up being more of a group than an individual thing.”

“Guess we’ll find out tomorrow. No use worrying about it until we know the details.” Katsuki said, letting his eyes fall closed just as his phone buzzed in his pocket again.

Probably Deku.

“I’m gonna go upstairs. Nap for a bit.” He decided instead, the urge to talk to his boyfriend stronger than the temptation to pass out on the floor. “Knock if you really need me, fuck off if you don’t.”

“Gonna go get off over the phone with your boyfriend?”

“For the last goddamn time, we have not had phone sex!”

“Not yet.”

“Keep it down if you do.” Todoroki muttered. “I want to sleep tonight.”

“You’re all unbelievable.” Katsuki’s face burned. “You know, maybe I just wanna talk to someone who doesn’t spew this garbage to my face every second of the day.”

There was some sort of hoot and holler from Camie as he stormed off, but his phone was in his hand before he even reached the stairs. His friends were the most wonderful assholes, yeah, but an asshole was still an asshole.

That wasn’t to say that seeing Deku’s name in bright and shiny new-notification letters didn’t put a smile on his face, though.

[Deku] hi kacchan!!

[Deku] they let me off duty early today so im going home and making food for the week

[Deku] how did your exam go? you said it was the last written one, right?

At this point, Katsuki had become a master of texting and stair-climbing.

[Katsuki] i better have gotten the best grade in the class on it. I’m tired as shit
Katsuki this week has beaten the hell outta me but

Katsuki not much longer left. Just tomorrow’s practical and I’m done with this year

But in the middle of climbing up the last flight, on the third-to-top step, something— or someone— bumped into his shoulder and knocked his phone from his hands before he even realized what was going on. Down, down the phone fell, clattering to the landing below with a dull thud and a sharp curse from Katsuki. He didn’t look to see who the culprit was— didn’t care to bother with them other than to toss a growled watch your step in their direction, really, but wasn’t so dense as to claim he wasn’t to blame, either. Before he could turn to grab his phone, though, the other person darted past and beat him to it. However, the familiar, dark-haired figure only managed to draw a groan from him as Katsuki realized that shitty Shindou had been the one to cause him trouble.

Fucking hell. Not in the mood.

“Sorry about that, Katsuki!” Shindou apologized in that too-high, too-fake voice of his. “I didn’t mean to get in your way.”

Not like I gave you permission to use my first name, either. Fucker.

He grabbed Katsuki’s phone from the landing (the screen was still intact, at least) but didn’t hand it back before stealing a not-so-subtle glance at the open messages screen.

“Aw, Valiant’s so sweet.” Shindou smiled, almost warm enough to be real. “He says he’s wishing you luck on the practical tomorrow!”

“Holy shit, I can read my own damn texts.” Katsuki hissed, and snatched his phone away before Shindou could do anything else. “And why the hell are you here? You’re in 2-B, and last I checked, these were the 2-A dorms.”

“Oh! I just left some stuff in Shouto’s dorm last night.” He answered. “I told him I’d be swinging by, don’t worry.”

Katsuki made some gesture of disgust, only throwing a Todoroki’s downstairs in his direction before turning and trudging back up the stairs, phone safe and secure in his hand. He was trying his best to tolerate Shindou, really, but something about the very nature of his personality irked him to no end. Todoroki wasn’t dating him, but friends-with-benefits would be a long shot, too. We-both-want-to-fuck-and-you-were-available would probably be the best way to label whatever their relationship was at this point, and for all he’d subjected his friend to, Katsuki didn’t feel he had a right to complain about the occasional bout or two of noise next door.

He’s not… bad. Just annoying. Like a mosquito or something, always buzzing around and getting in your face when you don’t want it to.

But Todoroki hadn’t been bothering him to do things like train or hang out as much, and while Katsuki was glad that the time he was spending with Deku wasn’t interfering with their friendship, a part of him missed being able to hang out so frequently.

Wonder if he’s been doing all this shit with Shindou ‘cause I haven’t been around as much?

Even if that was the case, the situation wasn’t a problem. Just an annoyance.

And Todoroki can do whatever the hell he wants. I don’t care who he sticks his dick into.

After the rest of the short trip to his dorm, Katsuki went to check his phone again. He’d half-
expected Shindou to have sent something to Deku, but to his relief, his message history looked untouched.

[Deku] ahhh thats so awesome!!! Good luck bby!!!

[Deku] youre gonna do great i know it

[Deku] just get some sleep, eat a good breakfast, and ill see you tomorrow!!

[Deku] jsfkdl oh shit sorry ignore that last part i meant uh

[Deku] the day after!!

[Deku] aha yeah thats. yeah

[Deku] well gnight!!!! ily!!!!!!<3

Katsuki didn’t need to be a genius to know that Deku had just spilled some information he shouldn’t have, and as much as his boyfriend attempted to disguise his nerves through text, his success rates hovered around next to none.

Guess he’s one of the people who’s gonna be at the final, then. Interesting.

He sent over a last love you too text before dropping on his bed for a nap, finding himself looking forward to the next day’s practical exam a little bit more than before.

You’re right, Deku. I’m gonna do great. I know it.

“Your practical final exam will be taken in groups of three.”

Only a slight breeze drifted in through the courtyard as Aizawa spoke.

“We’ll be putting game-like elements into this year’s final.” He continued, every eye on him. “Each student will start in one corner of our triangular-shaped field, and that starting point will also double as your home base. In addition, every one of you will be required– yes, required– to wear one of these flags on a belt around your waist. Nowhere else.” With that, Aizawa held up the flag, which really was more of a colored strip of sturdy cloth than a standard flag.

Flags, huh?

Katsuki was genuinely curious about the exam, but he could hardly contain the nerves rushing through his veins.

Deku said he was gonna be here. Or at least, basically said he was gonna be here.

“...goal will be to take flags from the other contenders on the field, and bring them back to your home ba...”

He was well aware of his foot tap-tap-tapping against the pavement, but with the tension and anticipation in the atmosphere, could anyone really blame him?

“I’m going to assume you all received and read the notification I sent out about a few pro heroes coming to join us.” Aizawa drawled, scanning the group of students. “That ties into the rest of this exam– each one of you will be randomly paired up with a hero who will also have a flag, and after a short five-minute period to strategize and plan together, the match will begin.”
“Um, question!” One of the students in the front perked up, hand shooting to the sky. “Doesn’t that mean you could just have the hero do all the work? How is this supposed to be our exam!?"

Aizawa looked more than a little tired upon hearing that question, and Katsuki could only assume he was about to hit that point. “It’ll work like this– while the heroes will be on a team with you, they’ll be handicapped to an extent, and will also not be allowed to do anything aside from defend without clear instruction from you, the student.”

...oh?

“The expectation is that you, the student, will take on the role of a hero in a modified hero-sidekick relationship. You all have been interning over the course of this year. In order to gauge how well you’ve learned to work alongside someone, as well as the skills you’ve learned from observation of how a professional does things, we decided to arrange the exam like this.”

...be the hero. Take on the role of a real, legitimate hero.

“The goal of the exam is to bring at least two flags back to your home base within a fifteen-minute time limit. One from another hero, and one from another student. Now of course, there are other criteria we will be looking at as well in regards to the execution of your actions, but—”

At... at least two?

Katsuki’s hand went up this time, and with a sudden spark of resolve, realized something.

“Does that mean we can take more than two?” He asked, a sliver of determination seeping into his voice. “If there’s four available flags on the field, can’t we take all of them?”

The crowd went silent, still, as if Katsuki’s words were less of a question and more of a threat.

Let me show them. Let me prove I can do this. I won’t just win, I’ll—

“...yes.” Aizawa dipped his head, and Katsuki’s blood pressure rose in time. “Though I can’t guarantee it will help your score, you won’t be stopped from taking more if you’d like.”

I’ll decimate the competition. No one’s gonna be left standing.

Katsuki grinned.

Let’s go.

“Well, if no one else has any more questions, I’ll begin pairing you up.” Aizawa announced, and gestured at the school building. “Once you’re assigned, you’re assigned. No switching partners or slots. You’ll be paired up against the other students based on your order of assignment as well.”

Footsteps and the clank of familiar gear drew his attention in a instant, and though he’d known it was happening– thought about it all night, really– Deku’s presence in the small group still sent his heart into a mad frenzy.

What if I have to fight him? I could, I know I could, I learned as much in our training sessions, but...

Katsuki wasn’t sure if he’d ever be able to forget the feeling of their first fight, how overwhelmingly mind-numbing each and every sensation had been. But it’d been nearly two years since that fight– he’d improved, their relationship had grown in an exponential way, and deep down he knew that there was no instance in which he’d let himself be stuck in that sort of situation again.
I’m going to do good. Better. I’ll be the best there is, dammit!

Second year had been a mess of ups and downs, but he wasn’t about to let it end on a low note.

We’re going big or going home. No chance I’m gonna lose. If I gotta fight him, I will, and I’ll do—

“...and lastly, Bakugou will be rounding out group one alongside Pro Hero Valiant.”

Wait, Deku!?

Katsuki’s mouth fell open, but it was only seconds later that he realized those words had not just been said in his head, but also out loud. He could feel half the heads in the group turn towards him, but even stronger than that, could feel the surge of blood gushing towards his head and racing to his heart.

Oh god. Oh god. Oh… oh my god.

He wasn’t sure where Deku was looking, didn’t care, really, because every bit of Katsuki’s efforts had shifted to keeping himself calm and composed. For whatever reason, the chance that Deku would be fighting on his side hadn’t crossed his mind, not even for a moment.

This is either gonna go great or horribly, no in-between.

“Wait, what…? Did Valiant just say something? It sounded kinda like—”

“Like, uh, Kacchan? I heard it too, is something going on?”

He didn’t even have time to think about who around him was whispering about his sudden burst of Deku, and didn’t care. Fact of the matter was, Deku would be fighting alongside him— not against.

I don’t know if that’s better or worse. Not when I still don’t really know if he trusts me enough to obey my instructions on the field. He said he would, time and time again, but we haven’t really had a chance to put it into practice...

“Students and heroes, go pair up and head to the door labeled with the number in which you were chosen. That means Chargebolt and Red Riot at gate one, Creati and Earphone Jack at gate two, and Bakugou and Valiant at gate three.” He concluded. “Preparation time will begin as soon as you all have entered. Everyone else, follow me to the observation building.”

Deku was walking towards him, towards him, and Katsuki could hardly even register the other names that had been called. The rest of the group dispersed quickly enough, and as soon as the stragglers ran off to the observation room, his boyfriend appeared in front of him.

“Um, h-hi, Kacchan. I… shit, I.” Deku started, the hint of a laugh on his lips. “O-Oh god, I was not prepared for this.”

They started making their way towards the exam grounds, the both of them in relative silence as if still trying to process what was happening.

“We neither.” Katsuki mumbled, cursing the heat over his cheeks. “I… I thought, if anything, I was gonna be—”

“—fighting against you.” Deku finished, echoing his thoughts. “Not that I’m, um, complaining! N-Not at all! I just didn’t expect that you’d be the first one I was paired with, Kacchan, a-and, aha, well…”
“We haven’t really fought together before. Just sparred.” Katsuki mumbled, trying to make sense of the scrambled, cluttered thoughts in his head. “You– you are gonna listen to me out there, right?”

“I mean, yeah? It’s kinda, uh, my only job!” Deku mumbled, voice pitching up. “It’ll– we’re gonna do great! We’re gonna win, and you’re gonna pass, and, aha… I guess this is our first time really fighting as partners! That’s pretty cool, right?”

But there was no missing the taut, high-strung nerves in his voice, nor the way each sentence seemed slightly more stilted than the last.

*Why are we both so freaked out? He’s right, it’s his job to listen. He’d obey anyone else he was paired with, so…*

“It’s cool. Yeah.” He forced out, slowly regaining his composure. “We’re gonna plan some shit, alright? I know you’ve gotta be familiar with the other heroes’ stuff, so that might give us a leg up from the start.”

“And the fact that we’re both so used to each other’s quirks… honestly, we could probably snag this victory fairly easily. You just let me know where to run, and I’ll do it, yeah?”

“It ain’t about to be that simple.” *Nor would I want it to, really.* “Momo– Creati– she’s strong as fuck. And for as much of a dumbass as he is, Chargebolt ain’t a pushover either.”

“Creati’s the one who made you the dildo, right?”

“Holy shit, now is *not* the time to talk about the damn dildo!”

“A-Aha, sorry, sorry!” Deku apologized. “My, um, my bad.”

*God, we’re both nervous.*

But Katsuki stopped outside the gate to the arena, clenched his fists, and stared up at his boyfriend. “You, more than anyone else, should know how damn important this exam is.” He said, deathly serious. “I know we’re working as a team. I– trust me, I know that. But you’ve gotta promise me that you’re not going to hesitate on my calls, and that you’re not going to argue back with my decisions today. This is *my* exam, and you—” A gloved finger jabbed itself against Deku’s chest. “You are only here to follow directions, not worry about my safety. Got it?”

*We’ve talked about this in the past. Kinda. But we haven’t had a chance to prove it, so—*

“I know.” Deku said, face shifting to something entirely different. “This is your time, not mine. I’m your support, so... use me as you see fit.”

While the situation was serious, absolutely, one-hundred percent serious, Katsuki couldn’t help his snort upon the other context *use me as you see fit* would work in. That said, everything Deku had promised seemed sincere, and if he wasn’t, well…

*This is definitely a test, in more ways than one.*

A small smile tugged at the corner of his lips, and though the nerves were still racing, racing, racing through his body, everything felt a little more controlled than before.

“I will.”

And with that, they stepped inside.
Their base wasn’t anything special, really. A curved fence with a retractable door locked them into the gray-walled space, but Katsuki assumed they’d open as soon as the match began. Just as soon as he was about to start a conversation with Deku, though, Aizawa’s familiar voice rang out over the loudspeaker.

“You have five minutes to strategize and plan. Be sure to put in the earpieces provided, as well. They will serve as your main method of communication with your partner.” He announced. “And with that, your planning time starts… now.”

“Alright. So, De—” Katsuki clasped his hands together, but before saying anything else, remembered that calling Deku Deku, when everything was likely being transmitted to at least Aizawa, would be less than ideal. “…Valiant. Let’s start with quirks.”

*God, that feels weird to say.*

He quickly ran through Yaoyorozu and Kaminari’s quirks, basic moves he’d seen them pick up, as well as what he knew of their fighting styles and usual behaviors. At the very least, he had more than enough practice sparring with Yaoyorozu, but that practice had *also* let him in on just how dangerous she was. Kaminari was an interesting opponent for sure, but his abilities would make close-combat far more dangerous for them, and in turn, make getting in close enough to grab his flag a challenge.

*We’ll have to use our limited ranged skills more, I guess.*

Deku went over Earphone Jack’s abilities fast enough, and Katsuki had to consider himself thankful that he was so intimately familiar with everyone’s quirks and their ins and outs, the overly detailed analysis his boyfriend had written out in his head coming in more than a little handy. When he went on to talk about Red Riot’s skills next, though…

*Something feels off.*

“He’s, um… he can be basically impenetrable if he wants to be, when he goes into his unbreakable mode. I, uh, think he’s gotten it up to a few minutes of time at any given moment that he can hold it, and he’s improved a lot with adjusting his level of hardness at will. And, ah… w-well, fighting him is like, um…”

Knowing what happened between them helps make sense of all this, but it still… it still hurts to listen to.

His boyfriend fell quiet, but with the clock ticking down, Katsuki knew they didn’t have time to contemplate the past.

“If I need you to fight him, you’ll fight him.” He reminded him, and Deku could only nod.

“I… I will.” A pause, a gulp. “I’m not gonna let our, um, history get in the way.”

Even those words sounded more like a way of attempting to convince himself that everything would be okay, though.

*He’ll be okay. I have to believe he’ll be okay fighting him.*

They spent the last couple minutes brainstorming simple strategies, basic techniques of theirs that could be combined together, and the general role each person would hold. Katsuki would stand on the offensive, but Deku would be in charge of surveillance and holding off attacks when need be. With the heroes not being able to take flags themselves, Katsuki would have to be the front-and-center of every skirmish if he wanted to win.
Thirty seconds remained on the clock.

“One last thing.” He started, grabbing the headset from the small shelf on the wall.

Fifteen seconds.

“We’re not just gonna do the minimum.”

Ten seconds.

The earpiece was put on, safe and secure.

“I’m getting all four of those flags.” A sharp, dangerous smile grew over Katsuki’s face. “That’s a promise.”

Five.

The world went silent, silent, silent for a moment.

This is the calm before the storm.

“I know it is.” Deku echoed, battle-hungry light in his eyes.

One.

“Fifteen minutes on the clock.” Came the announcement. Aizawa’s voice rang clear, and his boyfriend fixed him with a confident, supportive look.

“Your time starts now.”

Katsuki clenched his fists.

“Let’s go.”

The gate opened, and they ran free.

So we’re starting in a woodsy area. Alright, alright.

Thick trees surrounded them like bars on a jail cell, and Katsuki cursed the fact that he could barely see ten feet in front of him with the foliage encroaching so close, so close. Navigating through the woods was hard enough, but with the addition of his probably too-large gauntlets?

This is ridiculous.

“De– Valiant.” He started, and with a small bit of annoyance, realized he’d be correcting himself throughout the whole fight. “Go on ahead, stick to the shadows, and report back to me what kind of terrain is past this. Only engage if someone moves to attack you first.”

“On it, Bakugou!”

And with that, Izuku dashed ahead with a thumbs up and a flash of green in his wake. Some surge of pride rushed through his veins with just that one simple command, and finally, Katsuki started to gain back some of the confidence he’d lost.

I gotta figure what I’m gonna do next. Where to go.

If the map was shaped like a triangle, then chances were there would be three different types of
terrain. While the forest wasn’t super suitable for himself or Deku, it’d be a paradise for someone like Earphone Jack, and Yaoyorozu could easily mold herself to work within it.

*We gotta engage them outside of this area. Hopefully there’s some sort of—*

“Bakugou!” His headset crackled to life, Deku’s familiar voice comforting even now. “Looks like there’s a city-type area to our left. I’m climbing one of the buildings along the border between it and the forest to get a better look at the last area as well, and… okay.” He paused, probably taking in the scenery. “Last area is flat, not much cover, kinda desert-like. Lots of rock piles, only a few trees, and I think— oh, shit. Okay. I think I see, uh, Chargebolt and Red Riot over there.”

“That means Earphone Jack and Creati are in the city.” He mused, relieved as light began pouring through the edge of the forest. “Let’s head towards the city first and deal with them. With any luck, Chargebolt will stick himself with a cactus and put himself out of the fight for us.”

“Should I stay here?”

“No, um…” Katsuki finally burst through the edge of the forest, and caught sight of what his boyfriend had been talking about. “Can you run along the top of the buildings for surveillance? Out of everyone here, you’ve got the upper hand in movement.”

“Over, Bakugou.”

*I hate it when he says my last name. God, it’s weird. It’d be better if I had a hero name, but…*

A part of him was tempted to say *fuck it* and just tell Deku to call him Kacchan, but logically, he knew that’d be a shitty idea.

*Focus on the fight. Focus on the now. We don’t have much time, so we gotta make the most of what we can…!*

He ran towards the cityscape and managed to blast himself up on one of the lower roofs, ducking and hiding along the short wall bordering it. Right now, the key would be to stay out of sight as much as he could.

*Momo can’t hit a target she can’t see, and her range of movement is pretty limited when compared to mine, at least. So what to do, what to do…*

Katsuki jumped from roof to roof, trying to stay as quiet as he could. Even if Yaoyorozu was listening in, he needed to make sure she couldn’t hear his movements. Quietly, he reminded Deku of the same. Stay silent, stay hidden, stay down. That’d work, right? If they managed to get the jump on their team, then—

Suddenly, he stopped. Something low, no louder than a soft hum and no more physical than a slight tremble rattled through his legs, chest, and up through his arms.

*What— wait, what was—*

Instead of spending his time waiting around for something to happen, though, Katsuki decided to do the smart thing and ask Deku what the hell was going on.

“Are you feeling this?” He hissed, hands shaking more than they should’ve.

“It’s Earphone Jack’s quirk.” Deku answered, voice perfectly level. “She’s probably surveying the area too.”
I need his information. “Can she only sense me if I’m on a surface?”

“It’s easier for her to. The skies are definitely gonna be safer.” He replied, yet with the sudden pounding footsteps on the other end, Katsuki could tell he was running. “Hold up, I see them. Where exactly are you?”

Katsuki rattled off his location as fast as he could, trying to calm his racing heart. Deku took a split second to acknowledge it before responding, yet even just that short break was enough to fray his nerves again, again.

“They’re to the right of you, standing about a block away in the middle of the street. It doesn’t appear that they have any interest in coming up here to engage. Creati is standing guard, and I believe Earphone Jack is feeding her information.” Deku murmured, his analysis fast and clear. “I could jump down there and knock both of them out in fifteen seconds flat.”

...knock both of them out?

Truth be told, it was still strange to hear the person he’d grown so used to seeing in a softer light talk with such blunt aggression.

*This is the same person who dislocated both of my arms with hardly a word,* he reminded himself. *He’s at home here. He knows how to take the competition out swiftly and easily.*

But while that would be the easy answer, a way that would certainly guarantee Katsuki victory, that wasn’t what he was here to do.

“I want you to get to the ground.” He commanded. “Retreat back about half a block or so. Stay away from me for now.”

“Ka– wait, Bakugou, are you serious!?” Deku protested, as if he’d never been refuted before. “I just said I could take them out, so why the hell do you want me to—”

“Your job isn’t to ask questions.” Katsuki hissed, stomping out his words. “I said retreat. I’ll give you orders once I get closer to the target. For now, stay back and keep alert for any sign of Red Riot and Chargebolt.”

“I—” Deku faltered, but didn’t push it further. “…over, Bakugou.”

Thank god.

Even with his boyfriend’s reluctant acceptance of his orders, though, Katsuki couldn’t help the anxieties rushing back.

*If he’s acting like this when combat hasn’t even been initiated, how the hell is he gonna handle a fight?*

There wasn’t time to dwell on that, though. Not when his targets were close by and available.

*Go through with my plan, and use Deku like the tool he is. Right now, that’s all I have to do.*

*I can do this.*

With any luck, grabbing a flag or two would calm his jitters a little bit. Katsuki jumped from the roof of his smaller building, careful to descend at a pace that’d allow him to land with ease. A part of him couldn’t help but mentally flip through some strategies involving Deku’s quirk– now that he thought
about it, a gust of wind or two to knock his competition off balance could be useful– but he had to assert himself. He had to make Deku trust him, if nothing else.

No backing down now. I’m gonna win.

Katsuki landed with a soft thud, and straightened. The subtle tremors were still present on the concrete, and even stronger than up on the building, if he were to guess.

Means I can’t stay in one place for too long. I gotta get close in on them, and do this quick. Don’t know what Momo’s gonna have up her sleeve.

He stuck to the shadows and ran closer, closer, closer to the center of the tremors. If nothing else, it proved to be some sort of gauge as to how close he was to them– the further he went, the stronger they got. And yeah, maybe he’d told Deku to stay away, but…

If I need him, he’s not far. Half a block ain’t much, and with his stupid speed, he’ll be here in no time. I probably should talk to him again, though.

“Valiant.” He started, quiet as could be. “I’m closing in on the target. Where are you?”

“I went in the direction of the forest, but I’m hiding out next to one of the shorter buildings on the outskirts of the city area.” His boyfriend said, thankfully non-combative. “Need me to do something?”

Well, if Earphones can sense people’s locations through the ground with her quirk, then…

“Yeah. I want you to start running around the targets.” Katsuki said, letting out a short sigh of relief upon Deku’s silence. “Stay about a quarter block away, and try not to let them see you that much. I want you to be my distraction.”

“…oh! You got it.” Deku agreed, and Katsuki couldn’t help the small bit of pride he felt towards that positive acknowledgement. “You just want me to run circles around them? How fast?”

“That’s up to your discretion.” He decided. “Go the speed that’s gonna throw them off guard. I don’t want them to know exactly who’s running.”

“Sounds good. Over and out, Bakugou.”

Even if the name is weird, he’s… kinda cute. When he does that.

But Katsuki shook his head upon that thought and reminded himself that now was very much not the time to think of how good Deku must look in the heat of live battle, natural beauty accented by the skintight suit that hugged each and every curve of his body.

That’s for later. Later. Very, very much later.

He took off towards the targets, ready to close in and go for the prize.

“I’m gonna aim to grab Earphone Jack’s first. If she’s put off a little bit, then she might not—!”

But he was cut off by something loud, horrible, and absolutely deafening ringing out in his eardrums, followed up only by his blood curdling screams. He nearly tripped, slammed himself into the side of a building, and shoved his hands to his ears in an attempt to just lower the volume of the noise.

“Ka– Bakugou, are you okay!”
Okay sounded pretty laughable right now. *Ear-dead* was more like it.

It’s a fucking wonder I can even hear him right now…!

“Find Earphones! I— shit, can you blast some wind and interrupt her or something!?” He begged, trying to pretend like his head wasn’t about to explode. “She must’ve– m-must’ve found me. Be a distraction, and get this damn sound turned away from me!”

“I—” Deku said, and as Katsuki was about ready to shout at him for taking too damn long, continued. “Over, Bakugou. I’m on it.”

All he had to do, then, was endure. Katsuki tried to run, and managed to duck behind a building in an attempt at lowing the volume a little bit, but didn’t manage much more than light relief. Even so, though, it was something.

*I can’t run through that. It feels like my ears are about to bleed, and I can’t afford to make it worse.* *Earphone Jack’s professionally trained so I’m sure she knows her limit, but still…!*

Katsuki cursed, kept his palms firmly over his ears, and waited, waited, waited for the all-clear. They couldn’t take too long— didn’t have long enough, really— but sure enough, only ten or so seconds later found the noise falling silent and the ringing in his head to starting to fade away.

“You got it, Valiant?” He asked, but not before running back out towards the targets. “Do you have their attention?”

“Yeah, she’s on me, but I’m moving about as fast as they can adjust the direction of the sound!” Deku yelped. “Now’s your chance! There’s some big speaker-thing in the center. Dunno where it came from, but if you can destroy it I think it’ll make this bearable!”

“Big speaker. Got it.” He paused, and— “Thanks.”

“Thank me later! Just carry out your plan, you got this!”

*Right. I got this.*

He broke into an explosion-powered sprint, blasted himself down the side street as fast as he could, and all at once, broke into the clearing. Yaoyorozu had fashioned some sort of shield and an eight-foot metal pole for personal defense, and by the looks of it, had created the giant, turntable speaker in the center of the field. Earphone Jack had centered herself just behind the speaker, turning it in what was presumably Deku’s direction in an attempt to stop him in his tracks.

*They’re gonna see me, gonna see me, but I gotta get out of here with at least one flag…!*

Yaoyorozu was clearly the most vulnerable of the two, yes, and while Katsuki *could* engage her, he’d rather get in, destroy the speaker and grab Earphone Jack’s flag, and get *out.*

*I’ll deal with Momo later. Taking care of this is top priority!*

So, he did just that.

“Bakugou’s here!” Yaoyorozu shouted, turning towards him with her pole armed and ready. “Hey, get the speakers turned towards him!”

“If I do that, Valiant’s gonna come rushing in!” Earphone Jack protested, and in that brief moment of weakness, Katsuki saw an opportunity. “Are you sure!?”
“No, nevermind I– I can take Bakugou!”

He almost snorted.

That’s what you think.

“Take me, hah?” He laughed, blasting up and out, away, away from Yaoyorozu’s reach. “Funny!”

“Oh, knock it off.” Katsuki could see her eye roll from his vantage point, and yet also noticed her tracing every twitch and every move he made. “Do you really think all this time I’ve been practicing with you has just been for show?”

Don’t listen, go around her, grab Earphone’s flag and get out…!

Right now, Deku was in a good position, keeping the big guns aimed on him while he took care of the stuff behind the front lines. Yaoyorozu kept jabbing up at him– one, twice, three times– but he rolled, dodged, twisted his body around her all-out assault.

“Don’t you remember how great I’ve gotten with air maneuvers?” He gloated, and finally landed a small blast near her shoulder. “If you think you’re getting this flag, think again!”

“I know you well enough to know you’ve gotta come down eventually.” She said, still watching him dance in the sky. “So what’s it going to be? Exhaustion or my attacks?”

Oi, you– “It doesn’t matter, because—” He jerked towards the speaker, finally blasted the top chunk in, and darted away and towards the ground for a brief moment to avoid the resulting electric shower. “I’m coming down on my own terms!”

Earphone Jack stepped away from the malfunctioning speaker, and it was all Katsuki could do to narrow in on the flag dangling from her belt. All he had to do was get in, grab, pull, and get the hell out.

It’d be nice to get Momo’s too, but I don’t know if I can manage it right now…!

“Bakugou, remember!” Deku’s voice broke through, jolting him back to the moment. “Earphone Jack can blast her quirk through her boots too!”

Right, right…!

Earphone Jack was recovering from the speaker blast, getting back to her feet, and Yaoyorozu was charging in.

What else can I do? I can’t play around much longer, so—!

Katsuki swallowed, leaned forward, and let himself fall into the wave of his explosions before shooting himself like a speeding bullet towards the two, one hand tearing out to yank at Earphone Jack’s flag as he barrelled between them and narrowly avoided a sharp jab from Yaoyorozu’s pole on the way.

Fast, but not as fast as me!

“I got one!” He exclaimed, and stumbled into the sidewalk on the other side of the street. “Get back over towards the forest! Think we need to regroup real quick and then head towards the others!”

He started running as Deku started talking, listening in as he raced down the streets. “There’s been no sign of the other team, so I guess they’re still in their area, but… you sure you don’t wanna just go
for Creati’s flag right now? It’d fill the requirement for this exam, so you don’t need to worry about —"

“Getting away’s gonna be the easiest option for now.” He breathed, high on adrenaline. “I think I’ve got an idea, and I need Creati to chase down Chargebolt to get it to work.”

“O-Oh? Um, okay… I’ll meet up with you back at the forest perimeter, then.”

_It’d probably take too long to head back to base with only one flag… I should try and get at least two— no, three– before I go back._

No backing down from his promises. _Go big or go home._

Escaping back to the forest wound up being easy enough. Deku caught up to him fairly quickly, too, landing with a grace that Katsuki could only hope to one day achieve.

“So, what next?” He asked, as they ducked in deeper in the foliage. “Did you want to charge in on the other team, or—”

“Creati’s gonna be playing a bit more aggressive now, I think.” He interrupted, trying to process his thoughts as fast as they were occurring. “And she’ll go after Chargebolt ‘cause we’ve convinced her we won’t be easy targets. And while Chargebolt’s a dumbass, he can throw up these electric barriers, yeah? Makes it hard as shit to get in close.”

“Oh… okay, okay, I see.”

“And I’d expect that he’ll have Red Riot standing a little further out. They were probably waiting for us to come to them, ‘cause they’re more suited to defense than offense.” He kept going, kept thinking. “I’ve seen it happen like this before. Creati can make shockproof stuff like blankets and all that, so my hope would be that she makes something that we can steal and use instead to get in close on Chargebolt, and then grab her flag on the way.”

If _I-could-kiss-you-right-now_ had a face, Deku’s was it. He tugged off his earpiece, if only for a moment, and leaned in.

“That’s… that sounds really solid, Kacchan.” He whispered, a proud smile tugging at his lips. “I’m sorry for doubting you earlier. I know you’ve got this.”

His boyfriend put his earpiece back in place, and took a long, deep breath. “Alright. I trust you. Lead the way, sir.”

_Oh, that should not sound so sexy right now._

“R-Right, uh, right on it.” He sputtered, trying very hard not to think about how well the lush greenery brought out Deku’s gorgeous eyes. “Let’s go.”

Deku patted his shoulder, the furthest they could probably go without someone being suspicious of them, and took off.

“Red Riot’s gonna be an issue, too.” Katsuki commented, ducking between branches and too-large leaves. “If what you say is true, there’s no goddamn way I’m gonna be able to get a hit in on him. My explosions won’t leave a scratch.”

“Ah, yeah. That’s probably the case…”
“So if the other team hasn’t worn him out by the time we get there, you’re going after him.”

“...right, right. Okay. Just, uh, just punching?”

“Whatever it takes to weaken him enough for me to get a hit in.” Katsuki huffed. “You didn’t give a shit about saying you’d run in and take out the other team, so I don’t wanna hear a damn bit of hesitation from you just ‘cause it’s him.”

“You’re right, you’re right. Sorry.” Deku apologized yet again. “Like I said before, it won’t be an issue.”

Better not be.

But for as much as Katsuki was wary of Deku’s ability to stay true to those words, they both had to trust each other right now.

We don’t have time for second chances. We’ve got one shot to get this right.

Katsuki patted the second flag on his belt for good luck, jumped out into the rocky clearing, and kept himself wide-eyed and alert as best as possible.

Where are they, where are they, where are they...

The time it took to find them, though, wasn’t as long as they’d expected. For as congested as the city area was, the rocky desert spot was wide open, only a few sparse clumps of rocks and trees in the way.

Means we’ve got no defense. We’ve got the shortest range here, so of course we’ll be outclassed in that department.

Katsuki sucked in a long, deep breath, took one more look around the area, and turned towards his partner.

“Follow the noise, stick to the edges while you can, and when you see Red Riot, engage him.” He murmured, getting a slight grunt of acknowledgement in response. “I imagine you know his limits pretty well. Your job is gonna be to wear him down enough so he can’t harden fully against my explosions.”

“Sounds good.” Deku nodded, and stood up just before breaking into a sprint. “I’m here if you need me.”

“I know you are.”

And then, they were off again. Katsuki would’ve been starting to get tired had he not been high on the thrill of the fight, but Deku had appeared as bubbly as ever.

I wonder how long his days have been? How much crime he’s been fighting with the rates spiking? I know what he says at the end of the days, but...

He stole a glance at Deku’s vanishing form, the deep green-blue of his suit striking against the browns and oranges of the desert-like terrain.

There’s always more to those texts. More that I’ll never know.

Because for as exciting as this exam was, this kind of thing was his boyfriend’s every day.
Except the villains out there don’t vanish after a fifteen-minute time limit.

He shook his head, forced those musings away for now, and took off. While Deku had Red Riot to take care of, Katsuki had a few other people to follow.

The shouting, at least, made them easy to find. Kaminari was far from the quiet type, and even from a distance, Katsuki could hear his laughter, his yelling, and see the very faint outlines of his electric sphere. He’d begun to think it was Red Riot he was seeing off to his far side, and the green streak that had to be Deku only confirmed it. That meant that Kaminari’s hero partner was occupied, Yaoyorozu and Earphone Jack would be targeting him, and Katsuki could swoop in and steal the win from under their noses.

_Fighting hand-to-hand is more my style, but... ah, well. I guess this is its own form of victory, too._

Because for as controlled as the environment was, there was some kernel of truth in it.

He found a rock outcropping to hide behind, for now. Earphone Jack didn’t appear to be surveying, instead sticking next to Yaoyorozu as she crafted—as expected—a large, sturdy, completely shock-proof blanket.

_Predictable._

And just like he’d expected, she seemed a bit tired, movements far more sluggish than usual. Making that large speaker had to have taken a lot out of her, and for as good of an idea as it might’ve been, Katsuki suspected she’d been a bit excited in the process of making it and therefore, taken on a bit more than she could handle.

_Good for me, at least._

Katsuki watched, watched as Yaoyorozu ran in and watched as Earphone Jack followed close behind. A part of him almost couldn’t believe that she’d done nearly exactly as he’d expected, but the other part of him knew that knowing someone for two years and training overtime with them would certainly give him a leg up on inference.

_Maybe she was hoping to play the waiting game too, and just got her plans ruined because of that?_  

Whatever the reason may be, she was in Kaminari’s sights now, and just as he’d expected, had had all the attention turned towards her.

_Who knows how Kaminari decided to use Red Riot, anyways. Chances are, he made some stupid choice and just told him to go defend their zone. You’re supposed to give more controlled directions than that...!_  

But the important thing was that Yaoyorozu and Earphone jack were approaching, approaching, and with Deku occupying Red Riot’s attention in its entirety, Katsuki had his opportunity right in front of him.

_No point in waiting around. I’ve got some flags and a blanket to steal._

Putting all of them on his waist could be an issue, but it was the only way they were allowed to carry them if not by hand. He’d only noticed later, but each flag had their names written on it—like Creati, Earphone Jack, and...

_Well, mine only has... Bakugou. ‘Cause I still haven’t settled on a hero name._
That was another question that had been plaguing him for the longest time, but either his names had been rejected or nothing had felt right. He’d planned to ask Deku at some point how he came up with his, but the question had slipped his mind time and time again.

*I guess ‘Bakugou’ is pretty on the nose, but... I dunno. Kinda lame for a hero name.*

At the very least, he wasn’t Todoroki and hadn’t named himself Celsius. Talk about lame-and-a-half.

*I’ll come up with something. Later. Now’s the time for fighting, and winning!*

Katsuki jumped out from behind his rock, ran towards the moving team as fast as he could, and put the last of his trust in Deku to keep Red Riot distracted.

*We’ll get this. We’ve done good so far.*

Being out on open terrain, though, was more than a little gut-wrenching. He hated the feeling of being exposed, of something coming at him from behind, of invisible enemies knocking him to the ground and of brass knuckles piercing his chest.

*That’s a little too specific, maybe?*

As much as he hated to admit it, even the thought of being pinned down and restrained like that again was enough to scare the shit out of him.

*That’s not gonna be today, though. That was before. I’ve gotten better since then.*

He cracked a smile, glanced at Deku, and ducked behind another small rock formation.

*We’ve both gotten better since then.*

Kaminari was starting to fight back against Yaoyorozu, sending bolt after bolt of electricity after her as she tried her best to deflect his attacks. Even with how well she was doing, though, it was fairly clear this was a quickly thrown together part of her plan— in her position on the street, she’d been pretty well equipped, and likely could’ve taken Kaminari out and stilled Red Riot enough to take their flags fairly easily had they approached first. She’d been forced into this position because of Katsuki’s actions, though, made to move even when she likely hadn’t wanted to.

*Sucks to suck! Should’ve prepared better, but your rebound ain’t bad.*

That said, Katsuki’s only question now was when to strike.

*I need to get in close enough to grab Momo’s flag, then head towards Kaminari and get his. I’ll run up towards Deku after I’m done with that shit, grab Red Riot’s, then get the hell away and get back to my base before the time runs out.*

*Should be easy, right?*

Maybe.

Earphone Jack had been tasked with blasting her quirk towards Kaminari’s defensive bubble of sorts, the sound waves colliding with the forcefield in a visible ripple. If he could wait till that bubble popped, though—

*That’ll be my chance.*

Katsuki readied himself, set to watch, and waited.
Just a minute more, and we’re in the home stretch. Not much longer now.

Electricity crackled and popped as the team drew closer in to Kaminari, and all at once—

Snap!

He stared on as the field collapsed in a shower of sparks, lighting up the area in an almost-gorgeous performance. No time to stand in awe, though. For as obvious as it might’ve been that Katsuki had been there, Yaoyorozu paid him no mind, choosing to instead rush towards Kaminari’s frantic blasts of lightning bolts and static.

My turn.

Katsuki gave up the subtlety act, shot up and over the rocks, and launched himself towards Yaoyorozu’s running form. Her flag hung in plain sight— they hadn’t been allowed to hide it, but right now it was so close he could taste it.

Just a few more steps, grab it, then steal the blanket and shove it on Kaminari!

So close, so close, and yet somehow he’d forgotten about—

Earphones.

Katsuki was blasted with a wave of sound, unpreparedness sending him stumbling off course and lurching towards the desert sand, trying and failing not to fall. One of his arms smacked into a rock jutting out of the sand, though, and if not for his gauntlet, he would’ve been injured far worse. Instead, though, he wound up with a sharp crack from his gauntlet, and with a curse, realized it’d broke on impact.

Fuck…!

It was one thing to recover, but it was a whole nother to shake off the shattered gear and steady himself with now unbalanced weight. He had to be fast, though— couldn’t take his time or the other students would come after him, couldn’t tell Deku to leave Red Riot or he’d come after him, and—

No second chances.

Somewhere, in the haze of ideas, Katsuki remembered.

I can still stick to the plan. Look, Kaminari’s attention is on me now. Look, Momo isn’t holding on very tight to the blanket. Look, I already have Earphone’s flag, and she’s focused on Kaminari again now. Probably thinks I’m out of the fight ‘cause of my broken gauntlet.

So, it’d be a one-two move. In and out.

A single shot is all I need.

Katsuki got to his feet, leapt backwards into the air as Yaoyorozu reached for the flag at his waist, then redirected mid-flight and kicked out towards her back and watched as she fell, fell, hitting the sand just as he managed to snag the blanket from her now-iron grip with one hand and pull her flag with the other.

Yes…!

There was no time to lose, no time to celebrate, not when Yaoyorozu was already producing some sort of spiked object from from her back and in turn, shooing him away in the most effective manner
possible.

Doesn’t matter, I’ve got the shit I need!

Earphone Jack had turned, tried to attack him with her quirk again, but in some manner of pure luck the blanket he’d grabbed blocked the worst of the waves. From there, it was only a matter of rushing towards Kaminari, pulling off his flag, and getting the hell outta there.

I can do it, I can do it…!

And of course, he did.

All he’d needed was a few precious seconds, a few beautiful moments of time to jump in, grab the flag, and jump out. By the brief look he got at Kaminari’s face, he hadn’t known what hit him.

Fucking perfect.

And though he was sure he hadn’t seen, Katsuki had hoped– really, really, really hoped– that Deku would be proud of him, too.

Gotta finish off this exam, now. I’m so close to the end…!

Katsuki launched himself up and over his opponents again, hoped Kaminari would be too stunned to move for a solid few seconds, hoped Earphone Jack wouldn’t hit him as he went flying, and hoped as he tumbled to the ground near the last bit of action that he hadn’t broken a rib on impact. But he managed to hook the flags to his belt in the flurry of movement– right now, he only had one more to get.

And Red Riot is right… right—!

“Bakugou!” His mentor called out, and a cold, chilling shadow found itself cast over Katsuki’s thrill-riddled frame. “Good to see you here! Sorry, though. I’m gonna have to go a little hard on you this time.”

Panicked eyes turned upwards, caught sight of the fist coming towards him, and froze.

Wait, wait– what are you—

The fist wasn’t stopping, and Katsuki couldn’t move.

Red– holy fuck, Red Riot is—

“Ka– shit, get away from him!” Deku screamed, thundering footsteps howling in Katsuki’s ringing ears. “Kirishima, get back he—!”

“No can do! Chargebolt just told me to target Bakugou, not you.” He chuckled. “Don’t worry, don’t worry. All’s fair, yeah?”

Target…

It’d stopped for a brief moment after Deku’s interruption, but now Red Riot’s fist was coming down, down, and every nerve of Katsuki’s brain had short-circuited.

Not on top of me. Not like this. No no no, I—

“Kacchan!”
It clicked.

*Deku…!*

One palm on the ground, the other turned up.

*I’m not trapped. Not trapped.*

Sparks flared from panicked, extra-sweaty palms, and in an instant, exploded. Katsuki hardly moved, but Red Riot was served a blast to the face and actually *recoiled* on contact.

*Deku must’ve done his job, then.*

He got to his feet, not about to let himself get in that horrible trapped mindset any more, and stole Red Riot’s flag before he could get his bearings back.

“Deku!” He cried out, and ran towards his boyfriend in an attempt at finding safety. “We– w-we just gotta get back to the base, I-I’ve got all the flags, and—”

“Let’s– we should probably go. Fast.” Deku panted, voice trembling. “Can you run?”

*Arm hurts like fuck, but…* “Yeah. I can run. And you—” He glanced up at his boyfriend, and tried not to stare too hard at the obvious. “Follow me.”

Katsuki didn’t look at the welts on Izuku’s face, didn’t look at his torn costume and bleeding cuts, only watched him nod, nod, and leave.

*We’ll get healed up after this. After I win…!*

The race back to the base was a blur. Katsuki hardly knew what was going on– hardly realized that he was still being aimed at, that there were ropes and sparks and shouts flying his way, but all they could do was run, run, run.  

*Safety. We gotta get to safety.*

But when they reached the edge of the forest, they hesitated. Katsuki’s vision was blurring, his ears were still ringing, and just the thought of navigating back through that god-awful maze of brambles and vines sounded like a death sentence right now. He knew the other teams were hot on their tail, knew that they had no other choice but to run through, but Katsuki had to grab onto Deku’s wounded arm for a moment and regain a bit of steadiness.

“I’m okay.” He assured him, all while swallowing back metallic blood in his throat. “I-I’m– yeah. Okay.”


“You’re going first.” Katsuki coughed, and yeah, he’d probably broken a rib or two when he’d crashed. “You’ve still got your flag, so you’ve gotta go in front. Get back to the base before I do.”

“No, I gotta—!” His boyfriend started, but grit his teeth and wiped a hand over his face. “Fine. Fine, alright. I…”

It was more than a little clear that Deku was still struggling to follow those hard-hitting directions, but at the same time, Katsuki could see where his hesitations were coming from a bit more now.
I want him to go first so he doesn’t have to fight anymore. So he doesn’t gotta bleed any more. Red Riot really got him good…

“I’ll go on ahead.” Deku’s voice broke and he reached for Katsuki like it was reflex, grabbing his hand for a split second before dropping it. “I’ll… I’ll be waiting for you. Bakugou. You’ve done great so far, and I know– I know you’ll get this victory.”

And somehow, that changed everything.

He trusts me. He trusts me, and I… I trust him.

Smiling was a little easier, now.

I’ve got this.

Deku turned, ran, and Katsuki followed in his wake.

A part of him was glad he’d lost the gauntlet. For as useful as they usually were, there was no denying the slight inconvenience in transportation, made more than evident by the relative ease in which Katsuki was able to navigate the branches now. But with them both as beat up as they were, and slowed by the thick trees, the sound of voices only got closer, closer, closer with every step.

Shit. Am I gonna have to fight again?

His heart was beating with a fervor, the only upside to the situation being that Deku was safe and out of sight. Katsuki was sure that they couldn’t be far from their base now– no, not when the trees were growing denser and the sun was slowly being shut out of view. But with the dimming lights came the growing voices, and Katsuki couldn’t help the sinking sensation in his chest that he’d have to do something to fend them off.

I’m moving too slow for this, so what can I… what can I…?

Katsuki’s palms were sweater than usual.

...oh.

He stopped.

He stood.

He waited.

Deku was gone, Deku was safe. He’d have no part in the final act of this fight– his fight.

Katsuki’s fingers popped with tiny, tiny bursts of explosions, and he went the only direction he could.

Up.

Voices crowded below him, all of them, shouting, screaming, practically begging him to come down.

Down, huh?

He didn’t have much time– his chest was killing him, his arms were shaking, trembling, weak– but just for now, just for the moment—
I’ve got one gauntlet left, and enough adrenaline to get by.

Twenty feet off the ground and turned towards the singular open-air spot the canopy had allowed him, Katsuki stopped thinking and pulled the pin.

*One. Two. Three.*

Silence, then—

*BOOM*

The trees erupted in a bonfire of whites and golds, and Katsuki fell, fell, and barely managed to land himself in the center of the explosion. He might’ve laughed, might’ve cried, might’ve screamed— who cared, really, when all of his competition had been blown far enough back to let him run home free. A part of it was beautiful— hints of smoke rose like dancers to the sky, speckled bits of dust and debris made an audience for the now-cleared stage, and charred wood melded together to form the backdrop for him, the actor, to perform on.

*I… I did this.*

Katsuki could hardly move for a moment, opting to just stand and stare, stare as the opponents— students and heroes alike— began to recover from the enormous impact of the blast and get to their feet. A part of him couldn’t help the wave of relief flooding over him at the fact that he’d been lucky enough to not seriously hurt anyone, but before he could let anyone else have an encore to his finale, he turned, ran, and made it back to his tiny base before a surprise attack had the chance to claim his well-earned victory.

“Kacchan! Holy— o-oh my god, that was—”

*Deku.*

“You saw me?” He grinned, and pulled his boyfriend into a hug, hardly caring about the fact that the cameras might be watching. “What’d you think?”

“*Amazing.*” Was all he got. “Kacchan, you— you were *outstanding.* That last move was brilliant, and I—”

A part of him could’ve sworn Deku was crying, crying, but they were the good kind of tears.

“When you were standing out there, when you landed back at on the ground, a-at your ground zero, I just thought— shit, you looked *majestic.*”

*Wait… back at my ground… zero…?*

Something swelled in his chest, and yet again, something clicked.

“Ground Zero.” He murmured, and took a small step back from his boyfriend before meeting his eyes. “I— yeah. That’d make a lot sense…!”

*It’s like… new beginnings, right?*

“Wait, what are you—”

“My hero name.” Katsuki said, firmer this time. “Ground Zero. That’s— that’s it!”

Deku looked taken aback for a moment, but *only* for a moment before a huge smile exploded on his
“It’s perfect. Shit, I’d rather call you that than Bakugou on the field.” Deku chuckled, but there was no hiding the pride swelled up in his voice. “A nice bonus to your victory, right?”

“He reached down, grabbed all five of the flags hanging off of his belt—his own included—and pulled them up for Deku to see. “We—we did it.”

“All I did was what you said to do.” His boyfriend reminded him. “This is your victory. And you—you should be proud, because like I said, it was amazing. And shit, I…”

Yeah, Deku was definitely crying now.

“I’m so happy that one day, I’m honestly gonna get to call you my partner.” He paused. “Both off, and… on the field.”

Katsuki was about ready to break down and cry, too, and would’ve tried to find words had the loudspeakers not come on and announced his win.

“I-I might, uh… get some points off for a bit of property damage.” He mumbled, only for Deku to up and elbow him. “And, uh, for not being as safe as I could with the attack against everyone else. And —”

“Oh, shut up. Enjoy your win.” Deku rolled his eyes. “Maybe I will go through and do the thing I thought about for your birthday as a little reward for this after all, then.”

...birthday reward? Oh, huh… yeah, that day ain’t too far off now.

“Guess I’ll stay excited, then.” He laughed, and despite broken costumes and broken skin, they hugged one last time. “I’m looking forward to working with you again, Valiant.”

“Right back at you, Ground Zero.” Deku promised him, a light in his face that shone with only the truth. “And so—so much more than you know.”

Chapter End Notes

i’ll probably be able to upload next week(or at least, i really REALLY want to) but bc of projects n school idk if ill be able to or not, so either check back here or on my twitter @aeronines if you’re curious what the verdict is!!!
and TYSM AS ALWAYS to my AMAZING beta @aetherlite!!!!
Other stuffs here!! : curiouscat, BIG FUN ART LIST, real fic playlist hours
The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and Katsuki was reaching for his phone in a haze as it went off for what had to be the fiftieth time that morning. He was fairly sure that he’d woken up at least once, maybe twice to the sound, or that the ringing had wormed its way into his dreams– even after all that time, though, it still wasn’t stopping.

Who the fuck is calling me at…

Katsuki glanced at his bedside alarm clock, and upon recognizing that it was already eleven in the morning, understood.

...oh. makes sense.

He’d been trying to wake up earlier– really, he had, especially considering that the new semester would be starting in only a couple days– but for as much as Katsuki liked early-morning jogging, there was something special about sleeping in till noon with the knowledge that there was nothing on his plate.

Not like I get the chance to do it that often, anyways.

But he gave in, grabbed his phone, checked to see who it was, and was almost immediately overwhelmed by notification after notification on his home screen. Texts from friends, acquaintances, extended family who he saw once a year, and all with the same message.

Happy… birthday.

“...oh.” He swallowed, suddenly far more awake than before. Usually, he wouldn’t care all that much. Another birthday, another year, another chance to give it his all. And yeah, maybe it was just another birthday– but.

It’s… my eighteenth. And that means…

“Shit…!”

I have plans today, and I’m nowhere near ready!

Katsuki (metaphorically) blasted himself out of bed, scrambled to his closet, and spent a wild, frantic few minutes searching for something that wasn’t dirty to wear. He’d meant to do the laundry this morning– and with a sigh, realized that that was probably one of the other reasons his alarm had been screaming.

We… we’re gonna meet up at noon. Go out for lunch, then to the beach together, and head to his
apartment afterwards so we can have…

Well, all Deku had said was that he had something special in store. That meant he needed to look good, right? Or at least, not like he’d come wading out of a dump?

Fuck, I can’t look like garbage, not when I think we’re gonna get to…

Katsuki yanked the nearest muscle tank from his closet (Deku liked this one, right?) and pulled it on, then grabbed a pair of slim-fitting, probably-clean sweatpants (for easy access?) and did the same.

Good enough, yeah? Maybe?

The tank did provide a nice outline of his chest, and he knew that Deku was fond of that, but…

Doesn’t feel like it’s… enough.

But it would have to do for now, because Katsuki had not given himself enough time to do much of anything else.

I hope Deku doesn’t mind. Er, well, that he likes it enough. Likes me enough.

A part of him wondered if Camie would be disappointed– after final exams were all over, he’d let her and a disgruntled Yaoyorozu in on what Deku had said at the end, a promise regarding something special for his birthday. And while Yaoyorozu hadn’t been in a great mood after barely passing the final via other points, even she was excited. Because it was no secret, none at all, that ‘something special’ almost always meant—

Sex.

It still hadn’t hit him.

I mean, it wasn’t like he explicitly said we were gonna have sex, but the chances are… uh… pretty high? I think?

He was eighteen, now. He was an adult. He was an incoming third-year at U.A. High, and he was Deku’s goddamn boyfriend of nine whole-ass months.

Almost a year if you count when we first kissed.

It was too early for nervousness— too early for anxieties, for hesitations, for maybe we should wait a little longer? If it’s not okay yet? But, fuck. This— if it happened, anyways— was something that they’d both been waiting for far, far too long. The onsen was as close as they’d gotten to anything legitimately sexual, and with that having been as amazing as it was?

God, what’s it gonna be like when he actually touches my dick?

The rest of Katsuki’s mid-morning hours were spent getting off in the shower, biting his hand hard enough so as to not to scream Deku’s name in his parent’s home, and hoping, hoping that it would be enough to keep him from getting too hard till they made it to his boyfriend’s apartment.

Making it through this afternoon is not gonna be easy.

But it was only once Katsuki washed up and got dressed did he actually decide to check his messages. He hadn’t looked all that carefully earlier, opting to instead try and get ready while he still could. But down, down near the bottom of the pile sat two missed calls and a voicemail from Deku.
Wait, was he trying to get ahold of me earlier?

Katsuki frowned, opened up the voicemail, and listened.

“...this on? O-Oh, okay. Hi! Ah, well, first off... happy birthday, Kacchan! Sorry if the calls woke you up at all, aha... but I, just um, wanted to let you know that... u-uh...”

The voicemail paused for a moment, and Katsuki could only imagine that Deku had stopped to breathe, to think.

“I-I promise I tried to get the whole day off– I really, really tried– but they went ahead and scheduled me till eight tonight because someone got injured on duty yesterday and they had to fill that spot today, and I couldn’t… there wasn’t anyone else remotely available.”

Whatever boner Katsuki might’ve still had died in an instant.

“God, I’m so sorry, I didn’t wanna delay tonight...! But I was thinking about some slight alternatives! Either I can bring in dinner, or we could try to find someplace to go out to, or if you really wanted we could just have a dessert? If that’s okay? I wanna do what you’re gonna be happiest with!”

On second thought, more time meant more time to prepare. Maybe a delay wouldn’t be so bad after all.

“Oh, and Kacchan? Just, ah... one last thing.”

His boyfriend’s voice dipped a little lower, grew a little more serious.

“We should still definitely have time for—”

“Katsuki! It’s noon. Hurry up and get your ass downstairs!”

He nearly snapped his phone in half right then and there, just as Deku was getting to the good part. Damn his mother’s timing, just giving him another reason to be frustrated.

But we should still have time for... for that thing, Deku? That special thing?

“Katsuki Bakugou, get down here right now!”

“I’m coming, coming!” He barked, but didn’t move right away. Instead, he pulled up the group chat he had with Camie, Yaoyorozu, and Todoroki, and filled them in on the situation, because while he was definitely going to be keeping his mouth shut about the details of what would be happening that night, Katsuki couldn’t be expected to keep all of his excitement to himself. After one quick text, though, he flew downstairs before his mother had an excuse to start yapping again.

What’s the deal with her, anyways? We hardly do birthday celebrations to begin with. I’m an adult, and I should be allowed to sleep in if I want to. Asshole.

But when he got to the bottom of the stairs, Katsuki was met with something entirely unexpected. Sure, there was his mother, arms crossed and staring at him with the same glare he saw every time he looked in a mirror. But behind her, crowded around the door, was—

“The fuck?”

Camie, Yaoyorozu, and Todoroki.
Katsuki remembered the hasty text he’d sent them, wondered when the \textit{fuck} they’d arrived, and hoped, \textit{hoped} that they hadn’t had any sort of dramatic reaction in front of his parents once he’d sent it. Yeah, he was planning on telling them about his relationship eventually, but…

\textit{Not quite yet.}

Back to the matter at hand.

“What’s the problem? Were you not wanting to see us, Baku?” Camie asked, voice dripping with honeyed sweetness, as if trying to hide what an ass she could be from his parents.

“Yes, Camie thought it would be a good idea to…” Yaoyorozu paused, a slight bit of pink dusting her cheeks. “Ah. Well. Say happy birthday, of course!”

He had the sneaking suspicion that there was something more behind those words, that the true reason for the sudden visit was due to his now-moved plans tonight, but someone else cut him off before he could think further on that.

“I thought you said you wanted to come support him?” Todoroki frowned, slightly confused. “You know, for his da—”

Camie slapped her hand over Todoroki’s mouth, and let out a small, faked laugh. “Well! It’s nice to meet you, Mrs. Bakugou. But if you don’t mind, do you think we could take your son out for the night? He did tell you he was planning on coming and spending the night with friends, \textit{right}?!”

His mother tilted her head, and something about the way she looked at him made Katsuki think that she could see right through him.

“He did mention he was spending the night with a \textit{friend}…” She started, and all Katsuki knew was that he did not like the grin on her face, not one bit. “Must’ve forgotten about the part about being with more than one friend, hm?”

\textit{Shit.}

Katsuki’s throat went dry as he prayed that there was no obvious sign of the slip-up on his face.


He was pretty sure that she didn’t believe him one damn bit, but his mother didn’t push it.

“Alright, alright.” She dipped her head. “Well. You better behave, alright? I don’t wanna hear about you doing something stupid now that you’re an \textit{adult}.”

“I ain’t stupid.” Katsuki growled, and crossed his arms over his chest right back at her. “And I’m gonna be the best damn adult there is, got it!? So fuck off. We’re gonna have a great time.”

His mother’s eyes rolled to the back of her head, but she didn’t argue back for once. Maybe this was some sort of birthday miracle after all.

“I’ll leave you guys be.” She finally said, and gave his friends a wave before walking back out to the other room. “Don’t forget your overnight things, Katsuki.”

“I was just about to go get them!”

But his friends were beside him in a flash, effectively twisting the conversation to something far, \textit{far} better. Katsuki knew better than to discuss anything further downstairs, though, so with a quick point
and a run up the stairs, they followed.

“Can’t believe you guys came out to my goddamn house for this.” He muttered as he swung open the door, letting his friends file in before shutting and locking it tight. “Was there something else that I needed to prep? Or did you seriously just show up to say good luck with the sex?”

God, even saying it out loud made his face burn.

*Is this actually gonna happen? Like, for real?*

“Partly ‘cause of that.” Camie said, but after looking him up and down and whispering in her girlfriend’s ear, then Todoroki’s, continued. “Today’s special, babe. I know you know that.”

*Special… special, right.*

“I’m a bit glad that Midoriya had to push back you two’s date tonight.” Yaoyorozu picked up. “It gives us a little more time to, ah… fix a few things.”

Fix? “Fix what?” Katsuki scowled, and shoved his hands into his sweatpants’ pockets.

“Don’t worry, the tab’s on Endeavor.” Todoroki finished. “They didn’t tell you?”

“No, what the hell are you guys talki—”

“Kacchan.” Camie sighed, and shook her head. “If you really want that dick, you gotta try a little harder! Your normal clothes aren’t gonna cut it, hon.”

“The hell’s wrong with my clothes!?” Katsuki retorted, arms pulled tight to his chest. “Deku likes this tank. I know he eyes me up all the time when I’m wearing it.”

“Oh, no. Midoriya likes what’s under it.” Yaoyorozu deadpanned, and coming from her, Katsuki started to take what they were saying a bit more seriously. “Please, Katsuki. You can’t tell me you honestly think that your wardrobe isn’t a bit, ah… plain.”

Todoroki snorted. “Looks like you haven’t bought new clothes since you were thirteen.”

“Oh, no. Midoriya likes what’s under it.” Yaoyorozu deadpanned, and coming from her, Katsuki started to take what they were saying a bit more seriously. “Please, Katsuki. You can’t tell me you honestly think that your wardrobe isn’t a bit, ah… plain.”

Todoroki snorted. “Looks like you haven’t bought new clothes since you were thirteen.”

“Oi, I remember that god-awful first hero costume you had!” Katsuki scowled, feeling very, very attacked right now. “I don’t think you have the right to speak, dipshit.”

“Oh, but I’m paying, dipshit.” Todoroki mocked, but he knew there was no lie in the fact that he’d brought along his dad’s credit card. “Look. If even I can see that you need some help, then I’d assume that indicates some sort of problem at play.”

For as much as he wanted to argue back on that, though, he didn’t have the words.

*Fuck.*

“…fine. Okay.” Katsuki huffed, relenting. “We’re going shopping? Or did you guys already, uh…”

On second thought, the idea of them picking out clothes for him in advance to literally get fucked in was admittedly, kinda weird.

“We’re going to the mall!” Camie exclaimed, and stepped forward, hands flying all over Katsuki’s body. “Oof, babe. You could go for a bit of cleanup all around. This hair?” A hand darted through it. “You could use a trim. And these nails? Hm, you at least need to get them filed down.”
Katsuki shoved his hands back in his pockets and stepped back before she could go and point out anything else of his that needed some work, getting the point. “Alright, alright.” He groaned. “We gonna go, then? Or are we just gonna stand around here and waste time?”

For a moment the three stared at him, stunned. Yaoyorozu might’ve whispered a he actually agreed and Todoroki might’ve smirked a little wider, but Camie looked thrilled as all get out.

“You grab your overnight stuff— remember, don’t forget the lube and condoms— and we’ll head out!” She laughed, and clapped him once more on the shoulder. “And I know, I know he’d like you just as well without a little something extra. But consider this our treat to you too, ’kay?” Camie smiled. “And if you feel like anything’s too much, you can always just say no. We won’t be weird about it! Promise.”

“Lies.” Katsuki grumbled, but couldn’t deny the warmth spreading through him. “You guys are always weird.” But he went ahead and shoved the remainder of his stuff in a bag, threw it over his shoulder, and followed them downstairs.

“We’ve got eight hours.” Yaoyorozu announced as they stepped out of the house and made their way to the station.

“Eight hours.” Todoroki repeated, eyes narrowed in some strange, faux-dramatic fashion. “And in those eight hours, we’re gonna make you drop-dead gorgeous.” Camie smirked. “Pro Hero Valiant’s gonna be on his knees before you can say blow me, daddy.”

Katsuki stared at her for a solid few seconds, along with probably everyone else in the group, until finally managing to form a response.

“I don’t— holy shit, I don’t call him daddy!” He protested, but couldn’t shake the thought of Deku–fucking Deku– on his knees for him.

That’s… almost hotter than the thought of his dick in my ass. Oh my god.

For once, he kept his mouth shut as Camie continued to tease him, dumb-struck by the mere thought of that scenario.

“Your mouth’s open.” Todoroki snorted, and nudged him forward. “Come on. We’ve got stuff to do, so quit looking like you’re catching flies.”

He went along with a grumble, boarded the train, and half-listened in on his friends going over plans for the afternoon. First would be lunch, then shopping, a haircut, then maybe more shopping if need be.

Wonder how this all is gonna wind up playing out.

Their conversation slowed to a halt with the stop of the train, and just as soon, they got off and walked to the mall nearby. Todoroki kept beside him as Camie and Momo went on ahead, pointing out restaurants and places to hit up. For the time being, he’d let them lead and do their thing— not like the cost was coming out of his pocket, anyway— and tried to strike up a conversation to quell his bubbling nerves.

“S’been a while since we’ve gotten to hang out.” Katsuki started, hoping Todoroki would pick up with more than a one-word answer.

“You’ve been busy.” He shrugged. “I’ve been busy. Family, training, all that. It happens.”
Katsuki hated the bit of distance in his voice.

“We should train together again.” He suggested. “I miss fighting against you.”

“Same, honestly.” Todoroki sighed. “You’re a good sparring partner. Shindou is fine, but…”

“But?”

His friend rubbed the back of his neck, not meeting Katsuki’s eyes. “He likes turning it into sex more often than not. I mean, it’s whatever. It’s fine. I’d tell him to stop if it really bothered me. But it gets a little… I don’t know. Predictable? Annoying if I’m not really in the mood? I don’t know how to describe it.”

...oh.

“You could just tell him to fuck off.” He muttered, more than a little pissed at hearing that. “I’m sure you could find other people to train with. Hell, you’re welcome to hit me up whenever. You know that.”

“I know, I know.” Todoroki shook his head, and waved him off. “Seriously, don’t worry. But I’ll text you if I’m free– maybe once the semester starts up again?”

“Works for me.” Katsuki nodded, and only could hope that his friend would follow through.

*If he doesn’t, I’ll bother him. The last thing I want is him thinking I’m too busy with Deku to spend time with him.*

But at Yaoyorozu’s sudden call, the two were freed from their slightly-awkward conversation to grab some lunch. That part went smooth enough—food was easy, good, *typical*—but when they steered towards some upscale clothing store, Katsuki would be lying if he said he wasn’t sweating.

*This is actually happening. This is a thing. It’s… I’m gonna…*

He couldn’t think too hard about it, though, not if he didn’t wanna get hard.

*They’re just clothes. Just clothes. And I…*

Katsuki looked ahead to see Camie and Yaoyorozu veering towards the racks, followed closely by Todoroki.

*I’m gonna look hot as shit. Deku won’t know what hit him…!*

“We’re not going back to your place, so you’re getting a whole new wardrobe for the night.” Camie started, already shuffling through a row of pants. “Hm… alright. So, me and Momo were talking, but we already know he likes your chest, and since he’s a little older, something a bit mature would be nice, yeah? We’re not going for like, super thotty or anything. More like, hm…”

“Didn’t you say something along the lines of *classy hoe* earlier?”

“Yes! Exactly.” Camie exclaimed at her girlfriend’s input. “Classy hoe. That means no trashy tank tops, no baggy pants, and no, um… whatever those shoes are you’re wearing.” She gestured vaguely at him, and for as much as she was *right*, Katsuki couldn’t help but feel a bit insulted upon the uncalled for critique of his typical day-to-day clothing.

“It’s simple to get off.” He grumbled, but joined her in sorting through and looking. “Don’t think
Deku would really mind easy access, y’know.”

“I’m sorry, do you really want to go straight to dicks!?” She sighed, positively exasperated. “Oh my god, Baku. Don’t you know about foreplay?”

“I-I mean, yeah, bu—!”

Camie grabbed him by the shoulders and stared him straight in the eyes, and Katsuki wasn’t sure he’d ever been more threatened in his life.

“You gotta give him something to mess with, alright? Something that shows off what you’ve got, but makes him work for the prize a little.” She said, squeezing his shoulders. “Most of the time, your usual is gonna be alright. But today? Today is special.” The last word was punctuated with a slight huff, and Camie let go. “Valiant’s a big boy. He knows how this stuff works. So show him that you know what’s up too, yeah?”

Show him that I… know what’s up.

Katsuki knew that Camie only meant those words as some sort of encouragement boost, but that didn’t mean the swells of I’m too inexperienced for him weren’t starting to churn again. Deku was in no way a virgin, and…

No. Don’t start thinking about that. I know he wants me, know he trusts me, and I know that he’ll help every step of the way. This… this is his area of expertise. Or, well, one of them.

“...okay.” He finally got out, swallowed back his fears. “Right. Let’s do this.”

First item on the menu– pants. They wound up settling on a nice pair of black skinny jeans after Yaoyorozu had promised him they couldn’t go wrong, despite the obvious constrictions at play. With those on, even he could recognize what ass he did have, and maybe, just maybe, Deku would notice too.

They tossed a pair of short, black, low-heeled zip-up boots at him too– trendy and simple to wear. Done, done. Easy.

Alright, alright…!

Next was a top. That topic, however, sparked some sort of heated debate between his friends. Camie vouched for one style, Yaoyorozu argued for another, and Todoroki advocated for something that Katsuki could only consider grandpa fashion. That said, he was the only one with apparently no say in the matter, despite it being his damn clothing.

“We’re not putting him in a suit. Not that he’d look bad! It’s just too much for the occasion!”

“All you’re putting on the table are low-cut tees and button ups. Isn’t that going against your self-implemented ‘something to mess with’ policy?”

“A suit like that won’t show off his chest. You know how nice boobs are! And babe, you have nice boobs! So think kinda like that, okay?”

“...I don’t think that it’s entirely the same, but—”

“Oh, same concept! His chest and shoulders are what we have to work with, so that’s what we’re gonna do, right?”
“I know that’s all he has, and that’s why I’m thinking that…”

Their bickering carried on, on, and Katsuki eventually walked away in an attempt to drown out their arguing. They were both right, in a way. Yaoyorozu tended to lean more towards classy to begin with, while Camie had always been more casual, but…

*There’s gotta be an in-between in there. Hm…*

A look to his left had him staring at a group of more casual blazers, while on his right lie a bunch of nicer button ups. He *did* have a nice chest, something he’d come to accept long ago, and with the ideas floating around in mind…

Katsuki pulled a nice, fitted, sleek black blazer from the rack, grabbed a red button-up from the table, and ran to the changing rooms before any of his friends had the mind to stop him. It was almost fun, throwing off his tank and pulling crisp fabric over his body, feeling the familiar stretch of it across his chest and shoulders while it stayed a little too loose at the waist. But that was fixed today with the help of the blazer, buttoned once near the bottom while the shirt stayed undone two– no, maybe three– down.


*Hot? Sexy, even?*

A hand pushed back at the shirt collar, then trailed down, down, further than he could with anything else he owned.

*I hope so.*

Katsuki’s breath hitched at the thought of his hand being *Deku’s* hand, touching, feeling—

*I’m not getting hard. Nope, nope, I am not gonna get hard right now…!*

He pulled his hand back before that thought could linger on his mind any longer, and realized that yeah, maybe he *should* check in with his friends to see what they thought first. So he poked his head out of the changing room, called them over from halfway across the store, and stepped outside when they arrived. Katsuki wasn’t sure what kind of response to expect, not really– but by the look on Camie and Yaoyorozu’s faces and the small grin on Todoroki’s, he had to have done okay, at least.

“…not bad, Baku.” Camie said, her expression slowly shifting into a smile. “Not bad at all.”

*Step one, complete.*

Next stop– the hairdresser. He’d needed a trim for a while, no question about that. Katsuki didn’t plan on anything particularly special for this, just a little shorter all around, but when Yaoyorozu suggested slimming it down in the back a bit, well– the idea appealed to him more than it should’ve.

*I’m not getting an undercut. That’s Deku’s thing. But, uh… shorter might be nice. More mature looking and all that.*

Katsuki left the hairdresser with a new, fresh, *stylish* confidence, slightly faded sides trailing into his usual length up top. Camie had cheered as they left the place, and Todoroki had even given him a high five.

*This… this is kinda fun, I guess…!*
That said, when Yaoyorozu proposed heading to the nail salon as their next stop, Katsuki’s hesitations began to return. Not that any of it was a bad thing, not at all! Just…

New.

But he followed them there, let himself be sat down, and squirmed as soon as they began to scrape the callouses from his feet. His friends were as useless as humanly possible, too, just sitting and watching, sipping water and sodas as Katsuki hoped that it would end. There was a bit of grumbling after he was done, but for as much as it had sucked, he could admit the final result wasn’t… awful.

“They didn’t even take that much off.” Camie had said, as she carted him over to the other side of the salon. “Don’t worry, you’ll be fine.”

She was right– but after they’d finished pushing back his cuticles, and trimmed and filed down his nails (after all, who knew where they were gonna go) they asked him something he hadn’t been prepared for.

Do… do I want some color? Some paint?

This was new. All of this was new, really, but hell.

Fuck it, why not.

Katsuki settled on something simple– just a matte black polish, nothing more– and endured his friend’s teasing over his supposedly punk color choice and flipped them off when he was done.

I look great. Deku’s an idiot if he doesn’t like all this.

He wasn’t sure what more they wanted to do. After all, this was the stuff that usually constituted standard procedure, right? Nothing else came springing to mind, but when Camie and Yaoyorozu started walking towards the other side of the mall, towards something that looked like a waxing spa, he stopped.


“What’s the problem?” Yaoyorozu asked, all-too innocently. “Camie and I do this all the time.”

“Y-Yeah, well…” He mumbled, slightly-sore feet suddenly much more noticeable now. “Uh…”

“I won’t make you do it if you don’t wanna!” Camie reminded him. “Your choice. But just think about it! I mean, if you wanted, you could just get your brows waxed or something.”

That didn’t sound all that bad. But just as he was about to accept his fate, Todoroki beat him to the punch.

“Maybe you shouldn’t, Bakugou.” He tilted his head, a hint of a challenge in his words. “Bet you couldn’t handle getting your brows waxed, much less your legs and chest.”

...bitch.

“I can handle it, asshole!” Katsuki growled, and stormed towards the door. “Bet you’re just saying that ‘cause you’re too afraid to try too, though!”

“I– I can take on my own bets!” Todoroki protested, and in no time, the two of them found themselves in the salon, both afraid but neither about to back down.
Katsuki vowed he wouldn’t be the one to scream first, but after they finished up with their brows (which had been bad enough on its own), it was all he could do to grit his teeth and try not to cry when they started on his legs.

This is—fuck…!

“Having fun over there?” Yaoyorozu teased, listening in on the both of them squirm. “I’m sure that’s not enough to bother you, right?”

“Oh, I’m having a f-fucking blast!” Katsuki grit out, just as Todoroki echoed his sentiments beside him. “Agh, y-yeah, c-cant get enough of this good—SHIT—!”

That said, the sounds that left his mouth when they did his chest would never be spoken of again.

“Can we… just… sit down for a minute.” He shivered as they left, the sensation of sweatpants on waxed skin something he was nowhere near used to. “We’ve got, what… two hours left…?”

“Two hours, yep.” Camie nodded, and sat down next to him on a nearby bench. “There’s just one more thing we really have to do before you head out, but we’ve gotta stop by my place to do it.”

“Oh… m’kay.” He sighed, knowing nothing, nothing could be worse than the goddamn wax at this point. “Cool.”

“Was there anything else you would like, though?” Yaoyorozu asked, joining them. “We have enough time to go around a little bit more.”

“I dunno. Can’t really think of anything.” He mumbled, and pulled up his phone, only to stop and stare at his lock screen— a nice picture he’d managed to catch of his boyfriend during one of their training sessions— and noticed something small, silvery, and shiny in Deku’s ear.

That’s right… he’s got nice earrings. They really do look good. Piercings suit him.

But one look up, and Katsuki noticed something staring him right in the face. Straight across from where they were sitting was a small piercings shop, and a small idea dawned on him.

This whole day has been a series of why nots, so...

“I think there’s one more thing I wanna do while we’re here, actually.”

It didn’t wind up being anything more than a quick stop, really. In, out, with pain that was hardly comparable to what he’d just endured. This part especially, though, was for him.

It’s… kinda cool. Matching this way.

Katsuki was still nervous, no doubt, but the whole day had definitely been a confidence booster. Only one last stop remained, and for that, their small group wound up grabbing a quick dinner before boarding the train and hopping over to Camie’s place for final touches. He couldn’t say he didn’t have his suspicions about what was going to happen, but...

They haven’t screwed me over yet. I trust them.

He’d only been to Camie’s home once before— it wasn’t much, really, just a small apartment in the city center. Neither of her parents were home that often, and for as confident as she was, Katsuki couldn’t help but feel she was a bit awkward in showing Yaoyorozu and Todoroki around considering their wildly different living situations. But today, she didn’t let it show one bit. The
group made their way to her small bedroom, crashed on her bed, and waited while Camie readied the last part of Katsuki’s makeover. A chair was then dragged in from the kitchen, a small side table pulled next to it, and Katsuki was swiftly sat down and instructed to look up.

“M’kay, babe.” She murmured, only gentle. “Can I put a little makeup on you? I promise it won’t be much. Just enough to bring out what you already have.”

Just what he’d expected.

“Y-Yeah. For sure.”

It was all new, all different, but not bad. No– if he was being honest, having his friends take care of literally everything for him, from plans to physical care to costs, was about as amazing as it got.

They… god, I love them all so much.

He was glad these last moments before leaving were more intimate, though. The familiarity of Camie’s voice and the knowledge that his friends stood beside him, with him all the way, was so, so much more than he could ask for. Deku hadn’t had this support, and while that fact was something he hated to think about, all he could do now was better.

“Close your eyes, babe. Relax, okay? It’ll just take a moment.”

Eyeliner…

“…alright, you can open them now. Look down for me a little… perfect, perfect… now blink a few times.”

Something on my waterline, too…?

“Not gonna bother with foundation right now, but… hm.” Camie stood back, and beckoned Yaoyorozu closer. “Anything else, baby?”

“Hm… oh, maybe right here…?”

“Ooh, yes! Good call!”

Camie kissed her girlfriend, nothing long or deep, but just that reminded him of Deku waiting, waiting for him to do that with…

Shit, I want him so bad right now… ugh, just a little longer. Just another hour or so.

Something was applied up on his cheekbones, just below his eyes, and his friends finally gave him a nod of approval.

“Just a little highlighter.” Yaoyorozu assured him. “Would you like to see?”

“Please.”

Todoroki handed him something they’d dropped on the bed earlier, just a small, cheap hand mirror, and Katsuki stared.

Oh… oh my god.

He didn’t move for a good five–ten–fifteen seconds, absolutely floored.
Seeing the new, simple black studs in his ears was still new, still fascinating, only furthered upon bringing his hand upon to his face and running it through his freshly-cut hair, abruptly reminded of the striking matte black on his nails. Camie was right-- of course she was, really-- that the neatly applied eyeliner brought out the rich color of his eyes to their full extent.

So cool… so, so cool…!

Katsuki was absolutely, positively, one-hundred percent glowing.

I love this. Deku’s gonna love this.

“You feeling alright?” Camie said, coming up from behind and hugging his shoulders. “Everything okay?”

“Perfect. It’s-- god.” He swallowed, still staring at the mirror. “You gotta teach me how to do this shit at some point.”

“You really like it?”

“Fuck yes, I love it!”

The four of them laughed, maybe cried, maybe didn’t know exactly what to do except celebrate in what little time they had left. But when he got up to go change into the new stuff they’d bought, Yaoyorozu placed something else into his hand.

“Lip balm.” She supplied. “Trust me, it helps a lot for kissing, and, ah… other such things.”

He nodded, took it with him along with the clothes, and locked himself in the bathroom alone for just a minute to change. That minute took a bit longer, though, as Katsuki sincerely hoped Camie wouldn’t mind him getting off in her bathroom as a final attempt to quell his inevitable hard-on for the next while.

This is happening.

He tugged on his boxers-- they’d picked up some new, tight ones in a familiar green.

This is really, really happening.

Next was his shirt, left open far more than was allowed at school.

Deku’s gonna… well, we’re probably gonna…

He pulled up his pants, fabric hugging his freshly-waxed legs in a way that was both alien and so, so welcome.

…gonna have…

Lastly, the blazer went on, stopping at his forearms and buttoned only once at his waist, bringing his figure into full view.

…sex.

Katsuki knew he looked hot-- knew every inch of his body was something most people would die to get their hands on, knew that people stared, that people wanted, that people couldn't have what
belonged to only one person.

No getting cold feet now.

He brushed a stray strand of hair from his eyes, drew the balm onto his lips, and popped the cap before giving the mirror one last sultry, needy look.

I’m doing this, and we’re both gonna love it.

And with that, he stepped out of the bathroom and shut the door behind him.

“Holy shit, Baku...!” Camie squealed, clutching her girlfriend’s arm. “Fuck. If I wasn’t taken, I’d bone you.”

“I’ll, uh… pass on that one.”

“You look good.” Todoroki nodded, and Katsuki could’ve sworn there was some sort of pride in his eyes. “Valiant’s going to love it.”

“He better.”

“Katsuki...” Yaoyorozu stepped forward, and adjusted his collar just a little. “Everything’s lovely.” She smiled. “I’m serious.”

“Might wanna button up that shirt before you head out, though!” Camie said. “Save the sexy for when you’re at Midoriya’s place.”

“Right, right.” He ducked his head, and to his relief, his fingers weren’t shaking near as much as he’d expected. “I think I’m, um… gonna head out to the train. It’s a bit of a ride from here, and he’ll be home soon, so…”

“Yeah, of course!” Camie smiled again, pride swelling in her face. “You look amazing, and you’ve got a boyfriend that I know loves you. So be confident, okay?” He wasn’t sure if the tear she wiped from her eyes was real or not, but– “Repeat after me. I’m gonna get that dick!”

“I-I–” He started, unfairly flushed. “I- I’m gonna—”

“Come on, I’m gonna…”

“I’m– I’m gonna get that fucking dick!” He shouted, and Katsuki could only hope Camie’s parents hadn’t come home.

“That’s the spirit, babe!”

Everyone gave him one last pat on the shoulder before sending him off, and Katsuki, hyped up as could be, got on the train with every vein thrumming and every nerve spinning with anticipation. Each minute passed by in a hazy blur, and all he could do was check, check, check his phone by the second in the hopes that somehow, it’d make the journey faster. But the train arrived on schedule, Katsuki got off at the usual stop, then made his way to the familiar apartment complex before his heart could beat out of his chest.

No need to be nervous.

It was harder when his friends weren’t around.

No need to be afraid.
He looked hot as hell, and he knew it.

No need to be scared of him seeing.

Because Deku—Deku, above everyone else—would treat him right.

Katsuki only knew he’d climbed up the stairs after he found himself standing in front of Deku’s door, the place he’d come to call a third home. No time to waste on sentiments, though.

Knock, knock.

...and, nothing.

He knocked again.

Thirty seconds later, still nothing.

Katsuki huffed, momentum slightly killed, and realized that he probably beat Deku home.

Well, dammit.

Sure enough, Deku wasn’t late— it was definitely pushing at the end of the time he’d allotted to come home in, but technically, he wasn’t late. So Katsuki settled against the wall for the moment, pulled out his phone camera to check that his makeup was still intact (it was, of course it was), and waited.

Waited.

Deku…Deku, where are—

“...Kacchan…?”

He thought he’d been prepared to see him.

“Oh–oh my—”

His boyfriend had stopped for a moment in the mouth of the stairwell, but not seconds later, raced down the hallway. A shopping bag swung back and forth by his side, a backpack slung over his shoulders, but Deku—

Shit.

Deku was hot. Not dressed up near as much as Katsuki was, no, but the undershirt clinging to his abs and the undone button-up rolled up and stretched over those perfect, perfect arms was more than enough to have him weak at the knees. Scars drawn across gorgeous muscle, visible only through what little skin his boyfriend had decided to show, only served to accentuate every bit of strength rippling through his body.

But the crazy part— the unbelievable part—was that Deku looked absolutely awestruck by Katsuki in front of him.

“Kacchan.” His boyfriend breathed, as if saying his name would somehow break the spell. “Oh…oh my god.” Deku shoved his hand in his pocket, digging out his keys with the intensity of a high-level mission. “We’re going inside.”

Deku’s partly-free hand grabbed his shoulder while the other shoved the keys in faster than what had to be humanly possible, and Katsuki could’ve sworn his boyfriend’s hand was shaking.
He wasn’t given time to think on it, though, not before they were inside and Deku had dumped everything he’d brought onto the ground, not before he was pinned against the quickly-locked door by strong hands and a strong leg between his own.

...oh my god.

“Kacchan— s-shit, Kacchan—” Deku murmured, staring at him with every bit of analysis Katsuki had ever seen and more. “I was– I bought cake, y’know. For your birthday.”

“Cake, huh?” He rasped, unable to tear his own eyes away from Deku’s.

“Yeah.” His boyfriend murmured, and something strange– silvery, shiny– flashed in his mouth. “Chocolate. Like you said you liked. But…”

One of Deku’s hands wound its way around his waist, squeezing, squeezing.

“I think you’d taste better right now.”

Everything he’d ever known, ever thought, ground to a complete and utter halt.

“That so?” He finally managed, his hands on top of Deku’s own. “Is that what you want?”

“Not about what I want.” Deku said, every inch of his voice drenched in need. “It’s your birthday, isn’t it?”

Definitely something in his mouth.

“Y-Yeah.” He mumbled, trying to keep his composure as best he could. “S’my birthday.”

“So tell me what you want, baby.” He whispered. “What would you like?”

Only one right answer.

“You.”

That was all it took. Katsuki’s bag was torn from his shoulders just before Deku scooped him up in his arms and carried (carried!) him to his bedroom, past the blooming flowers by the window and through the door with only I love yous and you look so good, so good along the way. But for as excited as they both were, Deku sat down, back against the bed with Katsuki in his own lap careful as could be.

“Sorry for getting so, um…” His boyfriend’s gaze trailed up and down his body, drinking in everything he could see. “…aggressive. Out there.”

“You say that like I didn’t like it.” Katsuki raised an eyebrow, and kissed his boyfriend on the forehead. “I’ve been excited to see you all day, y’know.”

“Same. I… god, I tried to get off work earlier. Called in, argued with my manager, tried everything I could think of…” He sighed, shook his head. “Today was a bad day, apparently.”

“You don’t smell like you’ve been running around, though.”

“Showered and changed at my agency. I brought along clothes just in case.” He said, attention obviously elsewhere. “Speaking of clothes, though… this–” Hands came back up to trail along his
sides, as if exploring some new, uncharted territory. “When did this happen…? Like, all of this.”

“Put the extra time you provided to good use.” Katsuki grinned. “I was out with friends for a bit. Had some fun. The usual.”

“The usual, huh…?” Deku’s hand trailed further, further up his chest, and slid beneath the shirt opening and over smooth, sensitive skin. “Oh… is that what they’re calling this these days?”

“Calling what?”

“You know what.” Too teasing, too knowing. “With these clothes? Your hair? Your nails? These earrings? This… waxing?” A soft, gentle, laugh fell over his ear. “Kacchan, I’m talking about making yourself look like the very definition of sex.”

There was a quiet can I and an echoed yes, please, and Deku’s fingers were tracing, tugging, fondling a nipple from beneath his clothing.

“Is that a problem?”

“God, no.” A kiss to the collarbone. “Not today.” A tug, a pop of the blazer button off. “I trust you, Kacchan.”

A promise.

“I– I-I know you do.”

“Trust me?”

“Fuck, what do you think?”

Deku drew his hand away, if only for a moment.

“I think I want to hear it from you.”

...oh.

“I…I trust you.” He got out, still trying to even comprehend what was going on. “I want you.”

“Where?”

Where!? In his mind, it was a strange question. Where didn’t he want Deku? But he acted on his first thought, grabbed his boyfriend’s wrist, and pulled his hand flat against his chest.

“Here.” Katsuki said, just as Deku’s eyes went wide and his face grew into something more. “I-I… I want you here.”

Always feels good when he touches there, when he kisses and bites me th—

“Holy shit, Kacchan.”

...wait, what?

“You– you realize—”

Katsuki looked down at his chest, then back at Deku, then back to his chest.
"What the hell is he—"

“You put my hand… over your heart…?”

He froze.

...o-oh.

For as beautiful as Deku was in every situation, every possible scenario, Katsuki wasn’t sure anything had ever beat what he had on now.

“Wasn’t on, uh, purpose.” He stuttered, but his boyfriend stayed, stayed. Stared in shock, awe, disbelief, and…

Is that what you’d call—

“I-I…” The hand shifted, squeezed his chest just a little, still locked in Katsuki’s grip. “I’ll be honest, I thought you were gonna do something more like…”

Now it was his own wrist that was tugged away, soon pressed against Deku’s abdomen and led down further, all the way to his crotch.

“Like... this.”

He’d known that this night would be full of new experiences, new territory, new sensations, but nothing, not even seeing Deku’s dick, could compare to the feeling of cupping his hand over it and just feeling.

My god... so warm, so firm, so big...!

Katsuki scooted forward, hand still against his boyfriend’s clothed crotch and reeling over the fact that Deku’s damn dick was right there. It was all he could do to bury his face in the crook of his neck, breathe in every bit he could find, and hope for more, more.

“You like that?”

“Love it.” He whispered, kissing up his boyfriend’s neck while palming, touching, squeezing harder and harder. “I know you have a good dick. I’ve seen it.”

“Don’t you dare tell me the onsen ruined the surprise for you.”

“Ruined?” He scoffed as the barest hint of a whimper escaped Deku’s lips. “Fuck, no. Just made me want it more.”

“Mm, okay... good to hear.”

Fingers shifted upwards, upward, just enough so that Katsuki could tease and tug at the hem of his boyfriend’s jeans. “So do I get to see it again?”

“Not even a kiss first, huh? For as sappy as you were just a minute ago, I had half a mind to think you wanted to take this slow.”

“Slow!” Katsuki sputtered. “For fuck’s sake, Deku, I’ve been waiting literal years to do this with you!”

“Then what’s a little longer?” His boyfriend grinned, and pulled Katsuki’s too-excited hand away.
“Let me make you feel good. Trust me, I know how.”

For as much as delay sounded like a literal death sentence, the idea of Deku taking care of him in this way wasn’t half bad either.

“Fine, then.” Katsuki kissed him on the neck again, mildly confused as to why his boyfriend hadn’t initiated one yet himself. “Show me what you’ve got, Mr. Experienced.”

“Little shit.” He shifted back a bit, just enough for Deku to get at his front again. “Well. I’d say shut up, but honestly?” The buttons were popped off one by one, too much time taken between each snap. “I think I’d rather hear you right now.”

You’re gonna kill me. You’re gonna kill me, and I’m gonna die, and—

There were lips on his chest, a tongue on his chest, and something smooth, round, and completely new.

...you didn’t. No... no fucking way. No way that you...

“Something wrong, Kacchan?” Too innocent. “You alright?” Fuck, more than alright.

“Don’t stop.” He insisted, falling into a sharp, sudden cry as Deku moved to suck at a nipple, teeth scraping and biting and that small bit of something only serving to send his heart shooting out of his chest. “K-Keep– keep going, dammit…!

“God, you’re so cute. So turned on from just this.” He switched sides, mouth replaced with a hand as Katsuki bucked in his lap, barely able to even see straight. “Like this, baby?”

Oh, keep calling me that… s’kinda hot.

“Mhm, y-yeah, s’really good…”

"Like my mouth?"

“I like it when it’s on me."

“Me too.” His boyfriend laughed, but drew back before Katsuki was ready for him to go. “Shit, I don’t think I’ve gotten the chance to mark up skin this smooth before.”

“This smooth, huh?” This time, he touched his own chest, an invitation for Deku to come back, come back. “Then you better take the chance while you’ve got it, cause I don’t know when the fuck I’m gonna get this done again.”

“Still can’t believe you went all out like this for tonight.” His boyfriend shook his head, smiling stupidly.

He shrugged. “S’not like it’s just for tonight. The earrings were kinda spur of the moment, but…”

“They’re kinda like mine.” Deku said, brushing over them. “Aside from the color, but… was that on purpose?”

“Would you mind if it was?”

“God, no.” He said, only to stop, to stare for just a moment. “But if you’re trying to match, I think you’re one piercing short now.”
Oh… oh, shit. He was actually serious about that…!

“I’d hope you’d have noticed by now, but in case you haven’t…” Deku leaned in closer, closer. “Let me show you.”

No warning, no mercy, only Deku’s mouth on his own and that tongue forcing its way further, further, the small piercing a too-thrilling change of pace from their usual makeout sessions.

I can’t believe you.

Hot, heavy, perfect.

Doing this just for me…?

“I hope you like your gift.” His boyfriend murmured, mouth open just enough for Katsuki to see the innocuous silver ball lying inside. “I had it done a few weeks ago. Kinda glad I didn’t have time to meet up with you much over your break, to be honest. They told me I was best off waiting a while before doing anything like this.” He clicked his tongue, and Katsuki swore that he could hear the small tick of the piercing against his teeth. “It’s too bad, really. I wanted to practice a little more before I got to see you again.”

“Practice?”

“Like you do with your dildo. Practice.” Deku said, kissing him again, again, the piercing pushing his senses to the limit. “Remember what I said I was good at?”

Fuck! Me!

“Course I do.” He managed, the memory of those confessions something that’d never managed to leave his head. “It was something, kinda like…” Katsuki grabbed Deku’s hand on impulse, and before he could stop, brought the tip of his finger past his lips and sucked, a genuine blush spreading over his boyfriend’s cheeks as he took another in alongside it. Ridges of age-old scars, battle worn skin, and the familiar taste of Deku, Deku swelled in his mouth as he kept going as best he could. Oral had been the one area he hadn’t quite managed to get a grasp on, but maybe tonight…

I could try again?

“That’s a good look on you.” His boyfriend said, less steady and more heated. “One more… c’mon, baby. Take one more for me?”

A third finger slipped into his mouth, and Katsuki nearly moaned at just that. Deku was pushing in, nearly choking him, but—

If I can take this, maybe a little something more won’t be a problem…!

He pulled at the hem of his boyfriend’s pants again, harder this time, and wasn’t stopped.

“Oh.”

Low, powerful.

“Is that really what you’d like to do?”

All he could do was nod, nod, nod and choke out a needy please…! as Deku pulled back his fingers and let him recover for a moment before practically diving towards his crotch, tearing at the button and zipper of his goddamn jeans all in the same moment. He’d never wanted, never needed this as
much as he did right now, needed to discover what Deku would really taste like in his mouth, needed to know, needed to feel everything and more.

I… I wanna…

“H-Here, lemme help."

With a quick lift of those strong hips and a swift tug, Deku got his pants past his perfect ass enough for Katsuki to maneuver them off the rest of the way. But for as much as his boyfriend’s cock showed his excitement, already hard and straining against his boxers, upon tossing the pants to the floor did he notice Deku’s sharp flinch as his legs instinctively snapped towards his chest in some attempt to hide the thick scars decorating bare skin.

Not today, fucker.

“Oi.” He hissed, hands pushing those knees back down against the bed. “Tell your self-conscious shithole of a brain to leave. We’ve been over this.”

“Aha, you’re right, right… force of habit.”

Seeing Deku a little nervous, though, almost helped to quell any of his own lingering anxieties.

We’re learning together, I think.

But Katsuki himself was sweating upon just seeing the outline of his boyfriend’s cock against his boxers, and he realized that yeah, maybe the shirt still half-clinging to his shoulders wasn’t helping.

Goodbye. He thought, throwing it on top of his boyfriend’s jeans. You’ve done your part.

“Are you gonna keep me waiting?” Deku asked, voice too coy for the flat-out grin on his face. “Come on, now. Don’t be shy.”

I ain’t shy!

His boyfriend lent his assistance again, lifting his hips in one graceful, fluid motion and letting Katsuki grab his boxers and pull, off in an instant with hardly a bump. And yeah, he’d expected Deku to be hard. Knew he was hard. Knew he was big, but this close?

...oh, fuck me.

Deku– Deku was thick.

I swear it wasn’t that big at the onsen. Was it just ‘cause of the water? Or is he more turned on now?!

“Deku.” He breathed, suddenly very glad he’d put on the lip balm. “I-I want you to show me how to do this.”

“Oh?”

“You’re the expert, right?” He said, on his hands and knees in front of Deku’s crotch. “If I’m gonna be the best, I gotta learn from the best.”

A soft curse fell from Deku’s lips, almost in some sort of awe. “You haven’t even felt what I can do yet.”
“Don’t care.” Katsuki said, and reached for his boyfriend’s dick for the first time in his life. “I trust you.”

’Sides. If I go first, I’ll come in a heartbeat.

Just one tug, just one squeeze, just one dip of Katsuki’s head down to lick at the head of Deku’s cock had his boyfriend entirely on board, though.

So teach me, babe. Teach me.

“Do that again.” He heard, low and heady. “Hand on the base… yes, right there, perfect."

I’m gonna die.

“Take it further, if you can— just a little at a time, just like that…”

Katsuki had never felt so full in his life. Sucking, swallowing, moving on pure instinct with a hint of Deku’s directions guiding him along had never been so good.

But I… I-I dunno if I can…

He knew he had too much of a gag reflex. Knew he’d need to train it out. But fuck, he’d try his best to stay on for as long as he possibly could.

“You’re doing good, baby, doing good… h-hah, yes, I like it when you use your tongue right there…!”

...I’m doing good? Really?

Katsuki’s head bobbed up, down, up, down, trying his best to go even just a little further. It wasn’t his fault Deku’s cock might be more than he could handle, wasn’t his fault that he was inexperienced, wasn’t his fault that the world was spinning, spinning with a haze that had to be due to pure lust. But Deku kept talking, talking, and Katsuki swore every word was more incentive to keep going.

Fuck, how far am I in…?

“Hey, you can—”

I can do more, I can take more…

“Kacchan, you’re gonna cho—”

Come on, come on…

“Katsuki, stop!”

W-What!?

But he listened, drew back with a sharp, hoarse cough, silvery spit trailing from his lips to Deku’s cock for a split second before falling.

Am I not good enough?

“Hey, hey. Need you to breathe for a minute.” Deku instructed, pulling him close. “You’re good, I promise. Just relax for me.”
“D-Did I do something– s-something wrong?” He got out, heart racing, racing. “I was just– it felt good, and you sounded good, so I thought I was doing…”

One look at Deku’s face, though, and he fell quiet.

“You… Kacchan, you were literally choking.” Deku said, and kissed him on the forehead, still holding him close. “You didn’t do anything wrong, it’s all good! It did feel good for what was probably your first time. But you were way too red in the face, and I just didn’t want you to– t-to—”

His boyfriend broke off into a soft laugh, and hugged him close. “Look. It’s a good way to go out in theory, but I’d rather not see you legitimately asphyxiate on my dick, Kacchan.”

“I—!” He started, but the utter rawness– and not necessarily the good kind– spoke louder than words. “O-Oh.”

Well, fuck.

“That’s, uh. E-Em—” He coughed, not sure if his face was hotter because of the lack of oxygen or utter shame. “K-Kinda embarrassing.”

“You’re fine, you’re fine! I promise.” Deku assured him yet again, and for whatever reason, he felt more comfortable than he probably should’ve. “You really couldn’t tell, though?”

“No…”

I guess I did get, uh. Into it.

“I mean, seeing you go to town on my dick was fun, but you’ve definitely got some technique to work on.” Deku elaborated with almost too much excitement. “With that in mind… guess it just means we’ll have to get some extra practice in, yeah?”

“Like, b-back when we made out for the first time…?”

“Just like that!” Deku nodded, some sultry look hidden beneath his enthusiastic nod. “Just like that… and if you want, maybe we could start off the lesson plan with a demonstration…?”

That shouldn’t sound so sexy.

But just like that, his boyfriend had managed to turn every bit of humiliation into something far more fun. Deku slid off the bed and beckoned Katsuki to the edge, on his knees beside the bed and comfortable between Katsuki’s legs. And if the position alone wasn’t enough to get him hard again, the gentle encouragement he was met with when he moved to take off his pants definitely was.

“You’re gonna tell me if anything’s too much, right?”

“‘Course I am, like I always do.”

“Alright, alright.” Deku nodded, and just as Yaoyorozu had predicted, somehow managed to get his skinny jeans off in two seconds flat.

Magic.

“How is even your dick cute. This is unfair.” Deku complained as he helped Katsuki out of his boxers, thumbing at it through green fabric.

“You sayin’ it’s small?”
“No, no! It’s perfect!” His boyfriend shook his head, and finally threw his boxers into the rest of the discard pile. “Just like the rest of you.”

_Ugh._ “You _sap._”

“Like you’re one to talk, _Mr. I-Want-You-To-Touch-Me-On-My-Heart._” Deku snorted. “What, did you expect something different?”

“_Gee, I dunno._” Katsuki groaned. “Maybe something hotter? Maybe me not physically choking on your dick?”

“That part wasn’t my fault!”

“...we’ll go with _sure._”

But Deku leaned in close, kissed a long, soft trail up the inside of his thighs, and stopped just before he reached his cock. “You said you want something a little hotter, right?”

_When he talks like that..._

“Kacchan... if nothing else.” He paused, and looked up, _knowing_ he had Katsuki completely under his spell. “I aim to please.”

_Oh. Please._

“O-Oh.” He fumbled, unable to tear his eyes away from his boyfriend’s face. “Then what are you waiting for, huh?”

Deku cocked his head, thought for a moment, and pulled his shirt off too. All he offered Katsuki was a warm smile, an _I didn’t think you’d wanna be the only naked one in the room_, and another line of kisses along his thighs, the contact good but not _enough._

“Hurry it up.” Katsuki huffed, reaching for Deku’s hair with half a mind to pull him closer. “If you’re supposedly so great at this blowjob thing, then I’m starting to get concerned over what your standards are if _this_ is how you’re going about it.”

“It’s called foreplay, Kacchan!”

“Didn’t we already do that? Like, for fucking _years!_?”


“Oh my god, I never said—”

“Boo-fucking-hoo. Guess you’ll lose your oral virginity with an ungrateful attitude.” His boyfriend let out a long, dramatic sigh, and Katsuki’s his dick— carefully, of course. “Not like I’m about to give you the best— no, the _only_— blowjob you’ve ever had.”

Nonetheless, Deku continued, falling quiet and taking the head of his cock between his lips, soft and tender and with so much more _grace_ than Katsuki ever could’ve expected.

“It’s been too long... I missed doing this.” His boyfriend said, the volume of the room falling to a low hush. “Mm... god, yes.”

All he could do was look on, _feel_, and try his best to stay calm in the flood of sensation rushing his
way. If even just Deku’s lips were perfect, with just the right pressure and just the right timing, then he could hardly imagine what everything else would be like.

“Y-Y’know, I… take back what I said.” Katsuki said, forcibly keeping his voice from pitching up at another tug, another move. “You’re not bad.”

“Not bad?” Deku repeated, eyes never leaving Katsuki’s crotch. “Baby, I… I had a bit of a reputation in high school for a reason.”

“A reputation?” Harder, harder… “T-Thought you were only sucking Red Riot’s dick in high school.”

“Well…”

Actually, stop talking. The more you’re yapping, the less you’re blowing.

“He was the only one I did more than once, anyways. It was, uh. Just an incident for a week or two, when I went around and b—”

“Y’know what?” Katsuki tugged his boyfriend’s head forward, and Deku’s face nearly smacked against his dick. “I’ve officially decided that I don’t care. I’m the only one you’re gonna be blowing now, right?”

And just like that, something changed.

“…right.” Deku nodded, some new light dawning over his features. “Only you.”

*Only me.*

“And you’re gonna do a damn good job of it, aren’t you?”

“The best job.”

*I’d kiss you if you weren’t down there right now.*

“Then quit talking.” Katsuki said, and gave his hair another pull. “And start sucking.”

No room for worries, for fears, for anyone but them now.

*Just us. Only us.*

Deku started again, put his tongue into it, and *shit—*

*Almost forgot about the damn piercing…!*

His breath hitched, hips bucked forward, and a long, shiver ran through his whole-ass body at the simple sensation of hot metal on warm skin. It was good, so good, and his boyfriend knew it.

“Do that– t-that thing again.” He begged, drowning in the way Deku kept a simple and steady pace, drawing out each and every moan with *purpose.* “Oh… hng, right there, k-keep going…!”

“Like that?”

“W-What…. w-what the hell do you– s-shit– think!?”

The response came in the form of Deku sinking deep, then slowly, *slowly* pulling back, that damn
piercing running along every spot he didn’t know he had.

“Speed it up… just a little.” Katsuki asked, more a plea than a request. “Want you. More of you.”

“Mm, so what should you say?”

Katsuki’s head was spinning, spinning, and all he could sputter out was a breathless _please_. And again, his boyfriend complied, a little faster, harder, _rouger_ than before. “God, yes…!”

“Love it when you talk like that.” Deku mouthed around him, hardly breaking rhythm. “Keep it up. I wanna hear your voice, baby.”

Anything you want. Anything for you.

If Deku’s tongue was a sin, Katsuki was going straight to hell. Up, down, up, down, then drawn out, _out—!_ … and down, a desperate, awful, _needy_ cry tearing through his throat.

“Keep going, k-keep—”

Another stroke,

“Please, babe, I need… h-holy _shit_!”

Another lick,

“Y-You’re— I-I’m, I’m, I’m…!”

Another rough, teasing, drawn out tug that left Katsuki crumbling from the friction and trying not to cry, really, _really_ trying not to cry, but—

“P-Please… please, Deku, _please!_”

Fat tears were streaming, streaming down his face and into Deku’s hair, but even though his boyfriend had, _had_ to have noticed, didn’t do a thing to remedy it.

Feels so, feels so—!

He’d deny the begged, pleaded, broken whimper that fell from his mouth for the rest of his life as Deku worked him good, worked him harder, worked him _better and better and better and better_. And maybe he’d be ashamed of how long he’d lasted, in retrospect. Maybe he’d be disappointed that it hardly took one, _maybe_ two minutes for him to be reduced to an absolute mess, but with those flushed, freckled cheeks and smooth, perfect lips wrapped tight around his cock, who the hell could blame him?

“Deku— _please_, D-Deku, I’m gonna—!”

I lo…

“Gonna what?” His boyfriend asked, a knowing, _knowing_ glint in his eyes. “Use your grown-up words, _Katsuki_. ”

Ka… Ka…

His boyfriend’s tongue swirled around the head and that piercing, that damn, _damn_ piercing, ran across the tip, hot and smooth and shattering any and _every_ bit of flimsy restraint he had left.
Deku, Deku, Deku, Deku…!

“Fuck!” He cried, a choke and a sob and a laugh wracking his body in a mess of pleasure and frantic need. “D-Deku— Izuku, I—I—!”

Toes curled forward, hands twisted into rumpled sheets, and his head tipped back as he came with a violent, desperate, *primal* scream that had to have woken up the neighbors. Tears trickled down his fucked-out face and blurred his vision to a watery haze, but when he finally managed to look down at his *amazing* boyfriend again, Katsuki nearly came again on the spot.

*You’ve… you’ve gotta be…*

Because Deku— *Deku*— was still patiently on his knees, one hand wrapped around his own dick and covered in cum that had to be his own, and if the thought that Deku had come just from blowing *Katsuki* wasn’t already incredible enough, his mouth— his *mouth*—

*Oh… oh my god. Oh my god.*

He froze.

*Oh. My. God.*

Sitting in Deku’s mouth was Katsuki’s *own* cum, streaked back across his tongue and smeared over the small, silvery, oh-so-innocent piercing in the center. Only for a moment did he get to see it, though, before Deku ran his shaky tongue over his lips, swallowed, and got to his feet.

“How is that… “How the *fuck* is that— i-is that even a *question!*?”

And Deku laughed, *laughed*, and hugged him. “I’m gonna go with yes, then?”

“Yes. ‘Course it’s yes.”

*You… haven’t done me wrong yet.*

“Good to hear. Like I said, I’m a *little* out of practice, but…” He paused, stopped, and met Katsuki with the warmest gaze he’d seen all day. “This was… this was really, really nice. To be able to do with a… um…”

*What’s got him all—*

“Just, nice to be able to do this with a boyfriend. That’s, aha… that’s all.” Deku he shook his head, pulled Katsuki close, and didn’t let go. “This is what matters now. *You’re* what matters.”

“‘Course I’m what matters, dumbass.” Katsuki wrapped his arms around his boyfriend’s bare waist, lazy fingers tracing over beautiful scar after beautiful scar. “And right… right back at you.”

*You matter to me. So, so much.*

“Were you scared at all?”

*Huh?*

“I mean, you’ve seen me naked before.” Katsuki blurted out with a slight giggle, head pressed
against Deku’s slightly-sweaty chest.

“But this is different, y’know? When it’s more… touchy-feely. That sort of thing.”

“Why are you getting all shy now? Just a minute ago you were blowing me to pieces!”

“W-Well, it’s just!” Deku stammered, then sighed. “Okay, okay, I’ll admit it. I was nervous.”

“You were nervous!?” Katsuki’s jaw dropped, absolutely aghast. “Why? I’m a– well, was– a total virgin not an hour ago, and you’re like some sort of sex god!”

“I… uh, I just wanted to make your first time good enough. Something to remember.” He said, that blush way too innocent to belong on those damn cheeks.

“Well, I can assure you that I’m not gonna forget choking on your damn dick.”

“We can work on that!” His boyfriend exclaimed. “I-I just, y’know, wanted to make sure you were feeling good! Especially ‘cause it’s your birthday and all that… ah, yeah.”

Katsuki could feel something vulnerable, something exposed in his voice, but decided that now...

Now’s not the time to worry about the past.

“It was amazing.” He smiled. “We should probably get, uh, clean now though.”

“Ugh, yeah. I’ll run the shower.” Deku groaned. “I’d rather just pass out in bed with you right now, but we should wash off. Clean is… is good.”

“I think I need to take care of these earrings, too? They gave me directions.”

“Right, right. I’ll help you if you need.”

So natural, so easy, and so unlike all the hardship waiting outside the door.

That doesn’t matter, though. Not right now.

“I’ll grab my overnight bag, I left it by the front door when we came in.”

School was starting back up in a few days for his third year– his last year– but right now?

Nothing beyond these walls matters. Er, well. Maybe my friends. Nothing other than them, though!

“Water’s warm, Kacchan!” His boyfriend called out as he dropped his stuff in the bedroom. “You can go first. I’m gonna throw some clean sheets on the bed.

But when he bumped into Deku on the way out, a huge, happy grin spread wide over his face on its own volition.

“Didn’t you say you bought a cake?” He asked.

“Oh, that. Eh, it’ll be better off as breakfast.” Deku snorted. “I’m not going to work tomorrow. They are not calling me in. I deserve a damn day off.”

“Damn right you do.”

They stood there for a minute longer, though, and all Katsuki could think of upon seeing the tip of his boyfriend’s tongue was how good he’d looked on it.
I came in his goddamn mouth. What the fuck…!

“I love you, Kacchan.” Deku kissed him on the forehead, bringing him back to somewhere a little less horny. “And I’ll love you even more when you smell nice. Go shower.”

“Yeah, yeah, love you too.”

And for as casual as it was, he meant it. They both meant it.

What we have, right here?

He stood there for a moment, watching as his boyfriend went to sort the discarded clothing into neater piles with legs still visibly trembling beneath him.

Deku might be my first, but this?

Katsuki laughed-- a stupid, simple, happy laugh.

This is something special, I think.

Chapter End Notes

ILL BE HONEST I WAS SHAKING WRITING THIS I
IVE WAITED 200 FUCKING THOUSAND WORDS TO WRITE SOME
GODDAMN SMUT AND YEAH THEY JUST DID SOME SUCC BUT BJS ARE
AMAZING AND I HOPE YALL ENJOYED OH HECK
Thank u so much to @sabasama for betaing for me this week in my usual beta’s
absence!!!!!!
and the things!!! my twitter, ALL THE AMAZING ART, and the playlist for this fic!!!
and kee, the whole makeover part is still ur fault

EDIT 5/8: probably not gonna be a chapter next week from a combo of me needing a
break and finals!!! but i have a small idea for a short scene related to this chapter so there
might be something!! (it'd be in its own fic tho but in a series with this one) but no
promises theres gonna be something!!! definitely be back the week after tho and ILY
ALL YALL SM
“Hey… you still sleeping?”

Sleeping...?

“O-Oh, sorry if I woke you up… just wanted to know if you were alright?”

Izuku blinked, his room still dim despite flickers of light trickling in through mostly-closed blinds. Soft sheets were draped across his shoulders, soft hair tickled his neck, and soft skin—

Well.

“Mmm, Kacchan…” He murmured, only curling closer around his boyfriend’s smaller form. “G’morning.”

“Morning, my ass. It’s noon.”

...oh. Whoops.

“Shoot, sorry…” Izuku apologized. “Are you, uh, hungry? Need me to make something?”

“Did it myself earlier.” Katsuki admitted, but only pressed further against him, his back fitting against Izuku’s chest way, way too perfectly. “Came back ‘n you were still sleeping. Hope you don’t mind that I used some off your eggs.”

“Why are you apologizing? Fuck, I…” An arm caressed Katsuki’s chest, running up and down, up and down as gentle as could be. “You’re at my place, s’my job to take care of that… didn’t mean to be a shitty boyfriend.”

He still feels so good, though… I love touching him, even if it’s just like this.

“Don’t worry about it. You looked tired as shit.” Katsuki said, and okay, maybe he’d been a little tired. “Still hot, though, which is stupid. No one should allowed to be hot when they’re sleeping.”

And at this bleary, too-early hour on his day off, all Izuku could think about was how bad he wanted Katsuki to keep saying that, keep saying that.

Tell me I’m hot. Tell me I’m beautiful.

“Mm, and are you really allowed to tell me that this early…?” He grinned, hand running up to cup at Katsuki’s chest and eliciting a soft no fair from his boyfriend. “C’mon, baby... we’ve still got some time, right?”
“You’ve barely been awake for a two minutes, and you’re already horny again.” Katsuki remarked, but did nothing to stop Izuku from idly folding his chest.

“Don’t tell me you’re any better.” He murmured, thumbing over a nipple with one hand and tracing the outline of his boyfriend’s hip with another. “Did you have anything else with your eggs? Maybe an extended trip to the bathroom?”

He wouldn’t have asked if he’d thought he was wrong– and just like he’d anticipated, Katsuki huffed, mumbled something incomprehensible under his breath, and urged Izuku to keep his hand on his chest for a while and play.

“Say that again for me?” Izuku asked, squeezing his chest again. “ Couldn’t hear you the first time.”

“Just… y’know.” Katsuki stumbled, and a part of Izuku wondered if he was glad he was facing away right now. “Woke up. Morning wood. As it goes.”

Ugh, god. He’s so stupidly cute.

“Should’ve let me take care of it.” He let go of his chest, fingertips trailing down to tease tender skin near Katsuki’s stomach. “I don’t want you having to use your hand if I’m around, baby.”

His boyfriend near melted into his side at the touch, and quiet, so quiet came a soft sigh of yes, touch me. Touch me more, more, more…

I could stay here all day, just doing this.

And he would’ve stayed there if his stomach hadn’t thought that now was the perfect time to let loose a long, low rumble and thus, send his boyfriend into a fit of laughter and a go get food, dumbass. Izuku couldn’t object at that point, and soon enough, the two found themselves back in the kitchen, rummaging around for something to eat.

“Cereal? Really? C’mon, Deku. You know that shit has no nutritional value.”

“It’s good for the soul, Kacchan! Trust me.”

“That’s your excuse for every bit of garbage you shove in your body.” Katsuki raised an eyebrow, and Izuku could feel the stare boring holes through his back. “I’ll make you some eggs if you stop pouring that crap in the bowl right now.”

“Fuck you.” Izuku pouted and dumped the rest of the box in the bowl, dry pellets rattling on the ceramic. “I’m having my post-coital cheerios, and that’s that.”

“Suit yourself.” His boyfriend shrugged. “Have fun being hungry in a couple hours.”

“Are you really complaining? All I’m gonna be hungry for then is your dick.”

He let himself smile a crooked smile when Katsuki didn’t reply for a long, long moment. Izuku knew he’d won this time. Why would anyone turn down his ability, especially in combination with his new piercing?

You can’t get mad at me for eating this when—

“…so, would dick also be considered good for the soul?” Katsuki said, arms folded across his chest. “Because if so, I still think you’re full of shit.”

Come on!
“Fine.” Izuku grumbled, dumping milk into the bowl and grabbing a spoon before sitting himself flat on a barstool. “Guess I’m not gonna suck your dick again today. Have it your way.”

“Well…” Katsuki slid into the seat next to him, hand coming up to rest on Izuku’s barely-clothed thigh. “Guess that won’t be too much of an issue, considering I was planning on sucking yours. Or did you forget all about that practice you promised? Don’t worry, I’m gonna do my best not to choke on my food this time.” A thumb swiped over his lip, and his boyfriend kissed his cheek just before leaning in to whisper in his ear. “You had a little something there, babe.”

Oh. That’s hot.

“Are you wanting to spend this morning just teasing me?” Izuku said, the cereal long forgotten in favor of cupping Katsuki’s face in his hands and kissing him again and again, making damn sure that his boyfriend wouldn’t forget his new piercing in the process. “I didn’t know you had all this in you, Kacchan…”

“What can I say?” Another kiss, another hand straying too close to Izuku’s crotch. “I learned from the best.”

“Mm, now you’re just trying to suck up to me.” He said, only for Katsuki to snort and palm at Izuku’s crotch.

“I think suck off would be more appropriate.”

“That so?” Izuku pressed his hand over top of his boyfriend’s, urging him to continue. “Really up to giving it another go already?”

“God, you have no idea.”

Who gave you… “Who gave you the right to sound so good.”

And oh, Katsuki did not have to let that little bit of tongue poke out between soft (moisturized?) lips and give him the most lust-filled stare he’d seen in years. “I dunno, but…”

Keep talking, keep talk—

“Maybe you’ll find out when you finish eating.”

Just like that, his boyfriend got out of the seat beside him, leaving Izuku with hunger and a hard-on.

He blinked.

“W-Wait, Kacchan, what are you—”

“Talk to me after you’ve had a vegetable!” Katsuki called out before proceeding to step into Izuku’s room, shut the door, and lock it behind him. “Fruit works too!”

Izuku stared at the door, mouth hanging open like a dumb fish, and tried— really, really tried— to comprehend what had happened.

Was… was I just…

“So, wait. Lemme get this straight.” Kirishima started, some stupefied look on his face. “He cockblocked you over cheerios?”
“Right when things were getting good, too.” Izuku grumbled, and slumped back into the plasticy stadium seat. “Yeah, yeah, I listened. Ate a banana. Some grapes. He came out of my room eventually, and we spent the rest of the afternoon working on blowjob technique.”

*Seeing him wearing my shirt walking out of my room a couple weeks ago was nice, though. And seeing his mouth on my dick, even if he’s still… really bad at oral.*

“Damn, dude.” Kirishima laughed and turned towards his girlfriend. “Ochako. Would you do that if I was eating like shit?”

“What, withhold oral from you?” She rolled her eyes. “Doubt it. I mean, I think we both tend to eat fairly healthy.”

“In theory!”

“Why would theory matter if it’s not gonna happen? Besides, we’ve got…”

Izuku listened to his friends continue to chat as the familiar stadium grew louder and louder. He hadn’t made it to last year’s sports festival because of his assignment at the earthquake disaster site, but from what he’d heard, it wasn’t anything much to talk about. Katsuki wound up failing in the second qualifier on a technicality (he wouldn’t go into specifics, but Izuku assumed he was too embarrassed to talk about it) and the final set of matches had been relatively uneventful.

This year, though, things were already shaping up to be different. The crowd had filled out the stadium to its brim, the opening statement had been said, and the third years were gearing up to get moving. They were all waiting on the announcement for what the first qualifier would consist of, but by the way all the students were being shifted off to the sides of the area and the teachers near the center, Izuku could assume that they’d be changing up the terrain a little.

*Last time I came, they started off with that race to the top of the hill thing…? It was pretty cool. Wonder if they’ll top that.*

But when the terrain *did* shift to some strange part-rocky, part-muddy, part-tree...ey… stuff, and the students were all handed some sort of large, limp noodle-looking thing, Izuku wasn’t so sure.

“And for this year’s first round…” Came Present Mic’s recognizable voice from booming speakers. “We’ll be having a free-for-all, beat-em-up event! Each student has been given a high-tec foam rod that they’ll use as their ‘weapon’, and with it, they’ll attempt to make contact with as many students as they can within the ten-minute time limit! Every successful hit will increase the student’s score by one point, but look out! Being hit in return will cause the student to lose a point! The top forty students will advance onto the next round, and…”

Izuku groaned.

*Really?*

“So in short, what they’re saying is…” Ochako frowned, eyes rolling to the back of her head. “They’re gonna have the students run around and smack each other with pool noodles in a mud pit for ten minutes.”

Kirishima wrinkled his nose. “Gross.”

“I’m hardly gonna be able to see Kacchan in that mess.” Izuku complained, arms crossed over his chest. “Dammit.”
“Not being shy about who you want to win this time, huh?” Ochako teased.

“He’s my boyfriend! Why would I root against him!?”

“Just poking fun at you.” She laughed. “I wanna see him and Yaoyorozu succeed, too. It’d mean we didn’t do a half-bad job as mentors. Right, babe?”

Kirishima nodded. “Not to brag, but I think we did a pretty good job! Even though their skills are being used for a contest like, uh… this.”

“Kacchan’s gotta make it to the second round. He will, because I know I’m gonna get to see him in the spotlight.” Izuku grumbled. “Not just in this mess.”

He was right.

Izuku was able to catch sight of boyfriend soon after the match began, flying through the air with twists and turns he knew all too well and making that goddamn noodle look like a weapon of mass destruction. If grace had a name, it was Katsuki, because never had someone managed to make something so ridiculous seem like a professional sport.

“Whipped.”

Wha—

“Look at you. You’re whipped as hell.” A cheeky grin on Ochako’s face pulled him away from the match, if only for a moment. “I don’t remember the last time I saw you smile that big, Izuku.”

“It’s a good look on you.” Kirishima added, leaving Izuku to burn brighter and brighter. “Aw, don’t be embarrassed! I’m sure he’d find it cute.”

“He’s ‘sposed to find me hot. Not cute.” He mumbled into his hands, flushed. “Is this tongue piercing cute? I don’t think so.”

“It’s cute that you got it because of him.” Ochako unhelpfully supplied.

“You know what? We’re not talking right now. Not doing this.”

I’m hot. He thinks I’m hot. He definitely thinks I’m hot.

But he watched the match to the end, kept his eyes on Katsuki, (mostly because he was in the lead, absolutely) and clapped louder than the rest of the people around him upon seeing his boyfriend finish first in the qualifier. With his pool noodle held high and a wide grin on his face, Izuku was sure he was looking at the very symbol of victory.

C’mon, baby… c’mon, next round’s yours too, you got this!

“...and, you’re mumbling again! Y’know, that’s a little—” Ochako paused, and mouthed a very clear ‘G-A-Y’ in Izuku’s direction. In return, he made a point to ignore her for the rest of the second qualifier– which wound up being two rounds of a 5-person baton relay– and watched as Katsuki succeeded in leading his team to victory and moved onto the final contest.

“At least the tournament’s still normal.” Kirishima said, inspecting the final contenders. “Hm… got some familiar faces, with that Todoroki kid, Bakugou, Yaoyorozu, and, uh… earthquakes? Always forget his name.”

Ochako beat him to the punch. “Shindou.”

_Utsushimi…? Oh, Camie!

“That’s one of Kacchan’s friends!” Izuku smiled. “She’s a little weird, but Kacchan really seems to like her.”

“As much as you like saying Kacchan’s name?”

“Ochako, shut up!”

“Shh, they’re announcing the bracket!”

The three of them fell silent at that, and just watched for a moment as the final sixteen students were allowed onto the finals, consisting of the two top teams from each round of the relay race. Katsuki was paired off against some kid that seemed an awful lot like Kirishima for the first round and won fairly easily, but not without a brutal onslaught of explosions to break down the other kid’s defenses.

“You planning on doing anything after this, Izuku?”

_Maybe, maybe…_ “I’m thinking I’ll see if Kacchan’s free.” He murmured, watching Katsuki rise into a victory pose. “Might treat him extra special if he wins.”

“Oh, _extra_ special?” Ochako giggled. “Even though he was a little shit last time?”

“I’ve got some ideas.” Izuku steepled his hands between his chin, trying to pick up on what was going on in the match below. “Yeah, he was a shit last time, but…”

_I’d like to take things up a notch, if we can. If he’s okay with it. If he’d be down with me actually fucking his—_

“…a-anyways!” He shook his head, tearing his mind away from the gorgeous image of Katsuki below him, legs spread wide and near begging for something _inside_. “He’s hasn’t won yet. So I’ll just keep an eye on things!”

She laughed.

_Did I say something?_

“It’s kinda crazy.” Ochako ran a hand through her hair, fond eyes meeting Izuku’s own. “Seeing you like this.”

_Huh? “Like what?”_

“Like, um…” She trailed off, a finger tapping against her lip. “Being yourself, I guess? Letting yourself love? Not shutting everyone else out to maintain that ‘I’ll be alone forever because my only purpose in life is being a hero’ bullshit?”

“It’s not bullshit, it’s—” He started, then fell quiet. “I-I mean, I’m a hero before anything else, but… I can be other things too. I think.”

She gave him one last, long look, squeezed his shoulder, and nodded. “I _know_ you can be.” Ochako paused, and directed his focus back down towards the field. “Well, let’s watch the rest of the fights, yeah? Yaoyorozu’s coming up in the second round soon, I think, so you better watch too!”
“I’m watching, I’m watching!”

“Good.” Ochako folded her arms over her chest. “And take note of what an awesome mentor I am while you’re at it!”

“Pfft, you say that like I’m not a good mentor too.”

“Izuku, you haven’t even had an intern!”

“Well, not yet.” He groaned. “But I’ve taught Kacchan a lot when we go out to train together!”

“Oh, is that what they’re calling sucking dick these days?”

“N-No, that’s– that’s afterwards!”

Izuku buried his head in his hands, peered out at the field from between his fingers, and watched as the next pair of students that weren’t Katsuki entered the arena. But even through that fight, and onto the first one in the second round, only one person stayed fixed in Izuku’s mind.

One down, three to go. You’ve got this, Kacchan…! Hardly anyone comes close to you out there. You’ll win, and I’ll give you the best prize you could earn.

For as proud as Ochako and Kirishima probably were of their interns, Izuku couldn’t help but feel as if some part of he and Katsuki’s training was helping him ascend towards his goal. He was doing good, so good, and just watching him blow past his second, near-nameless opponent and onto the semifinals was almost enough to get him hard again.

Almost? Izuku snuck a glance at his own crotch, and upon realizing that his little– or not so little–problem was starting to show, a rush of heat swept through his face.

Does this count as almost?

With a small, inward sigh, Izuku realized that this whole situation wasn’t so different from the first time he’d seen Katsuki participate in the sports festival. Hard, hot, and unable to tear his eyes off of his gorgeous boyfriend, but this time…

...this time, I don’t have to feel like shit about it.

He didn’t want to relive that year. Didn’t want to think about how he’d run off in the middle of Katsuki’s fight to relieve himself in the grungy-ass U.A. bathrooms, didn’t want to think about how waist-deep he’d been in absolute denial and guilt.

I told myself then that I wouldn’t pursue anything. Told myself I wasn’t feeling this because of him, and that everything I was feeling was just because I was…

Izuku swallowed.

I was afraid.

But now, looking on at Katsuki’s radiant form as he left the stage of his fight, all he could feel was pride. Not shame, not desperation, not just simple arousal.

Not anymore. We… we have each other, now.

The quarterfinals passed by quickly, for the most part. Yaoyorozu fought against Katsuki’s friend, Camie, who wound up winning in a surprise turn of events. Izuku wasn’t completely sure what she’d
done to win it through the haze of illusions and moving figures she’d created, but her win meant she’d be put against Katsuki in the semifinals.

_Wonder how he’ll do against her… hm. Guess we’ll see._

On the other bracket was Todoroki, who he vaguely recalled Katsuki mentioning on a few occasions (they were friends too, right?) against the earthquakes kid. Somewhere in the back of his mind lay an odd sense of déjà vu— Katsuki had fought against Shindou and Todoroki when he was a first year, and now…

_He’ll be up against one of them again. Interesting._

First, though, his boyfriend would have to make it to the finals.

“Camie’s quirk is… hm. I don’t know how she’ll do against Kacchan.” Izuku cocked his head. “I don’t know much about it, but it seems like she’s been taking more of a mental, kinda, messing-with-your-head route? And with Kacchan being so physical when he fights…”

_This is either going to go great or awful for him. Depends on how well Kacchan can keep his head on straight in the midst of whatever she comes up with._

“ Illusions…” Kirishima echoed, frowning. “I could see her being a good undercover hero. Close combat must be difficult, though.”

“She _is_ a third year, though.” Ochako reminded them. “And that means that she’s had to have figured out ways to go about close combat, to some degree. I mean, look at me! My quirk’s suited to rescuing, but you _know_ I can—”

“Pin me to the floor in a heartbeat.” No hesitation– Kirishima had responded on reflex. “Trust me, I… yeah. I know.”

“Mm, more than willing to teach you again if you forget.” Her voice dipped a little, if only for a moment, and with some startling realization Izuku realized that that must be what _he_ sounded like when he and Katsuki flirted.

_Oh._

“T-They’re, um, about to start!” Izuku said, attempting to pull his friends from their sudden bout of low, teasing conversation. “Camie looks confident out there— I suppose she has too, a-aha, cause what’s she gonna do if she’s not? Oh, but Kacchan does too…! Of course he does, of course he does, what am I saying? A-Ah, um…”

“Izuku, you’re rambling.”

“Right, right! Sorry, I must’ve, um… gone off again. My bad.”

If the atmosphere wasn’t already awkward enough, it was now.

“We’re watching the match, don’t worry.” Kirishima assured him. “Sorry for _going off_ ourselves.”

“No no, you’re fine!” His hands splayed out in front of his face, waving frantically. “I don’t think I’m much better, so…”

“Let’s just watch.” Ochako interrupted, settling the conversation. “Look, they’re starting.”

And sure enough, there they were, circling each other in the area like a pair of predators looking for
the moment to strike. Izuku wasn’t sure why Katsuki was so hesitant— were it him in his situation, taking Camie out would be a one-two punch, getting her out of the rink before she had the chance to distract him. But Katsuki seemed to be playing it safe for some reason, all eyes on every twitch and flicker his opponent made.

_They’re friends, so… they’ve gotta know how each other work to some degree. I have no idea how much they’ve trained together, nor how advanced Camie’s illusion work is, but—_

Izuku blinked, and there were two.

_Two Camies? I guess that’s reasonable enough, but still… oh. Shit._

That two became four, then eight, then sixteen, and Katsuki was left to wander like a kid lost in a crowd amongst the field of all-too-lifelike illusions. Maybe his boyfriend knew where the source was, and maybe there was some hidden tell that could only be seen from up close, but from afar they were absolutely indiscernible.

_At least Kacchan has loads of area attacks at his disposal. If he needed to, he could just sweep the field with explosions and hit every one. Inefficient, but possibly effective? I… I dunno, though. He’s smart. I’ll just wait and see how he handles this._

Katsuki was still careful, though, not aiming for any one in particular. If he turned and hit the wrong one, Camie could likely use it as a distraction to get him from behind. If he sent out a sweeping attack, then it’d be less force, but potentially damaging to himself.

_He… he didn’t back himself into a corner, did he? No, no… Kacchan wouldn’t do that._

Then, with a start, he realized.

_If Camie moves first, Kacchan’s won. He can react faster than she can. That said, is he just waiting her out? Is he trying to wear her down? Is there a time limit, a capacity, a maximum amount of illusions she can hold up for any period of time?_

Somewhere in the background, Izuku thought that his friends said something else about his analysis. Maybe he was mumbling again. Maybe he just had a certain look in his eyes.

_Who cares. This is too damn interesting…!_

The illusions were closing in— slowly, slowly, but Katsuki had the ability to launch over them if need be.

_What’s he going to do, what’s he gonna—_

Izuku froze.

...you’re shitting me.

Green. Green. Green, in a field of browns and blues. Green, not like grass, but an rich teal he knew all too well. Green, the color that stained ever newspaper article and every TV screen the moment he arrived on the scene.

_N-No, no, you can’t—fuck, you can’t…!_

His legs moved before he realized it, bolting from his seat and nearly launching himself up and over the stadium seats as he raced towards the set of stairs leading towards the balcony. She couldn’t—
No way. No, no. You’re kidding me.

Every nerve, every muscle, every inch of Katsuki’s body had gone numb.

That’s not Deku.

Earlier, Camie had vanished from the field in a snap, and Katsuki hadn’t been able to tell where she went in the mess of illusions she’d conjured, but now—

I can’t believe this is your strategy. Using him against me? Making me fight him?

A small part of him couldn’t believe how lifelike her illusions had become, but for as much as he was trying to focus, focus, it was harder than it should be with that staring down at him.

I can do this, Katsuki assured himself, balling only slightly-trembling fists and shaking out stiff limbs. He’s not real. It’s just Camie, and we’re gonna have a very, very long talk about this afterwards…!

Vaguely, he noticed that the surrounding illusions had begun to flicker out over the field, leaving them alone. But Not-Deku stepped forward again, this time shifting from his hero suit into something casual— a look he almost knew better at this point. That smile didn’t belong on his lips, warm eyes didn’t belong on his face, and—

“Kacchan?”

The stadium was probably roaring, chatter and cheer erupting in the background as Katsuki’s stomach twisted itself into knots.

I have to punch it. I have to kill it. I have to end this, right— right now!

“Are you okay?” Not-Deku tilted his head, reaching out a hand to him. “Everything alright?”

“Shut up.” He finally stuttered out, nails digging into sweaty palms. “You’re not him. You’re not!”

All I have to do is move. Fight. Do something, dammit! You’re better than this!

The short-sleeved shirt hugged Deku’s– no, not-Deku’s– arms all too well.

Wait, wait. Short?

“Kacchan, are you scared? Did I do something?” Came the voice again, so uncanny and yet so, so fake.

Frantic eyes skimmed his arms, and sure enough…

They’re not there… she wouldn’t know they’re there!

“Deku doesn’t wear that kind of shit.” He hissed, and shook his head before taking a more confident step backwards, finding it easier to focus with the certain knowledge that that wasn’t his Deku. “But you wouldn’t know that, would you, Camie!?”

Where is she, where is she…

“Huh? Kacchan, what are you talking about?”
Quit saying that name!

He forced himself to look around the area and tear his eyes away from not-Deku’s for a moment, and at the realization that it was empty aside from the thing he could hardly call his boyfriend.

Two options, then.

One– Camie was behind Deku, or two—

Katsuki planted his front foot forward as if to jump, but just before lunging at the illusion, spun on his heel and shot a hand not towards the illusion, but away.

Gotcha.

“S-Shit…!” Came the scream from behind at the releasing of a well-timed blast, just as the image of Deku crumbled away before him.

One thing left now.

Camie was on the ground, coughing in the wake of the blast but getting to her feet all the same. He’d kept an eye on her in the first two rounds— during the first qualifier, she’d placed in the top five after using her illusions to trick people time and time again into her traps, and though her quirk wasn’t the most ideal for the relay, she’d still done well.

But…

He grabbed her by the collar before she had the chance to run off and try her stunt again, only inches from her face.

“Why the hell did you do that.” Katsuki hissed, hands shaking, trying to ignore the fact that the eyes of the whole damn country were on him. “Why the hell would you try to use him like that against me!?”

“T-That…” She broke off into a cough, fatigue plaguing her features. “Isn’t it obvious, Baku? H-He’s— he’s your biggest—”

Camie cursed under her breath, and with a start, Katsuki realized that she was wiped.

Must’ve gone to her limit, conjuring up all the shit she did.

“Hurry up.” He shook her again. “He’s my what? What!”

But before she could say another word, a loud, resounding announcement of Katsuki’s victory blared throughout the arena, and Camie, with one last, dazed look, smiled.

“I… I-I worked on the voice for a while, babe. Hope you… h-hope you liked it.”

And more due to exhaustion than physical pain, she passed out.

“Oh, come on.” Katsuki grumbled, and waited as staff came out to help her off the field just before he went inside. It wasn’t as if he didn’t have an idea of what she was going to say, but…

He’s… shit, I know what you’re talking about, but I don’t wanna admit it…!

The next round was interesting to watch, at least. Katsuki was able to sneak away from the holding room to catch the end of it— after all, why wouldn’t he want to see the person he’d be up against
next?

_Todoroki or Shindou. Can’t believe they got smashed together in the bracket._

Katsuki still hadn’t forgotten his first sports festival, least of all his fights with the both of them in the bracket matches. Shindou hadn’t been a fun match— not with the ceaseless taunting, goading, and getting way too much in his personal space even in the context of the fight. Todoroki had been better to some extent, but…

_Well, he had his own set of issues back then. Fighting him would be different now._

They’d worked in a few training sessions between Katsuki’s birthday and now, but as much as they both loved doing it, getting back the spark they’d lost for a bit had proved to be more difficult than anticipated.

_We’re working on it, though. We’re getting there._

That didn’t mean he had to _enjoy_ hearing him and Shindou getting it on three times a week, though. But Todoroki told him that it wasn’t for anything but mutual relief, that Shindou’s quirk was _too well suited_ for that sort of thing, (granted, he wasn’t _wrong_) and that he was perfectly content with life.

In the arena, though, Katsuki watched as pillar after pillar of ice was deflected and ground up, tossed to the side as Shindou ravaged the field with his quirk. He had no idea how they _ever_ managed to train inside, but seeing them move was like witnessing a strange dance of sorts. Up, down, side-to-side, sliding amongst columns of ice and falling after the earthquakes just as fast. Tendrils of flame skewered holes through the rubble, but Shindou only dodged (when had he become so fast?) time and time again.

“They know each other’s movesets too well.” Came a new voice, and Katsuki looked up to see Yaoyorozu joining him in the empty seat to his side. “I’d be willing to bet they could both hold out for a while.”

“They’ve _already_ been holding out for a while.” Katsuki sighed. “Did you go visit Camie? She okay?”

Yaoyorozu nodded. “Yes, she’s awake now. Passed out due to overexertion, just as I’d thought. They’re having her stay in the infirmary for another hour or so to rest, though, but she’s just fine.” She paused. “Your fight, though… I hadn’t expected her to actually pull that card. She told me about her progress with a convincing Midoriya illusion, and even showed it to me a few times before. But showing it off out here, in public like this?”

_In public…_

“I’d be willing to bet she was desperate. Probably wasn’t thinking fully rationally, because you _know_ she’s respectful of your privacy when she needs to be.” Yaoyorozu sighed. “From the stands, they didn’t hear anything that I’m sure she said, and the fact that she swapped him to something casual rather than his hero suit fast enough helped too with taking the focus off of what exactly they were looking at. I’m hoping your hesitations will simply be blamed on shock factor and any deeper reasons will be ignored, but… ah, well. Best not to keep thinking about it, I suppose.”

“I… shit. Wish I’d gone about that faster.” Katsuki cursed. “I wasn’t thinking about everyone watching. Or, uh—”

His throat went dry in an instant.
“I’ll just do better in the last round.” He swallowed, fumbling with his fingers. “Not gonna let one slip-up kill me.”

Yaoyorozu gave him a pat on the shoulder and a confident smile. “You’ve got this. Whichever one of them you’re going up against, you’ll—!”

She broke off with a sudden yelp as a glacier of ice erupted from the stadium floor, followed by a ground-breaking quake that nearly launched them from their seats.

“Who— oh my god, did someone lose!?” Yaoyorozu shot to her feet as the shaking died down, frantically looking around on the floor. “I don’t see either of them, I—”

“Wait. T-There.”

Katsuki pointed out to each side of the stadium floor, and swallowed.

“They… both of ‘em. They both got knocked out of the arena.”

But the cameras were zooming in, the announcers going wild, and after only a moment, Todoroki’s crumpled, passed-out body came into view.

No… shit, you’ve gotta be—

On the other side of the field, Shindou was struggling to his feet, bruised but awake.

Dammit…!

“I wanted to fight Todoroki.” He grumbled. “And is this even gonna be a fair match? Shindou’s gonna go into the last fight all banged up, and I hardly got hit in the past few rounds…!”

I hope Todoroki’s okay, though… I mean, he looks like he’ll be alright. I just wanna see him up and about again.

“It is what it is.” Yaoyorozu pursed her lips and urged him to get moving. “But they’ll have to clean up the stadium a bit from that fight before the last one, so… that’s some time for him to recover, at least.”

“Shindou better give me a good fight.” Katsuki scowled. “I don’t want an easy victory.”

I want something to remember…!

“No time to waste up here then, right?” She said. “Get going, and I’ll be sure to watch. I know you’ll give me something to enjoy.”

And if nothing else, that made him feel a little better.

“Right, right.” He nodded. “Keep your eyes on me, then. Shindou’s gonna go down in style.”

Deku’s gonna see me win, too. He’s gonna see me succeed.

He ignored any looks he got on the way down to the field, stretched for a few minutes before entering the ring, and planned out simple strategies in his head as he went along. It’d been years since he fought Shindou, and despite hearing from Todoroki time and time again how it was when they fought, what he’d just seen was the first experience he really remembered having with his
fighting style in recent times.

*I should expect elevation changes, but I can deal with that... really, the big thing is going to be keeping him away from physically touching me. There’s the possibility that I’d be knocked out on the spot if he sends vibrations too strong through me...!*

So, mid-range would be the ideal.

They managed to clean the stage up fast enough, and to his surprise, Shindou didn’t look half-bad when he entered the arena across from Katsuki. A little worn, but the stupid grin on his face was still there and showed no sign of wanting to leave.

“Hey, Katsuki!” Shindou called out, too chipper for his liking. “Sorry about taking so long in the last round. Don’t worry, I won’t drag it out this time!”

“You ain’t gonna drag it out?” Katsuki jeered, readying himself for the countdown. “I don’t think you should have to worry, because *I’m* the one who’s gonna send you flying first.”

“Ooh, I like that energy!” Shindou flashed him a thumbs up. “Well don’t let me down, then!”

Katsuki rolled his eyes as that thumbs up almost instantly became a middle finger as soon as the countdown finished, and before Shindou had the chance to knock him off balance himself, Katsuki launched into the air and somersaulted up and over his head.

“Really? That’s the angle you’re starting with?”

*What do you mean, ‘really’!?*

Concrete shot upwards before he had a chance to land, and Shindou smacked him out of the air with a bolt of rubble to the shoulder that left Katsuki hurtling to the ground with a sharp, bloodcurdling scream. Pain seared through his shoulder, his arm, but he was able to cushion himself with a blast from his other arm before rolling onto the concrete with a groan.

“Predictable. Should’ve known better, Katsuki.” Shindou sighed. “Figured you were going to open with that– you like starting high. Guess you haven’t really run across anyone who can shoot you down yet, hm?”

*Shit, shit, get back up...!*

He forced himself to his feet, warm blood trickling down his numb arm and onto the pavement below. “T-Then... guess I’ll have to take a different way up, huh!?”

*Ignore the pain, ignore the pain, I’ll get healed up later...!*

At the same time, he knew that he couldn’t strain himself too much. Lasting damage would do him no good, and in terms of real-life practicality, Katsuki knew that employers weren’t into seeing heroes wreck themselves to a damaging point.

*Okay, okay... so, gotta figure out how to move around with... one good arm. Take it easy on the other one till I need it.*

Columns upon columns had sprouted from the field, but some of the spires looked low enough for him to ascend without having to even bring his hurt arm into play.

*Might take a little time, but I’m gonna have to climb. He won’t come back down, so I’ve gotta take*
Katsuki ran this time, propelling himself across the field with small bursts of explosions and running up, up the broken ground, gliding over cracks and leaping over small chasms in order to get back up to Shindou’s level.

“Nice movement!” His opponent called out, more of a jab than a compliment. “Your boyfriend teach you that one?”

“Oi, don’t you dare talk about him!” Katsuki screamed, and made a sudden sharp leap up towards him, getting a tight AP shot straight in on Shindou’s face before falling back to his current platform. “He’s not a part of this, got it!?”

“Not a part of this?” Shut up, shut up— “Despite the fact that even I could see how much of a weakness he was in your last fight?”

“He’s not my fucking weakness!” Another jump up, another rabid blast to the chest. “I know he’s strong enough to handle himself, and he knows I am, too!”

“You’re still quick to defend his name, though.” Shindou raised an eyebrow, and casually pulled another slab of concrete into view. “The moment anyone says Deku, they’ve got your attention. Makes it a little dangerous, huh?”

What the hell— “What the hell do you want from me!?” Katsuki jumped up to the next pillar, closer to Shindou’s own, and cursed as the ground starting to creak below him. “Why are you here? Why are you spending so much time with Todoroki, and why do you care so damn much about my life!?”

“Care?” Shindou cocked his head. “I don’t care that much about what you’re up to, but it’s easy to get you riled up if I talk about him. And from what I’ve seen, anger makes you reckless, which in turn gives me a better shot at winning.”

Reckless!?

But before he could fire back another insult, Katsuki had to jump up to the next slowly-falling pillar as the one he’d found himself on started to shift and crumble more than what was comfortable. Katsuki didn’t wanna look down, didn’t wanna see just how high up in the stadium they’d gotten, because…

Falling back down won’t be fun for either of us—!

“And why would you mention Shouto?” Quit using his first name, you— “He’s my friend, I think? And he’s been talking to me just as much as I have to him. It’s not like we’ve been doing anything we don’t want to.”

Maybe now wasn’t the time to have this conversation, amongst the rubble and wreckage that they’d created, but it was the only time he had to give Shindou a solid fist to his too-pretty nose.

“Friends? That so?” He shouted, and propelled himself up a little further, managing some small use of his banged-up arm to reach the platform just below Shindou’s. “Then why has he been moody as hell? Why hasn’t he been talking to me as much, huh!??”

“There might be a chance that he likes spending time with me, y’know!” Shindou yelled, clearly irritated. “He’s a damn good sparring partner, and our training sessions are good! I don’t know how much time he’ll want to spend with me after the match we just had, but I keep talking to him because I like doing it, asshole!”
He’s getting a little angry himself... huh.

“Then let’s make a deal.” Katsuki said, finally managed to clamber up and onto the last pillar, hardly ten feet from Shindou’s bright-ass face. “I don’t talk about whatever you and Todoroki have going on, and you shut your face about me n’ Deku. Sounds fair to me!”

“Stop talking about you and Valiant?” Came his reply, all sharp focus and hungry stares. “Even if I do, people are going to keep talking. So what’s the problem?”

“Wh- Why would people talk!?”

He’s fucking with me, he’s just trying to play with my head, he’s—

Shindou’s eyes gleamed, and Katsuki wasn’t sure he liked what he saw in them.

“There’s already been rumors.” Some sort of confusion– or disbelief?– lay hidden in his words. “Not of you, no. Just that Valiant has a serious romantic partner.”

When Katsuki didn’t reply, didn’t move, Shindou continued. “You really haven’t been keeping an eye on the gossip? At the very least, I thought Camie would’ve let you know. Hm... then again, I doubt she’d want you to worry.” He gave him a small, worn smile. “She’s very, very kind to you.”

“Don’t have to tell me twice.”

And don’t say it like I don’t deserve it.

For as much as Shindou was talking, though, Katsuki was keeping a close eye on his every move. Just like Camie had been, he was clearly worn out– arms trembling just a little more than they should, a grit in his teeth that wasn’t usually there, and a slight squint that he probably wasn’t aiming for.

But what he’s saying... honestly, I probably shouldn't ignore it, as much as it makes me sick to think about...!

“Valiant’s not the type of hero to release personal information.”

“You say that like I’m not well aware.”

“Are you listening, though?” Shindou took a step forward, hand towards the ground as Katsuki readied himself into a nimble stance. “The media’s gonna keep pushing him. Keep trailing him. I’m trying to warn you, okay? ‘Cause the whole reason I can say his name and have you react like that at just the mention of it is because he means something to you! And that, just like that, makes him your weakness!”

Shut up, shut up, SHUT UP!

White anger pushed at the edge of his vision to a blinding point, and it was all he could do to not shoot himself at Shindou right then and there with absolute rage. “I’ve been attacked once because of that.” He hissed, each word razor-edged. “I can handle it if it happens again. We can both handle it!”

“Yeah, you can handle the hero stuff. We all know that. I know that.” Shindou heaved, but there was some honest truth in his eyes. “But can you handle the media? The press? People breathing down your neck at every turn and pinning every bit of your success on the fact that you’ve latched onto a more experienced hero for years?”
That’s it.

“I’m done listening to your shit.”

Don’t care what happens next…!

One blast. Then two. Three. Katsuki was on the other end of the teetering platform before he knew it, and took a sharp swerve to the side just as Shindou lunged towards him and toppled forward. No time to think, not when the column was falling, falling, falling and threatening to spill out on the arena below.

*If this one goes down, we’re going with it!*

“Got nowhere else to run, do you!?” Katsuki shouted, just as Shindou dipped under his last blast and then over his next. “Oi, I ain’t afraid to bring out the heavy shit if I need to!”

His shoulder throbbed if he paid attention to it, but at the very least, the feeling was coming back.

*This thing is gonna fall no matter what. Another shot, another miss. And he’s faster than I thought he was! If he’s gonna keep dodging, then what can I… what can I—!*

The ground was at least one, maybe two hundred feet below them.

*And I—* Katsuki swallowed, clenched his fists—*have a way to cushion my fall.*

“Well, it’s not like you’ve got anywhere better to use those explosions!” Shindou called out, almost in some sort of mocking tone. “What are you gonna do, blow us both up? I know you’re not stupid, Katsuki!”

*You’re right. I’m not stupid.*

He jumped, injured hand steadying the better one, and pointed down.

*This move worked last time, right?*

“Wait, wait, what the—!”

One last explosion, and silence.

*Got him.*

It couldn’t have been more than a few seconds he hung in the air, watching as the giant pillar splintered to dust before his eyes. Couldn’t have been much longer till he started falling too, wind curling around his lean form and streamlining his dagger descent all the way down. Victory was only *ninety, eighty, seventy feet away*, but just as he saw the ground began to come into view, some choked, *desperate* screaming bombarded his eardrums.

*Shit… can I really let him…*

Two options.

*Even though I don’t like his irritating ass…*

One second.

*It’s a hero’s duty, so I…!*
Katsuki’s arm shot out to the side as he searched the field for Shindou’s falling form, and in what couldn’t have been more than a moment, grabbed him by his filthy collar and stalled them both from crashing with what little strength remained in his injured arm.

“Ka– Bakugou, w-what the fuck are you—!”

“Shut up.” He ordered, the words sounding steadier in his head than they did coming out of his mouth. They tumbled to the ground in a mess of limbs and debris, both bruised and a little bloody, but safe.

I… I...

Only once he’d gotten past the ringing in his ears did Katsuki realize that the stadium had fallen to a hushed silence.

“…B-Bakugou.”

Shindou coughed, started to sit up, and stared at him with the rawest look Katsuki had ever seen on him.

“Why… why would you…?”

“It’s a hero’s duty to save, ain’t it?” Katsuki got out, the settling dust all-too gritty in his throat. “A-And… ‘specially if it’s cause of my own mess.”

He got to his feet, still wobbly, and reached out to Shindou. “C’mon. Up you go.”

“You don’t like me.” Shindou narrowed his eyes, but the confusion in his voice spoke wonders. “Why haven’t you tossed me out of the ring by now? The victory is yours.”

“Maybe it is.” Katsuki said, curt. “You gonna leave me hanging or what?”

This time, he took his hand, and Katsuki hauled him up to his feet with no malice or anger. “You’re right.” He started, and sucked in a breath. “I don’t like you. But I also don’t think you were totally fucking with me up there, and…”

Just say it.

“It’s Todoroki’s decision whether he wants to kick your ass, not mine.” He swallowed, nodded. “I dunno what it is he tolerates about you. Not sure if he knows either. But I trust him a lot, and for as shitty as I think you are, he hasn’t told you to fuck off yet. So you can’t be one-hundred percent awful.”

For once, Shindou was silent.

What is he...

“You’re a good person, Bakugou.” He let go of Katsuki’s hand, and stepped back. “And I get the feeling you’re going to be a good hero too.”

It was only when the announcement went off that Katsuki realized that Shindou’s foot had crossed backwards over the line– completely of his own accord.

Wait… wait, wh—!

“Don’t ask me why.” Shindou rolled his eyes. “You earned this one. So let me be a decent sport and
do this, asshole.”

...huh. Not the victory I was expecting, but…

As he watched Shindou walk off towards the bleachers and his exit gate, all he could do was stare.

...it works. I think.

The end ceremony passed by in a blur of congratulations and medals, of students talking and teachers hustling him to the infirmary to treat his wounds. His shoulder had been healed up after a quick inspection, along with the minor cuts and bruises he’d endured. And thanks to his quick actions, Shindou was only slightly worse off than he was. They didn’t speak after the fight– didn’t need to, didn’t want to– but there wasn’t any festering hate. No– if anything, there was some sort of grudging mutual respect there instead.

But after the commotion had died down for the most part, Katsuki found himself back in the temporary holding room to pack up what little he’d brought to take back to his dorm (along with his newly-earned gold medal). Quiet, for once, and alone.

Or, it would’ve been, had rapid footsteps at the door not interrupted him just as he was about to leave.

“Ka—ah!”

Huh?

“Kacchan! Ah, I was afraid I’d missed you!” Deku rubbed the back of his head as he rounded the corner, a slightly awkward but ultimately proud grin on his face. “God, watching you fight out there… that was intense. Wow.”

“Intense, huh?” Katsuki raised an eyebrow, but not before throwing his arms around his boyfriend and pulling him into a tight hug. “Was that all it was?”

“Well, if you want the truth, seeing you plummet to what could have been an early death was more than a little terrifying, but… I figured you had a reason for it.” Deku said, sneaking a quick kiss to the crown of Katsuki’s head. “Seeing you pull out that rescue at the end, though? Fuck, Kacchan. You know how to turn me on.”

There’s no one around, right?

Against his better judgement, and despite what Shindou had said earlier about the press and the media, he pulled his boyfriend down for a chaste kiss, coupled with a smile and a laugh.

“Figures you’d get off on that shit.” Katsuki snorted, but only buried his head further into Deku’s chest. “Bet you ran to the bathroom and rubbed one out in a nasty-ass stall. Probably didn’t even watch the very end.”

He wasn’t sure why Deku went still as stone for a moment in his arms, but the slightly-nervous laugh that came out was more than a little weird. “N-No, no… I saw the end! Not totally sure why the other guy just walked off, but it, ah, felt like you earned that victory for sure!”

Alright, alrigh—

“And I was thinking…” Deku’s voice dipped lower, softer, and a shiver ran down Katsuki’s spine as he spoke. “…maybe we could save that other thing for tonight?”
“W-What?” He started, anticipation popping and bubbling in his veins. “Getting off in these bathrooms?”

“No, no… you know what I’m talking about, Kacchan.” A strong, sure hand trailed down a little further, just enough to cup and squeeze at his ass in the most enticing way possible. “You might’ve messed around with me last time, but I think you’ve earned something special for that win.”

Something… s-something…

Katsuki would’ve thought on that more. Really, really would’ve thought on that more, but the sudden clack of new footsteps down the hall cut off whatever nice things Deku had started saying in his ear and the promises of things to come. But they pulled apart just as fast as they’d come together, and with a sudden, gut-lurching sight, Katsuki realized it was his mother coming down the hall.

Oh no.

“Katsuki!” She called out, an almost-odd smile on her face that glowed with pride all the same. “Katsuki, holy shit! That win– you fucking did it out there! They let me come back to congratulate you, and I just—” His mother paused, wiped a hand over her face. “Your father had to go to the bathroom, so you can just meet up with him later if you want, but I… I had to come tell you as fast as I could!”

Upon closer look, Katsuki could’ve sworn she’d been…

Crying?

“That’s all I really have to say, but—” She stepped forward to pull him into a hug, and Katsuki nearly felt Deku’s anxiety start to grow even more from beside him. “God, I’m so proud of you! This is a real accomplishment! And—”

Her arms grew slack around him, if only for a moment.

“…Pro Hero Valiant?”

Fuck, no, don’t talk to—

“Wait. Were you one of his mentors?” She asked, letting Katsuki go to turn to Deku’s mildly panicking form. “I feel like I remember him mentioning you before at some point.”

“A-Ah, yes! That’s right!” Deku sputtered, doing what had to be the worst job at keeping cool that he’d ever laid eyes on. “Kaccha– Baku– Ground Zero, excuse me– was an intern of mine!”

…it’s hard to watch.

“Yeah. Valiant’s my mentor.” Katsuki shoved his hands in his pockets, not daring to so much as look at Deku. “Just here to do the same thing you are.”

He knew that answer probably hadn’t convinced her, but it wasn’t totally a lie. Deku had helped him to train on far more than one occasion, after all.

“That’s pretty crazy, that you get to intern with the person that saved your life back in middle school.” She tilted her head, taking a good look at Deku. “You better be keeping my son out of trouble though, okay? I know he can be a bit messy at times.”

“O-Oh, um, yeah!” Just stop talking, please stop talking. “G-Ground Zero is an amazing boyfr— um,
inter—so don’t worry! And, uh, I know, totally crazy about the whole life-saving situation back then, a-aha…!

You’re only making this worse, Deku.

But in some stroke of stupid luck, she didn’t push it—didn’t ask further, didn’t set to interrogate them, only nodded and motioned for them to carry on.

“It’s good to see that you’re doing well, Valiant. I’ll leave you two be.” She dipped her head, staring mostly at Deku but still threw a glance at Katsuki before she left. “Will you call me tonight, Katsuki? I know your dad wants to talk about this win too.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll call.” He grumbled. “Won’t forget.”

They only managed to relax marginally after she was two minutes gone, and didn’t do anything more than look at each other.

“Your acting skills are absolute shit.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Good thing we’re not doing bedroom roleplay.”

A gargled half-laugh, half-choked sound came from of Deku’s throat. “O-Oh my god, Kacchan. That’s the first thing your mind went back to!?”

“I mean, yeah?” He turned back towards his boyfriend, smirk on his face as he fell into a slightly more seductive stance. “You said I earned something special for my win, right? When do I get this prize?”

They’d leave in a minute. One close call aside, the holding area was about as safe as it could get.

“…oh.” Deku murmured, shifting back to that overwhelming confidence just as fast as he’d lost it, knowing eyes running up and down his body. “Oh, well…”

…well?

“Come to my place by nine. Shower first.” His boyfriend leaned in closer, closer. “And I want you to bring the thing you told me about on the camping trip, too.”

There was no room for questions, no room for answers before Deku walked off, leaving Katsuki to nearly fly out of his skin and into the sun.

He…he wants me to bring…

The item in question was still lying on his desk after a previous night’s use, along with the large bottle of lube he’d finally caved and bought himself.

…this is gonna be interesting.

Chapter End Notes

YALL IM LITERALLY LOSING MY ENTIRE MIND!!!!! I JUST I CANT ANYMORE!!! HOLY BALLS PLEASE. PLEASE. CHECK OUT ALL OF THIS AMAZING SHIT THAT YALL HAVE CREATED IN THE PAST 2 WEEKS BC
IM LITERALLY ABT TO YEET MYSELF INTO THE SUN
So plz excuse my excitement and the length of these end notes because im still fucking crying over each and every one of these incredible pieces

1: Based directly on a scene earlier this chapter, here’s a 2-page comic of deku talking about all the wonderful things he’s gonna do to kacchan in the near future by my fucking WIFE @ariririsu!!!
2: Based on Kacchan’s makeover outfit from last chapter, here’s an absolutely PERFECT rendition of it by @cosmikuri!!!
3: How about a throwback to the first sports fest with a goddamn GORGEOUS rendition of deku sad ass jerking off in the bathroom ALSO BY MY WIFE @ariririsu!!
4: HOW ABT WE TAKE SOME TIME FOR SOME TUNES with this absolutely BEAUTIFUL song based off of the beginning of chapter 19, just before deku came home from the disaster site by @jendarknight!!
5: and lastly, based on the events of chapter 20, a goddamn DELICIOUS illustration of bdkd making out on the kitchen counter by my incredible WIFE @Kuckoonut!!
(and here’s a list of all the art that’s been done based on this fic)

Also, one more thing! Y’all might’ve heard me talking about this on my Twitter if u follow me on there, but I’ve got a bit of a plan to make a sort of artbook/fanbook for my fic bc i wanna draw stuff for this SO BAD, so i’ve finally started working on drawing character profiles of sorts on there!! So lastly, here’s a little bit of my own art!
Profile 00: Valiant
…and, deku w/ tongue piercing bc im still deceased over it

Thank you so much to my amazing beta @aetherlite and heads up, i might be changing my posting day to thursday bc im on break now and my schedule is a little different! Just know that I love yall more than words can even come CLOSE to expressing!!!!! /wipes tear
and then they fucked

Chapter Summary

come get yalls juice

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Are candles too much, Ochako? Too extra?”

“I dunno, are you aiming for romantic?”

“A-Ah, well… not sure, to be honest. Do you think he’d like that?”

“He’s your boyfriend, Izuku! Not mine!”

“Right, r-right! Um, well—”

“How about this.” Ochako interrupted his ramblings over the video call, her steady voice his only source of relief in these trying times. “Calm down. Let’s focus on what you’re wearing other than that harness first, okay? Can you show me a full-body view of yourself and your closet?”

“Oh, ah… yeah. Okay.”

Izuku dropped his phone on the bed for a moment, abandoning it in favor of dragging his hands over his face and just breathing.

Why is this so scary right now? Why am I so anxious?


I wasn’t this nervous when I blew him… god, he knows how I look naked! He’s well aware of how big my dick is! So why… why is the idea of doing something more making me feel like this?

“Izuku?” The familiar voice crackled through the phone on his bedsheets, so quiet and yet so sure all the same. “Hey, you there? You okay?”

I’m fine. I’m fine, really— was what he wanted to say. But he grabbed the phone again, slumped back into still-messy sheets, and sighed.

“Just nervous.” He mumbled, comforter clenched tight in his hands. “Not totally sure why, to be honest. Logically, everything’s gonna be fine. Might not be perfect, but it’ll be fine. We both want this. I– I know we do.”

She stayed quiet, almost in some sort of indication to keep talking.

Right. Right.

“I… I guess it’s just been a while. Since I’ve done this particular sort of thing.” Deep breaths. Relax. “I mean, I know his sexual experiences have been limited to just the oral stuff we’ve done before,
but… doesn’t that mean I should know what I’m doing in this regard too? I’m supposed to be the experienced one. Not… not all anxious about it.”

Izuku had never been more thankful to have a friend like Ochako, someone who would listen to him panic about a crisis like this.

“Mm, okay. Anything else you wanna say?”

“Not, uh… not right now.”

Quiet again.

“Izuku.” She started—steady, sincere. “Is it because it’s gonna be his first time doing this that you’re nervous?”

…oh?

Something clicked.

“It, ah… it could be?”

Just finding the reason would be helpful at this point.

“I have a feeling you wanna make a good impression. And I know you’ve been thinking about this for literal years, which probably isn’t, ah… helping.” She paused, and Izuku figured that if she had been there with him, she’d be smiling. “I think you’ve got this all built up in your head. Like it’s gonna be some make-or-break. But remind me why you two wanna do this in the first place?”

…why?

“I love him.” He swallowed, running a hand through his hair. “We’re gonna do it because he loves me. Because he trusts me.”

And because I trust him, too.

She laughed— a soft, warm, comforting laugh that sent some wave of calm through his mind and body, relaxing him like little else had. “God, you two are cute.”

…yeah, maybe we are.

For as much as he wanted to stop it, a wobbly smile pushed up over his lips as a trickle of heat crept down his face. But Ochako wasn’t done, not yet.

“Think about it this way. You get to be his first time. That’s pretty cool, right?”

Kacchan’s never been with anyone but me…

“I… yeah.” He nodded, more for himself than anyone else. “I get to be his first time. I’m gonna be the first person he’s with.”

And with any luck I’ll be his last, too.

He thought he heard another muffled cute from the other end, but didn’t push it. Nervous energy was slowly being replaced with anticipation, with excitement, and the prospect that he was going to be the first one to fuck Katsuki’s virgin ass.
“Little more chipper now, hm?”

“A-Aha, maybe!”

“Alright, alright. So, clothes?”

The next twenty minutes were spent with Ochako on a video call, and him going through his meager closet in an attempt to find something half-decent to wear under the simple black leather harness he’d picked up after that one oral-filled day. It’d been a bit of an impulse buy after a late-night, spur-of-the-moment run through a shitty ‘69 Ways to spice up YOUR sex life’ article, but really, no regrets. A strap stretched itself over each shoulder and met at a horizontal one around his waist, connected by a small, silvery circlet on each side. Three shorter pieces hung from the middle of his back to hook onto his belt, simple but oh-so-sexy all the same. Best of all, though—the small, simple leather loop around his neck that held the shoulder straps taut and provided all of the you can look, but you can’t touch vibe he wanted.

In short? Hot as fuck.

I just hope Kacchan thinks so, too.

The rest of his nonexistent ensemble still left something to be desired, but the harness would at least serve as a little extra something for Katsuki after they delved deeper into their evening.

And, speaking of his boyfriend— he had no idea if Katsuki was going to dress up like he had last time. A part of him almost hoped not; after all, his boyfriend would probably show him up big time if he did.

I’ve gotta make sure not to lose my mind too soon, though... gotta make sure to take good care of him. I need to make this first time a good one, so—

“Why don’t you own any pants aside from jeans and sweats!?” Came Ochako’s scalding voice from over the phone, promptly snapping him from his thoughts.

“I-I mean, I’m in my hero costume most of the time...” He tried to reason, but to no avail.

“Me too, but at least I have some stuff outside of casual wear. Hm... gah, guess it’s gonna be jeans again. Those other things aren’t gonna fly.”

“Not even for easy access?”

“Do you really want to fuck him in your four-year-old sweats!?”

“...well, when you put it that way...”

“Jeans, Izuku. The black ones. They make your ass look nice.”

Ugh. Guess I can’t exactly wear a belt with sweatpants either, and that means I’d have to do jeans so I have something to hook the bottom of the harness to anyways.

It wasn’t as if he was bad at getting his pants off in the heat of the moment, but that didn’t mean he had to like it. That said, it was already eight forty-five— only fifteen minutes before he’d asked Katsuki to show up, with a little bit of cleanup still needing to be done. No time left to spend complaining.
He’s bringing the dildo, right? It’s kinda factoring into what I wanna do with him, so… he better. Or I’m gonna be real sad.

“God, you’re lucky you’ve got natural sex appeal. All you’ve gotta do is show off your body and he’ll be begging for it.”

“Show off… hm.” Izuku shuffled through his shirts, not really seeing anything that would stand out too well against the harness.

Gotta be something, gotta be something—

It clicked.

“What would you think about something long-sleeved? Like, taking it off slow, doing a reveal, or—”

“Perfect. Yes. That works!” Ochako approved. “Alright, that means you need a top. Let’s look at those button-ups again. The nice ones.”

Right, right… nothing shitty. Huh…

“…is red an okay color on me?”

“If you’re wanting to look like a christmas tree, sure.” He could practically feel Ochako’s eye roll.

“Try… hm. Try white instead. And don’t button it up all the way! Remember, you’re not going outside. You can be sexy. Make sure you’ve got that harness fitted nicely on top of it, you don’t wanna go through all this effort and have it look like you threw it together in ten minutes.”

...hasn’t it only been ten minutes?

But he nodded, agreed, and did as he was told.

“Throw a belt on, tuck in your shirt. You wanna look like you know what you’re doing— yes, perfect.”

In the mirror, Izuku could admit he looked alright. There was certainly no hiding the taut muscle under the thin fabric of his barely-modest shirt, the white sleeves stretched over his arms leaving no room for imagination. A wonky grin rose up on his cheeks as a hand rose to the back of his neck to rub at the harness, finally feeling satisfied with what he’d managed to throw together.

“Good, good…” Ochako hummed her approval. “I like the BDE you’ve got going on. Suits you.”

“…BDE?”

“Big Daddy Energy, duh. Bakugou’s gonna be on the floor the moment he walks in.”

Izuku nearly dropped his phone.

“How– h-how about you never say that again, and we just go with hey, you look good!” He sputtered, trying to ignore the strange, possibly aroused feeling he got just thinking about that. “Shit, shit, okay. He’s gonna be here in a few minutes. Are we good? Am I good?”

“Hm… did you put on deodorant?”

“Course I did.”

“Set out condoms and lube?”
“Pfft, plenty.”

“Make the bed?”

“...I’ll be right back.”

But just as soon as he finished tugging the comforter up (which would only be thrown back later, he was sure), the knock he’d been waiting for finally came.

Kacchan...!

“He’s here. Shit, okay, he’s here.” He said, only partly to Ochako.

“Deep breaths, Izuku. Deep breaths. You’ve got this!” She encouraged. “Pull out that charm. That confidence. I’ll let you go, so make sure you have fun tonight, okay?”

Fun. Right. We’re gonna have fun.

Izuku nodded, well aware she couldn’t see. “I will. You’re right. Everything… everything’s gonna be good. Fun.”

And maybe it can be a new, better first time for me too.

There was a second knock at the door, followed by a quiet you there? that finally got Izuku moving again, phone left on the couch to be forgotten for the rest of the evening.

Gotta turn on the confidence. Not too hard when he makes it so easy to want, but...

A firm, sure hand wrapped itself around the door handle, and with one last wish for everything to go well, he opened it.

Time to channel that, ah… BDE.

“Ka—”

The name died in his throat as soon as he saw Katsuki.

Oh my god.

A large, dark jacket hung over his shoulders, the barely-visible neckline of some black shirt peeking out underneath. Coupled with that were black cargo pants hugging his waist, loose over his lean frame, only tight at the ankles. But in place of the studs he’d been wearing last time hung a new pair of earrings; a simple, thin, silvery chain on each side, one slightly longer than the other.

Izuku had never wanted to bend him over and fuck him so bad in his life.

“Hey.” Katsuki started, eyes everywhere but Izuku’s face. “You just gonna stand there and ogle, or are you gonna let me come inside and get this damn jacket off?”

Oh, I’m going to need to get more than just that jacket off.

“Inside.” He said instead, far firmer than he’d intended. “Glad you made it on time.”

“Wouldn’t miss this for the world.” Katsuki replied, a full smirk on his lips as he came in and shut the door. “Brought what you asked for, too.”
“Hand it over.” Izuku’s head cocked back, drinking in every bit of Katsuki’s form as he shrugged out of the jacket to reveal the shirt as some sort of tight-fitting tank top instead. Strong, broad shoulders stood out against the dark fabric, and if he looked close, Izuku could’ve sworn he could see his boyfriend’s nipples peeking through it, too.

No wonder he wore that jacket out here, just this alone is too sexy…!

“Still don’t really know why you wanna see it, but…” Katsuki sighed, reaching into his overnight bag as a hint of resigned bashfulness tinged his face. “Here.”

The dildo was shoved into Izuku’s hands in a flash, almost as if Katsuki was nervous about him seeing it. Not that that’d be too much of a surprise, but…

Holy shit.

He’d recognize that shade of green anywhere, as well as the familiar black markings on the sides and the white-and-blue striped base, accented with a gentle touch of gold.

Kacchan’s been shoving this up his ass for… a year? Two years?

“This is, uh. The second one.” Katsuki mumbled, seemingly content to just stare at the floor.

It’s a bit ribbed, too… oh, and it has a more natural, veiny texture… and a suction cup base? Has he attempted to do oral on this? Not enough, I suppose, but still.

“How long is this?”

“Uh, seven inches?”

“Mm. Width?”

“Two and a half.”

Hm… about the same length as when I’m hard, but I’m definitely wider… not that that should be news to him at this point, though. I’ll never forget the look of him literally choking on my dick.

Izuku couldn’t help the small, nearly giddy smile on his face.

This’ll be perfect for tonight.

“Wasn’t sure if you needed me to bring any lube, so I went ahead and brought some.” Katsuki shifted on his feet, clearly trying to not let the embarrassment get to him. “A-And I showered. Twice.”

It’s only been about four hours since the sports fest let them go, and he’s telling me he showered twice?

“That excited, huh?” He said, and reached over to run a hand down Katsuki’s neck, all the way to his bare shoulder. “You look really, really handsome, baby.”

His boyfriend raised an eyebrow. “And cute?”

“God, always.”

I have to take my time. Can’t just bend him over the couch right now. Need to get him to my bed first.
He rolled the dildo over in his palms once more, the image of Katsuki pleasuring himself on it even more crystal-clear now.

_Not that it’ll stay just a vision much longer, now._

Izuku glanced over at his boyfriend to see him fidgeting with his arms and rocking on his soles, clearly unsure of what to do next.

“My room.” He offered, though the phrase came out more as a statement than a question. But Katsuki just stared at him, mouth hanging open in a dumbstruck, stupefied fashion.

“O-Oh. Yeah.” His boyfriend finally said as he tried to get back to the present, shaking his head in an attempt to get out of whatever fog he’d fallen into. “Your room.”

“You’re hesitating. Something the matter?” Izuku tilted his head, arms folded over his chest. “I thought you’d be more comfortable with your head on a pillow than the countertop.”

And if Katsuki hadn’t already looked drop-dead _gorgeous_, the bright red on his cheeks only made it better. “Are you, um. Gonna bring the dildo? Are we using it for something?”

“Well...” His thumb ran along the side and over the head, viscerally aware of Katsuki’s blazing stare on him. “Why don’t we head in there so you can find out?”

That answer had Katsuki spinning on his heels, racing towards his bedroom and only stopping at the door when he realized he should probably wait for Izuku. But he only urged him inside and onto the bed, and Izuku couldn’t help but laugh as his boyfriend’s legs began to spread apart as soon as he sat down beside him.

_He’s too damn adorable._

“Relax.” Izuku ran his fingers through Katsuki’s hair, nothing but gentle. “Do you trust me?”

“’Course I do.”

“Do you want this?”

A frantic nod and a _yes, fuck yes._

“And lastly——” He leaned in, Katsuki’s face hardly an inch from his own. “You’ll tell me if too much is too much, right?”

“You know I will.” Nervous excitement streaked itself over his cheeks, but the reply was firm. “Like I always do.”

Just as Izuku went to open his mouth again, though, Katsuki interrupted him. “Can I, uh, ask for one thing first?”

_What could he..._ “Of course you can.”

“Kiss me.”

His first thought was surprise, maybe mild confusion. But it wasn’t an unreasonable request, not by any means.

*If that’s what would make him feel happy... if that’s what would make him feel safe...*
Izuku nodded. Ran a hand along his boyfriend’s cheek. Kissed him once, twice, let his lips meld with Katsuki’s just as they had so many times before.

“Forgot to say it earlier—” Quick breaths, quick words. “Y’look damn good, Deku. Real good.”

“Oh… that so?”

“Y-Yeah. Hot as fuck.”

*Glad the outfit’s going over well, then. I owe Ochako lunch.*

His mouth moved down, down past Katsuki’s lips and onto his neck, teeth scraping against twice-washed skin with a force so painstakingly gentle that his boyfriend leaned into it for even the slightest hint of *more, more.*

*Not yet. Be patient.*

“Mm…” A hand ran up to squeeze at his boyfriend’s too-perky chest, drawing out only the softest of groans. “Hot enough to fuck you into this mattress?”

Katsuki cursed louder that time, and the long, sultry whimper that followed nearly made Izuku cum on the spot.

“Y-You can’t just– c-can’t just say that…!” His boyfriend sputtered, but only arched further into his touch. “Shit, Deku!”

“Why not?”

“I-I mean, you can, but I…” Katsuki sucked in a breath, tried to meet his eyes. “We’re. We’re really gonna do this, aren’t we?”

“As long as you’re up to it. I’m more than ready, but—”

“I’m ready. I am. It just…” His boyfriend paused. “Feels like I’m dreaming, y’know? First there’s the win at the sports fest earlier today, and now I have…”

“Now you have?”

Up against those flushed cheeks, Katsuki’s eyes had never looked so beautiful.

“You.”

There was no stopping the full-mouth kiss, nor the groping-turned-caressing that followed as Izuku pushed his boyfriend back onto the bed, head cushioned against a pillow as his heart throbbed almost as much as his dick.

“Are you trying to make me fall even harder for you?”

“H-Hah… s’it working?”

“*God,* yes…!”

*You’re too good at making me feel, Kacchan. No fair. Then again…*

He drew back from Katsuki’s mouth, straddled his hips between his knees, and let his hands fall to his boyfriend’s shoulders.
“I like seeing this confidence from you.” He kept his gaze trained steady on Katsuki, not a single action escaping his view. “But I’d like to take a little control, if you don’t mind.”

This close, he could see his boyfriend’s pupils dilate.

“Will you let me make you feel good, Kacchan? Just for tonight?”

He’s beautiful. So beautiful like this.

“That harness... s’real nice on you.” Katsuki said instead.

Wrong answer.

“Eyes up here, Kacchan.” He flicked the base of his boyfriend’s chin, just enough to bring him back to attention. “I need an answer before I can do anything further, okay?”

“O-Oh. Right. Yeah, it’s more than okay.” He tried to nod, though it was a failing attempt with his head against the pillow. “What else do you really need from me before we start?”

I guess that works as permission, but... hm.

“If you want this so bad, then what do you say to me?” Izuku kissed him once more, chaste, but enough to get his full attention again.

“Aren’t you just, y’know, gonna fuck me?” Katsuki said, a slight huff at the end of his voice. “S’with all the formalities? What, do you wanna hear me say *please*? Want me to say *Oh great hero Valiant, would you insert your dick in my ass?* Want me to say—” Katsuki cleared his throat, lidded eyes drifting back up towards Izuku’s own.

But unlike the quick, snarky reply he expected, his boyfriend hesitated.

What are you waiting f—

“...yes, sir?”

Oh.

Oh.

He must’ve made some sort of audible noise in response because Katsuki’s breath hitched, face flushed an even brighter red than before.

Shit. Shit. I was expecting *please* or something, not...!

“Again.” Izuku managed, still in shock over the very effect that those words had had on him. “I wanna hear you say that again.”

His boyfriend’s eyes blew ten sizes wider, but the most of the snark had been replaced by raw lust.

“Y-Yes, sir. I want-- I-I want you.”


Every bit of his self-restraint was being tested, and Izuku almost wished his boyfriend wasn’t hot enough to make him melt with those two little words.

“Perfect, baby. So perfect. I’m gonna take such good care of you.” He promised, shaky hands
running back and forth over Katsuki’s chest. “I’m gonna make you feel so good. But first…” Izuku reached back, and with his one free hand, grabbed the discarded dildo. “Would you mind giving me a little demonstration so I can learn how you like it?”

Katsuki stared at him, slack-jawed and open-mouthed. “W-Wait. You want me to get off in front of you? Is– is that seriously what you’re talking about!?”

“Only if you’re comfortable with it.”

*You have no idea how badly I wanna see this.*

“*Comfortable* with it!?” His boyfriend exclaimed, surprising him. “F-Fuck, you say that like I haven’t been fantasizing about it for years…!”

...*holy shit.*

He pressed the dildo into Katsuki’s hands again and scooted back just enough to be able to tug down the hem of his boyfriend’s pants. “Years, huh?” *I can’t believe this.* “Would you tell me about these fantasies in more detail?” *Come on, you’ve gotta be kidding.*

“...s’lot of. Thinking about you walking in on me.” Katsuki started, the wobble gradually disappearing from his voice. Down, down went his pants, over the slight curve of his ass and to his knees. “Of seeing me like… like… saying your name while I’m getting off.”

*You’re shitting me.*

Katsuki only continued, though, making Izuku’s head spin on an even *deeper* level. “I think about what you’d look like if you saw me like that. About what you’d *think* of me doing that.”

*That’s… what the hell, Kacchan.*

“Baby,” he started, hand pressed to Katsuki’s thigh. “I think that’s hot as *fuck.*”

*And I wanna see more of it. All of it.*

Izuku pulled his boyfriend’s pants from his legs and dropped them unceremoniously on the floor, just as Katsuki popped open the bottle of lube on the nightstand and drizzled it over the head of the toy. But through the flurry of movement, Izuku noticed that the tight green boxers he took off of him next were very, very familiar.

*He wore these ones last time, didn’t he? God, he’s such a dork.*

All the same, though, that *dork* was probably the hottest thing he’d seen in… well, *ever.* With legs spread just enough for a hand to fit through, dick lying half-hard against his stomach, and the tip of the dildo pressed just against his hole in a too-teasing, too-*practiced* fashion, Katsuki was everything he could’ve asked for and more.

“Not gonna finger yourself first?” Izuku asked, already feeling the strain of his own cock against his jeans at the sight of that silicone tip sinking in, in.

“I-I… well, y’know, I just…!” He started, only to be cut off by a small groan in the back of his throat.

*Wait a minute…* “Kacchan, did you finger yourself before you came here?”

No response, aside from the breathy little huffs and sounds his boyfriend made with each smooth
slide in and each long, slow pull out.

“You totally did, didn’t you.” Izuku shook his head, more and more amazed by the second. “Baby… fuck, you’re too perfect. You’re beautiful.”

“Perfect…” Katsuki repeated, eyes clenched shut through the pleasure. “...me?”

“You. Yes, you.” Izuku praised, and unable to resist any longer, grabbed the base of the dildo and assumed control. “Can I play for a bit?”

Quiet, desperate— “Please, sir…”

Izuku shifted him from his side to his back, turning Katsuki’s hips up just enough to comfortably angle the dildo and kiss at his boyfriend’s bare legs, teeth sinking into untouched thighs and drawing only louder and louder cries of pain and pleasure out.

“Deku… D-Deku, please!” His voice cracked, hips pushing back against the agonizingly slow force. “More… m-more, please… need it so bad, need you so bad…”

Katsuki’s now-free hands reached for his cock, though, and would’ve started jerking himself off had Izuku not stopped them in their tracks and leaned forward enough to move his hands somewhere different instead. “Not allowed to do that, Kacchan. Like I said– you’ll let me take care of you, right?”

But the answer came in the form of an incomprehensible cacophony of sound, drenched in desperate whines and moans and glazed-over eyes that might’ve been shimmering with tears. Katsuki was gone, gone, so far gone, cock hard and red and nearly leaking as those hands clutched at the leather straps over his shoulders, hips practically writhing against the friction of the dildo and thrusting forward in a way that almost looked like—

Oh, fuck.

A hoarse, raucous cry forced its way from Katsuki’s throat and hardly a moment later, something hot and sticky smeared itself over Izuku’s cheeks and his boyfriend’s thighs. His hand stopped moving for a moment, then pulled the dildo out as slowly as possible, and just watched, watched as Katsuki’s chest heaved with every long, tough, desperate gasp at air.

I didn’t– didn’t mean to—

“Kacchan.” He whispered, forgetting about the cum on his face to lean in close and see thin, crystalline tears trailing down the sides of his face and onto the pillow. “You okay? You need anything?”

I should go grab a washcloth. He might feel better if I clean him off a bit, and I don’t think he’s in the mood to move right now.

“...m’sorry.” Katsuki whispered instead.

What?

“Hey, no need to apologize, it’s—”

“Didn’t mean to cum that early.” Katsuki’s voice cracked, each word weak and thin. “I-I tried to hold out, I did, I promise, I—”
“Relax.”

*Please, relax, It’s okay.*

“Look at me for a minute?”

Disoriented eyes met his own, but for only a moment, Katsuki looked a little calmer.

*Thank god.*

“I don’t mind taking a little break if you need to recuperate.” He offered him a gentle smile, hand just barely cupping his boyfriend’s cheek. “We’ve got all the time in the world tonight, Kacchan. It’s okay. You looked absolutely *gorgeous* like that.”

“But… I ruined the moment. Right when we were getting into it, I…”

*For fuck’s sake, Kacchan. It’s okay. Not an issue.*

Instead of engaging in useless argument, though, he kissed him. Long, smooth, slow… and after a few seconds, Katsuki began to relax under the touch as well.

“Better?” Izuku pulled back, relieved as the smallest smile worked its way over his boyfriend’s lips.

“Still not feeling *awesome* about the fact that I came before you even got to, y’know, do it yourself, but… yeah, think so.” *Good, good. But are you, u-uh…”*

*Huh? Why the—*

“You gonna wash my cum off your face or what?”

This time, it was *Izuku’s* turn to flush.

“O-Oh. Well, aha, um… kinda forgot.” He stuttered, mildly embarrassed while at the same time, more than mildly aroused. “I’ll go do that now, so just give me—”

“It’s hot.” Katsuki said, interrupting his quick climb off the bed. “Yeah, wash it off, but… I kinda like how I look on you.”

Lying back on the bed in only that sinfully tight black tank top and those too-delicate earrings, bare legs spread wide in invitation as the well-used dildo sat next to him, Katsuki *shouldn’t* have felt so…

*Powerful.*

Not that he minded. Nope, nope, not one bit.

*I’d follow his directions anyday.*

“You can stare when you come back.” Came the voice from below, some semblance of confident humor in his tone. “I ain’t going anywhere, and you still have a promise to live up to. Didn’t you say you were gonna take care of me?”

*Fuck you. Fuck you. I’m—*

“Once I get all this cleaned off, I’m going to fuck you so, so hard.” It was hard enough to keep his voice steady, stable. “So until I get back, Kacchan…”
He stepped off the bed, looked down at his boyfriend’s ready form.

“Keep your hands above your head, and *don’t move.*”

The reaction was instantaneous. Katsuki’s arms flew back and nearly slammed into the headboard behind him, legs spreading open just a little bit more as those eyes went wide, wide, looking at him as if he held every answer in the world.

“Y-Yes, sir.”

*Good.*

Pulling away to go do something as simple as wash his *face* was hard when his boyfriend was being so damn *perfect.* There was no complaining, no begging, not yet— only the quiet trickle of the adjacent bathroom’s sink and the soft scrub of cloth against his face. He remembered to do the same for Katsuki, of course, and dampening a fresh one before returning back out to his room to see him still in pristine position. An undeniable whimper rose from above when he went to wipe down his thighs, and Izuku couldn’t help but want *more* of that noise.

*Maybe… ooh, his legs…*

“Feels nice?”

“…y-yeah, but… I just, I want…”

His mouth moved back against those firm legs, tough from two intensive years of high school practice. “You want me to touch you a little more right here?”

All he got that time was a small noise of acknowledgement before he bit down a little more, a little harder, enough to make Katsuki’s legs jerk a bit beneath him and an honest moan slip out. But he only bit harder, sucked firmer, kissed gently before moving onto another part and doing the same thing there.

*Repeat. Repeat.*

The small chorus of whines and whimpers and the occasional groan egged him on as Izuku stained those thighs with sunset pinks and twilight reds, a near *horizon* blooming over the expanse of untouched skin. Later, those colors would shift to midnight purple, to morning blue, to fade, fade away again into a noon sky, but until then…

*He’s mine.*

And Izuku looked up, lifted his head, and saw those tears again— clear, silent, and shimmering on crimson cheeks.

*Beautiful. So, so beautiful.*

“You like that, baby?” He asked, heart racing as Katsuki nodded, hardly meeting his eyes. “You like it when I touch you there?”

He nodded, *again.*

*Not good enough.*

Izu’s hands moved to cradle at Katsuki’s hips, to thumb at the skintight fabric that could hardly be called decent. In a way, it was fun to pull back the top just enough for it to snap back against his
boyfriend’s stomach, to punctuate his every word with that simple, tiny action.

“I know I’ve told you before, so remember this time.” Izuku shook his head. “I want you to use your grown-up words, Kacchan. How am I supposed to know what you like if you don’t tell me?”

It might’ve been a little mean, asking him for a verbal answer when he was already so far gone, but the broken, barely, whispered response that came next made it all worth his while.

“I-Like it. Keep… keep going…” Katsuki shuddered, those hands clearly struggling to stay in place above his head. “W-Want you so bad, dammit…!”

Maybe he did come too early the first time, but he’s so aroused again already…! God, I’ve never had so much fun teasing someone in my life. Seeing him fall apart like this, a little bit at a time, wanting everything that I’ve got and more…

He made a resolution to himself, right then and there.

I’m going to fuck you so hard, so hard, and when we’re done I’ll kiss everywhere it hurts.

“Think it’s time to play somewhere else, then?” He murmured, tugging up the hem of Katsuki’s shirt for real. “I love your chest. So, so much.”

“Yeah, you… you’ve made that real clear.” Katsuki squirmed, air hitting the base of his now-exposed stomach. “So are you gonna touch it or not?”

“Mm, remember the words?”

That sent his eyes shut again, head shoved as far back into the pillow as far as it could. “F-Fuck… please, sir.”

There you go, baby. Just like that.

His hand slid further under the tight fabric, pulled it up slowly, slowly, kissed Katsuki’s chest through it, and left the shirt bunched up right below his pecs.

“Why– why’d you stop?” Katsuki complained, fidgeting at the sudden halt. “Just take it off already…!”

But his questions only turned to cries as Izuku pressed the flat of his tongue against his boyfriend’s stomach and moved, the smooth piercing only serving to send Katsuki’s hips bucking up, vying for as much contact as possible. It was tricky enough to resist biting down hard on his stomach, on his abs, on his hips and all the way down to his dick, but it was only made more difficult by the gorgeous, needy little noises his boyfriend was making right above. It was perfect, really—teeth digging into carved muscle, tongue gliding over his stomach with a feather-light force to match the rough. As he kissed the skin all the way down to Katsuki’s crotch, though, practically worshiping the man before him, something new tangled itself in Izuku’s hair and pulled.

That’s not going to work, Kacchan.

“Let go.” He ordered, stopping everything he was in the midst of doing. “I didn’t say you could touch yet.”

“Please, s’just hard, I-I wanna—!”

No.
Izuku cut him off with a grab at his boyfriend’s wrists, pulling those needy hands from his hair and pinning them back behind his head. There was a push, a groan, a please, please, I just wanna touch, but when Izuku’s lips met his again, the begging went quiet in favor of taking advantage of what contact he could get and kissing back.

“That’s better, baby boy.” He murmured, drawing off his lips with one last slow touch. “Are you going to be good for me now?”

“Yes… s-sir…”

“But even if you are going to be good now…” Izuku’s free hand went back down to toy with Katsuki’s rolled-up shirt, just for the moment. “I don’t know if I can let that mistake go completely unpunished.”

The shirt was pushed up and over his pecs, bunched up at his throat as Izuku’s head dipped down again, restraint falling to pieces as he dug in hard. A long, sharp cry sounded from Katsuki’s throat as those teeth did the same thing around a nipple, biting and sucking so much rougher than they’d ever done before.

Mm, yes, yes…

“You’re so sensitive.” Izuku breathed against his skin, awestruck by just how hard his boyfriend was in every place possible. “You always twitch when I touch your chest, like it feels so good you can’t handle it. I could play with just these all day, y’know…”

“Fuck, I-I’d let you…!”

His voice is so perfect like this.

“God, I love your chest.” He continued, holding Katsuki’s wrists tighter. Do you know how many times I’ve dreamed about marking you up? Another kiss. “Do you know how many times I’ve thought about covering every inch of you in bruises?” Another lick. “Do you have any idea how many times I’ve wanted to fuck you up so hard you can’t move?”

Another bite, another cry, another long, drawn-out moan.

“P-Please…” The tongue piercing swirled over an abused nipple, the simple change in texture earning him another, another, another shriek of desperation. “God, please…!”

Good. So good. So, so…

“Good, Kacchan.” Izuku smiled, and allowed him a moment to rest. “I love it when you beg like that.”

“You… y-you do?”

Those red eyes had never seemed so big before today.

“I do.” He repeated, letting his fingers run down Katsuki’s chest with featherlight touch. “You’re so good for me, baby. Such a good boy.”

It was only when Katsuki’s let out a long, low moan that he realized just what he’d said, and that for whatever reason, his boyfriend appeared only more turned on.

“Good for you, sir… s’only… only you…!”
Fuck, I could get off on just listening to him...

“I think you deserve something nice for being so good.” Izuku whispered, finally releasing Katsuki’s wrists to unbuckle his too-tight belt. “Want something nice, baby?”

The answer came in a near-breathless yes, sir— two words Izuku wasn’t sure he’d ever get tired of hearing. But as he went to shuck off his pants and finally get on with the main event, Katsuki propped himself up on his elbows and watched.

“I wanna take off your pants.” Came the request, all nerves and all confidence. “Can I? Please?”

And with that sweaty, messy blonde hair hanging down in front of his face and that hint of a plea on the edge of his words, Izuku couldn’t just say no.

“Of course you can.” He reached out to his boyfriend, who took his hand and rocked up onto trembling knees in a heartbeat. “You’ve been so good today, so go ahead.”

He’d expected excitement— maybe a little anxiety, too— but when Izuku pulled Katsuki’s shirt off and let him at him, the sheer eagerness in his every move was something he’d hardly anticipated. Frantic, ready hands tugged his dark jeans down, and for as sloppy as the process might’ve been, Izuku had to give him points for zealous effort. The fear was gone, the embarrassment long worn off; for as much as this might’ve been one of their first times navigating something so incredibly intimate, Izuku could only hope Katsuki felt as safe as he did.

“Would… would you take your shirt and that harness off too?” Katsuki asked as the boxers came off with the pants. “Not ‘cause it ain’t hot, it’s really, really hot, but I just… I dunno. I wanna see you.”

“I thought you were already looking at me, baby.” He teased, but gladly obliged. The harness was easy to slip off his waist, back, and neck after already detaching it from his belt, but he tried to make at least a little show out taking off his shirt. Katsuki wasn’t much help with all of that, but he did give Izuku a stare so full of lust and utter longing that it made even him falter.

He’s so bright. So beautiful. Blazing, radiant, shining… just like the sun.

“Hot as you remember?” Izuku grinned, flexing just for show. “Or close, at least?”

“Hotter.” Katsuki said, hungry eyes tearing apart every inch of bare skin. “I don’t think I’ve ever wanted your dick in me as bad as I do right now.”

He grabbed the discarded bottle of lube from the corner of the bed, the box of condoms on the nightstand, and took care to roll one on before crawling back towards his boyfriend. But Katsuki’s heady gaze never left, not with those eyes searing holes into his skin and setting his blood to a bubbling broil.

Kacchan, Kacchan… baby… god, I’m surprised you can still move so well after all that.

A deep, red flush ran from his boyfriend’s face all the way down his bitten-up neck, but a cocky, half-fucked grin sat heavy over his cheeks.

“I’m kinda proud of you too, sir.” Katsuki said, head tilted just a bit. “You didn’t flinch when you were takin’ off those pants, for once.”

I didn’t— “W-Wait, what?”

“Every time you’ve taken off your pants in front of me, you’ve always flinched, or cringed, or tried
to hide your scars. All that stuff.” He said, tone far more nonchalant than most anyone used when talking about his scars.

*Oh, shit… he’s right, I…*

“I was watching.” Katsuki hadn’t sounded so certain all night. “You didn’t. Not this time.”

*I didn’t. I wasn’t…*

Izuku looked down at his own bare hands, bare chest, bare legs— and unlike all the times before…

*I don’t think it hurts as bad right now.*

He cracked a small, small smile.

“Improvement, right?”

A nod.

“S’nice to see you get out of your head for once. Focus on, y’know—” Katsuki gestured towards his ass. “What’s important.”

*Not fair. He’s not allowed to make me feel so much, then pull this shit on me…!*

But, still— “You’re right.” Izuku said, crawling closer to him. “Making you feel good is what’s important right now.”

“Hmph. Better make sure you’re feeling good, too.”

“Feeling good? Fuck, Kacchan…” He shook his head. “I’ve never felt better.”

“Hope that’ll change once you stick your dick in me.” Those gorgeous hips rolled back, full of intent. “Ready when you are—” A pause, a wink. “Sir.”

*Oh, you little shit.*

“Someone’s getting a little cocky.” Izuku grabbed his thighs and folded them back towards his chest, that tight ass just waiting for him to go in. “Let’s see how long you can keep that snark up with me, baby.”

“Right back at you.” Katsuki rolled his head to the side, tongue peeking out between parted lips. “Huh... wonder how long you’re gonna be able to keep that composure of yours together once you’re in me…?”

“Keep my composure?” He grabbed the lube, thankful that he’d brought it close again earlier, and coated just a couple fingers with it. Katsuki was trying to toy with him too, and for as nice as that brash and stubborn confidence was, seeing that wall crack, fracture, and shatter from the pleasure was almost better. No time to waste— Izuku slid those fingers in, adrenaline spiking through his veins as Katsuki’s voice broke to a sharp cry at just that little bit of contact.

*Beautiful. So beautiful. It’s been so long since I’ve gotten to do this, and it’s... god, it’s so much better with him…!*

“Even after all that prep, you’re still so tight.” Izuku purred, taking his time to twist and stretch and scissor his fingers inside. “Gonna feel so good around my cock. You’re gonna take it so good.”
“I’m— I’m gonna take it so good…” Katsuki repeated, each breath faster, faster. “You’re… yeah, you’re gonna give it to me so good—!”

His words snapped off to another sharp scream as a new finger slipped inside, curling and stroking and teasing all too well. Even just this was fun, watching as his boyfriend’s cries shifted from small and needy to drop-dead desperate.

“P-Please… please, c’mon, I-I want more…!”

“That bad, huh?” He pulled his fingers out, wiping the excess lube over Katsuki’s ruined thighs. “God, I don’t think I’ve told you enough times how much I love your ass. So tight, so smooth, so… god. Perfect.” Izuku paused, poured a little more lube over his dick, and traced the outside of that enticing hole again, again. “I’m so happy it’s you I get to make mine, Kacchan.”

For so many more reasons than this, too.

“C-Cut the sap.” Katsuki stuttered. “Know you love me, so why don’t you show it, h-hah…?”

“Katsuki,” came the name— low, deep, husky— and those eyes, those gorgeous, gorgeous red eyes hung on him with a magnetic force so strong it would’ve had any lesser man on his knees. “I’m just getting started.”

And for as beautiful as Katsuki was every day, every moment, nothing came close to the exquisite crease of his features and the twist of his mouth and the long, low, pleading moan that came out as Izuku finally pushed in.

“Y-You’re—” Push. “God, so—” Pull. “S-So damn tight, baby—!”

He’s warm. So warm. So good, so tight, so ready…!

“Like that, baby boy? Like how my dick feels in you?” He breathed, each sentence punctuated with another sharp thrust, another long, slow draw back. “You’re so good for me, so good, so I’m gonna fuck you so damn hard!”

Tears swelled at the corners of Katsuki’s eyes, glistening against the ruby-red flush of his cheeks. “S’big… s’big, really big, f-feels so—”

He broke into a spiraling cry, one that sent shivers down Izuku’s spine and left him dying for more of that angelic sound.

Katsuki…

“Bigger than what you’re used to, h-hah?” Hands gripped Katsuki’s legs tighter, something warm, heavy, and nearly electrifying flowing through even those. “M-Maybe— m-maybe I can get somethin’ special for you. Just— just for you. Somethin’ a little more accurate than that knock-off toy you’ve been using.” He pushed in again, again, relishing in every little gasp and groan and moan that Katsuki offered in response. “T-That… y’know, let’s worry about that later. This ass of yours is so, s-so much more important right now.”

I can’t believe how warm you are around me…!

One of Katsuki’s hands twisted into white sheets, the other balled tight in a fist just above his chest. Those tears streamed down his face now, rivers of silver on blazing terrain, and crackling just above that fantastical vision were—
“Deku, D-Deku, please… please, harder!” Came the begging, the pleading, the sobbing for more as visible sparks flared from those violently trembling palms, illuminating each and every drop of sweat on his lean, tight, heaving body. “Need you, n-need your dick, need more, please– p-please, sir…!”

What did I do right in my life to have you in it?

And before he could even think about what he was doing, Izuku bent forward, dick still firmly in Katsuki’s ass, and kissed him.

I love you, I love you, I love you so much…

“K-Katsuki—” He fumbled, just trying to kiss him, kiss him in the hope that maybe he’d know some ounce of the fountain of love Izuku held for him. “Love you. L-Love you. Love you so much, baby, I-I just—”

“Why… w-why’re you crying?” Katsuki asked, and one of those gross, sweaty, perfect hands came to brush up against his cheek. “God… such a damn… s-such a damn sap.”

“S-Shuddup.” He mumbled, stuffy and snotty, then kissed him again. Again, again. “Lemme be sappy. Lemme love my amazing boyfriend.”

Katsuki only laughed, though– a small, simple, breathy laugh that could hardly be heard over the blood pounding in his head and running through his veins. “Dumbass… ain’t like I’m any better.”

They were both crying now, a total mess of tears and smiles and laughter and sex. Izuku couldn’t help but trail kisses down his chest again, caressing all the harsh marks he’d left earlier, treating each and every spot on Katsuki’s body like it was made of gold.

“You’re so strong… mhm, so smart…” A pause. “So kind, so caring…” A kiss. “So beautiful, so hot, so sexy—” A thrust, hard enough to bring out another one of those breathless, priceless screams. “So mine.”

“S-Shit, Deku, you can’t just—”

“Can’t just?”

“Can’t… c-can’t just say that…!”

“Why not, baby?”

Those palms reached up, up to brush at Izuku’s face and weakly grab at his shoulders, as if all they needed was simple touch to survive. “Love you. Love you. Never— n-never wanna leave, wanna be with you forever…!”

Forever…

Izuku hated how his first thoughts weren’t of love and of a happy life, but of fear, of people finding out about what they shared in these precious times together, of the world fighting back and trying to tear them apart. But just one look at Katsuki’s pleasure-struck face brought him back to the present, back to the good feelings and the good times.

Can’t focus on the outside world. Can’t focus on futures. Just… just need to focus on…

“How about you just think about right now.” He murmured, picking up the pace. “About how my
dick feels, about how great this has been, and how much of a good boy you are.”

 Fuck, why does calling him that feel so right…?

 “Yeah…” Katsuki moaned, toes curling and sparks flaring from his palms again, again, possibly even charring the bed. “Mhm, y-yeah, I’m… that’s me.”

 “S’you, y-yeah, s’you…!”

 Those hips moved faster as Izuku clutched at Katsuki’s hips with an iron grip, frantic movements tearing from a rhythm to an out-of-sync cacophony of feeling, of pleasure, of white-hot heat building and building to a toppling crescendo as each pant turned to a cry and each cry turned to a frenzied mess of faster, faster, and more, please, more…!

 “Katsuki, you feel so—”

 “H-Hah, keep going, harder, harder, dammit!”

 “G-Gonna cum, baby? Gonna be a good boy and cum for me?”

 “Mhm, yessir, I’m gonna, g-gonna, g-gonna…!”

 Izuku bucked his hips forward one last, one strong, one heavenly time, and—

 “S-Shit, Katsuki—!”

 “FUCK, DEKU!”

 Katsuki’s voice shattered, splintered into a screech that carried with it the sudden smell of nitroglycerin and a near blinding explosion off to the side as Izuku rocketed through his own orgasm, screaming and shouting too loudly to be ignored. He tried to pull out, tried to get back to reality as the dizzying image of his boyfriend’s cum-streaked body threatened to destroy what little sanity he had left, but even the smallest of actions was so hard, so hard.

 “K-Kacchan. Ka… Katsuki…” Izuku might’ve said, teetering along the line of post-orgasm dreaming and reality. “C’mere… c’mere, baby…”

 He managed to get the condom off and to the side before pulling Katsuki’s limp, fucked-out body into his arms, hardly caring about the mess of cum and sweat and lube between them. There were no words, only breaths and a failing attempt to recover from the high they’d both just fallen from.

 Kacchan’s shaking. He’s shaking a lot. Is he…

 “You okay?” Izuku asked, not out of pity or fear, but in wanting to be a decent boyfriend and help him through this. “Aha, sorry if I, um… went a little overboard at the end there.”

 “Shh…” Katsuki mumbled, a little hoarse. “Don’t ‘pologize… you’re perfect…”

 However, for as cute as he was, those reactions didn’t mean he was entirely aware of what he was feeling. This was all new to him, and Katsuki probably wasn’t in the right mindset to really know what he needed at the moment.

 He might be a little dehydrated, he was crying a lot, and just overwhelmed… hm.

 “Hey, I’m gonna go get us some water.” Izuku decided, and tried—tried—to pull himself away. “I’ll be right back real soon, don’t worry. Just don’t want you or me feeling shitty later.”
“Better come back ‘n cuddle fast.” Katsuki pouted, though the words were barely audible with his mouth half-pressed into the sheets. He gave him one last reassurance before limping out to the kitchen, legs still not used to being on the ground instead of bent before his boyfriend’s ass. But he brought water and crackers back quick, sat on the bed, and had Katsuki come up and lean beside him to drink and eat. For as much as that seemed to help, though, Izuku noticed one more thing upon glancing over to Katsuki’s side of the bed.

...oh my god. You’re kidding me.

“Kacchan.” He stared, dumbfounded. “Did you really…?”

His boyfriend turned towards what he had his eyes on, and flushed a deeper, more ashamed red than he had all throughout having his lights fucked out. “...fuck.”

He... he burned... “You burned a hole through my bed!?”

“I didn’t mean to, ‘kay!?”

I can’t believe this. “It’s— it’s fine, I can buy a new mattress tomorrow, but holy shit, Kacchan. Holy shit.”

Guess I really did channel that BDE energy, then. My god...

Katsuki gave as much of a shrug as he could muster. “Felt real good. Couldn’t, um. Stop it. I think.”

Do they sell explosive retardant mattresses? Like, quirk-proof ones or something? Is that a thing? At least I didn’t activate my quirk... accidentally powering up while I’m in his ass wouldn’t end well, I think.

“It’s okay, no worries. I guess now we know that that’s a thing?” Izuku managed a laugh, and handed another few crackers to his boyfriend. “How are you feeling, though? Tired?”

“Exhausted.” He mumbled, eyes shut as he fell against his shoulder. “Sports fest all day, sex all night...”

Shit, that’s right. No wonder he’s wiped out.

“I hope you planned on taking the day off tomorrow.” Izuku ran a hand through Katsuki’s slightly-matted hair, something warm bubbling up through his chest as his boyfriend leaned into the touch. “If you’re tired now, well. You’re gonna be sore as all get out in the morning.”

Katsuki didn’t have much more to add to that other than a grunt and another sip of water.

Probably shouldn’t leave him so messy before he falls asleep, though... and I definitely need to change these sheets.

“You up for a bath?” He shook Katsuki awake a little more, needing to make sure he didn’t pass out before they had the chance to wash up. “I’ll go ahead and run it, if you want.”

“Mm, yeah... could go for a bath.”

No complaints, no arguing.

This... this is nice.

For as fun as fucking Katsuki was, washing him off was almost just as nice, in a way. Izuku filled
the tub, carried his boyfriend all the way there, and ‘helped’ in a way that may have involved more
gentle teasing and loving gazes and stolen kisses than a normal bath should’ve. But once they both
washed up, dried off, and got the sheets changed to something clean and not crusty and cum-stained,
the two of them tumbled into bed (avoiding the fresh hole in the mattress) and kissed, kissed, kissed
until finally curling up in each other’s arms and falling asleep.

Or, so he thought.

“...Deku?”

“Mm? What’s—”

“I love you.” Katsuki buried his face further into Izuku’s chest, blonde hair tickling his chin. “Just
wanted to say it again.”

*Way to make my heart melt just like that…!* 

“I love you too, Kacchan.” He murmured, coupled with one last kiss to the top of his head. “More
than you know.”

“Dunno ‘bout that. Thought you made your feelings pretty clear tonight.”

“Doesn’t mean I don’t have more, though! I’m… I’ll make you breakfast in bed tomorrow morning.
Eggs. *Real food.*”

There was a soft, small laugh from below, and Izuku couldn’t get rid of the warm, blooming smile on
his face. “Knew you’d come around eventually.”

“Quiet, you. Or I’m gonna have to blow you extra hard tomorrow so you don’t start complaining
about my eating habits again.”

They both laughed that time, but fell quiet soon after to just touch and hold. The moment for screams
and cries and gasps of pleasure was gone, but for now?

“...love you, Kacchan. Sleep well.”

“You too, Deku… you too.”

“...oh, fuck.”

“Hm?” Izuku’s head swiveled towards the voice. “Something wrong, Kacchan?”

Breakfast had gone well, yet the most *startling* (yet satisfying) part of his morning had been waking
up to see his boyfriend covered head to toe in innumerable bruises, bitemarks, and some suspiciously
hand-shaped marks that Izuku *hoped* hadn’t been caused by accidental quirk activation. But just as
expected, his boyfriend hadn’t been able to move for a solid hour or so after they woke up, sore as
hell and unable to even drag himself to the bathroom to piss. And it was after their breakfast when
this new complaint came, as Katsuki lay on his side under the sheets again, messing around on his
phone with some sort of mild dread on his face.

“Ugh.” His boyfriend grumbled, dropping his phone back on the pillow. “Forgot to call my mom last
night. Missed her texts, and…”

*Oh… “And?”*
Katsuki looked at his phone more time, then back at Izuku. “...something tells me that shitty act you put on at the stadium wasn’t convincing enough. Think she knows.”

Izuku’s blood ran cold.

Oh, shit.

“You– you think?” He stuttered, trying to pretend there wasn’t sweat beading on his forehead. “Like, don’t know for certain? Just a guess?”

“She may be an old hag, but she ain’t stupid.” Katsuki groaned. “Fuck. Well, um…”

Don’t say it, don’t say it—

“Maybe… I dunno, maybe we should…” His boyfriend paused. “Well… would you be willing to meet my parents?”

...fuck.

Izuku swallowed. “I-I, um… I guess it’s gotta happen at some point, aha…”

Especially after I just wrecked his ass.

“She suggested Tuesday.”

“That’s— that’s like, three days from now! A-And, wait, what exactly did she say!?”

Katsuki sighed again, and read. “‘We’ll be making dinner Tuesday night if your boyfriend’s free. Tell him I’ll kick his ass if he winds up in the hospital before then.’

“What!” He exclaimed, not sure whether to feel anxious or mildly offended. “I-I’m not that bad! Fine! Tuesday’s fine! I’ll be free after seven, I can shower and change into something other than my hero suit before we go over!”

He might’ve seen his boyfriend’s eyes roll, but he punched in a quick message and dropped his phone back on the bed. “Told her that works. Now come cuddle with me.”

“So demanding.” Izuku complained, but happily obliged. “Maybe I should fuck you again today. Make it so you can’t walk tomorrow, either.”

But all he got in response was a cheeky, teasing grin. “Then I guess it’s good thing I’ve got an extra day off.”

God, you’re so horny. Not that I’m any better, but…

“...y’know, I’ll stick with cuddling for now.”

We’ve got time. Even... even if it’s just in this room we can use it.
THAT SAID- please, *PLEASE LOOK AT THE OUTFITS THAT KACCHAN AND DEKU HAD GOIN ON*, drawn by the fucking AMAZING @catskeez on twitter!!!

Also, *i drew up another one of those character profiles for kacchan right here!!* And *here’s all the art for this fic, the playlist for this fic, and my twitter!!* thank u so much to my beta @aetherlite, and ILY ALL YALL SO MUCH!! Next chapter next thursday!!
Meet the Bakugous

Chapter Summary

Pro Hero Valiant: big daddy energy in the sheets, big disaster energy in the streets

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clunk—the shut of the rarely-used bathroom stall doors.

Thump—the slipping off of the shirt over his head, followed soon by his belt and his pants.

Slam—a locker thrown closed, followed by...

“Dude, did you see the results for the last test? Ugh, I bombed it.”

Ugh. Classmates.

“Man… I’m ready to sleep hard tonight. Today’s practice had me all over the place.”

“Wanna grab dinner tonight? They’ve got that Monday night special at the ramen place, y’know.”

Talking, talking, talking. Just the usual locker room banter. Katsuki wasn’t usually a huge conversationalist in these brief periods after practice, wanting to get in and out of sweaty costumes and into slightly better clothes before darting off to take a shower. He had no shame in changing in front of his classmates, especially after over two years of being in classes together, but the thought of them seeing the mess Deku had made of his whole body not a day ago?

Yeah. No thanks.

His classmates didn’t need to see the bitemarks scattered over his chest, handprint-shaped bruises seared into his skin, or the long, still-red scratches littered across his back. Maybe they had gone a few more rounds the day after, maybe Deku had gotten a little wild with wanting to dig his nails and teeth into every part of him, and maybe he’d let loose on setting off small explosions against his boyfriend’s scar-ridden body. In the moment, it’d all been good. Great. Absolutely wonderful.

Now, though…

“...hey, did you notice… out on the field today, Bakugou was kinda, uh… limping?”

Fuck.

Katsuki leaned back against the wall of the cramped bathroom stall, that very fear coming to light.

Guess they thought I left already. Probably don’t realize I’m right here.

“Wasn’t gonna say anything, but shit. He totally was.”

Kaminari, shut up.
Interrupting would probably make it worse at this point, though, and some morbid part of Katsuki wanted to stay and listen to what his dwindling classmates were going to say.

“Think he finally got some? I mean, he was kinda mellowed out today. It’d make sense, dude.”

“Yeah…!” Kaminari continued, echoing what he assumed was Sero’s comment. “Man, who do you think did him like that? Bet it was someone strong, fucking him hard enough to do that kind of damage.”

Why... why do you care...

“Doubt it was anyone in our class. Or, wait—dude. What if he scored a threesome with Camie and Yaomomo?”

Gross. Never. Katsuki shuddered, trying to keep from screaming as his skin crawled up his back. Thought everyone knew I wasn’t into women, ‘specially my best fucking friends.

“Nah, nah. Bakugou doesn’t swing that way.” Kaminari continued, all too freely. “Maybe class B? Ugh, but he never talks about them. Or—! Hold up, bro.”

There was a small laugh, a low, gossipy murmur, and Katsuki had to hold his breath to hear every word that came next.

“He leaves campus all the time. Bet he met someone outside of U.A.” Kaminari attempted to whisper. “Shit… man, it’s a long shot, but what if he’s got some pro hero ass after him?”

Every nerve, every inch of his body froze.

Stop. Stop. Stop talking, right now.

The only thing keeping him from blasting down the stall door and yelling at his classmates was the fact that doing so would confirm whatever suspicions they had, and Katsuki knew he was a god-awful liar.

Not as bad as Deku, but...

“Pro hero? C’mon, dude. You really think so?”

“I mean, he kinda seems like the type who’d want someone older, y’know? Someone… someone with experience.”

“Well, when you put it that way, makes me kinda want someone with experience, too!”

Change topics, change topics, please, just—

“But remember the sports fest? That whole thing with Valiant like, fucking blasting down the stairs to watch Bakugou when Camie pulled that illusion up? Oh, oh, and remember that thing about Valiant getting a tongue piercing or somethin’? Bro. What if they’re like, toge—”

“The hell are you two doing?”

Oh my god.

Through his heart trying to beat out of his chest and his bruised hands physically trembling against the once-cold bathroom wall, Todoroki’s voice cut through their conversation with knifelike precision.
“Ah, just thinkin’? Come on, don’t you wanna know who Bakugou let up his ass too?”

Let up my ass!? No, that’s not how it went, not at all…!

“I’d rather know that my best friend isn’t having his personal life gossiped about.” Todoroki hissed, scalding. “It’s not your problem who he wants to be with, if anyone at all.”

“Dude, chill! We—shit, it’s not like we said it’s a problem or anything! Just wanted to know who! Sides, he doesn’t need to know we were talking about it. It’s not like, an issue or anything.”

Kaminari groaned, and Katsuki could just imagine the eye-roll he had to be giving.

I’m… I’m really, really not supposed to be hearing this.

Those one-and-a-half days he’d spent with Deku had been some of the best in his life. Thirty six hours of being worshipped and played with and fucked till he couldn’t see straight anymore. Thirty six hours of low voices, of teasing words, of things said that would forever stay between them.

Don’t you dare try to ruin that time for me, asshole. Don’t talk about him.

“Talking behind anyone’s back like that is a dick move.” Todoroki hissed. “Leave him alone.”

Todoroki. Todoroki. I’m taking you out for dinner this week.

“Fine, fine! Geez, bro… just calm down. Ain’t that complicated.”

But the shuffle of feet across the concrete floor only confirmed the good news of their departure, and after another horrible minute or two of waiting, three quick, sudden taps sounded against the stall door.

“They’re gone.” Todoroki said from the other side, frustration hidden beneath the steady exterior. “Sorry I didn’t say anything sooner, I… just didn’t want them getting suspicious.”

Thank god. Thank you. Shit, I…

“T-Thanks.” He croaked, still trying to calm his violently shaking hands. “I’ll– I’ll be out in a minute. Promise.”

Deep breaths, deep breaths. They weren’t saying anything bad. Kinda invasive, but not bad. It was all just speculation. Just speculation.

“Take your time.” Todoroki assured him. “I don’t mind staying here if you want to walk back to the dorms together.”

Going alone might make him more vulnerable to awkward stares and unwanted ogling. At the very least, sticking with Todoroki would help keep some of the attention off him.

“If… if that’s okay. I’d appreciate it.” Katsuki finally managed, and pulled his pants up around his waist. “Thanks.”

“No need to thank me.” He said instead. “Last I checked, you’re my best friend. And the last thing I want is to see people spreading rumors about you.”

Even though we haven’t gotten to spend much time today lately, plus all the stuff with Shindou…
“Hmph.” He pulled on a t-shirt, and over that, the large jacket Yaoyorozu had been convinced to make for him for his most recent sex date. “Guess you’re not too bad yourself.”

*And I wanna spend more time with you before this school year ends, too... who knows where we’ll both end up after it’s over.*

Appropriately covered up and calmer than before, Katsuki finally managed to step out of the stall and meet his friend, patiently waiting for him to finish up. A small part of him almost laughed— it was like Todoroki was trying to be a *bodyguard* or something. Maybe that idea wasn’t too far off, but at the same time, it was just…

*Strategic. This is one thing I can’t afford to make public. I dunno what would happen, what the media would think, what Deku would think, and...*

Katsuki was a man of few fears.

*I’m not scared of being found out, not inherently. I’d love to be able to at least be a little public about us. To be able to go out to dinner without worrying about backlash, to be able to hold hands in the street without paparazzi harassing us, to be able to spend time together and not have our relationship be used against us.*

He wasn’t afraid of publicity, but he was terrified of being forced apart from the one person he’d come to love and cherish more than anyone else.

*Maybe it’s just me thinking too much. Maybe it’s all just a bunch of nonsense. Maybe— maybe nothing would happen even if we were found out. But I just...*

He nodded in Todoroki’s direction, let him know that he was ready to go, and they took off.

*It’s not something I can risk right now. I need to be more careful.*

“And, uh….” Katsuki started as they left the locker room. “Is my limp really that bad?”

“I’d be lying if I said it wasn’t noticeable.” Todoroki confirmed. “I mean, you were at his place for a while. And I may be wrong, but Midoriya seems to be the kind of person who’d give it his all.”

*He definitely gave it his all, Katsuki thought, ass still very sore. His all, and then some.*

That wasn’t to say he’d be opposed to going hard again, and again, and again, though.

“Yeah, you’re... well.” Katsuki rubbed at the back of his neck, thinking about all the marks hidden beneath his too-heavy clothes. “You’re pretty spot on.”

For as much as he loved class, pulling away from Deku to head back to the dorms had been one of the hardest things he’d done in years. All he wanted was to stay in that small bedroom, to spread his legs for his boyfriend and let him have *everything*, to drown in that sea of pleasure and praise and whispers of *good boy, good boy, such a good boy for me, baby.*

‘Course I’m good for you. I’m gonna be the best damn boyfriend ‘cause I’ve got the best boyfriend. And when you talk to me like that...

Katsuki wasn’t sure he had words to describe just how *loved* Deku made him feel.

*I just wanna listen to everything you say. I wanna see that face you make whenever I say yes, sir, wanna feel your mouth and your hands all over me, wanna hear you talk and wanna make you
scream and wanna see you cry 'cause it feels so, so good when you’re in me.

“I’m glad you guys are doing well.” Todoroki added, a little quieter than before. “It’s… it’s easy to see that you love him.”

_I do. I really, really, really do._

He shrugged.

“Got lucky, I think. He’s… Deku’s really something special.”

_I miss him already, and it’s only been a day since I left._

But Todoroki was still quiet, even as they walked through the school courtyard and out to the dorms.

“…um. You and Shindou doing anything later…?” Katsuki asked, relieved that he was able to say that name with less of a bitter tang in the back of his throat. “Haven’t really seen him around.”

“No.” Came the answer, sharper than he’d expected. “We’re… no.”

_Huh?

“Did something happen?”

“Did something happen…” Todoroki repeated, kicking a rock out in front of his shoe. “I suppose so. We had a conversation while you were at Midoriya’s.”

_Oh? “What about?”_

He shook his head, the subtle lilt of a sigh at the edge of his words. “Last year’s internships are over. I won’t be working alongside him again this year because of that.”

“I mean, duh.” Katsuki said, still not sure what he was getting at. “I ain’t working with Momo again this year either. What’s your point?”

Todoroki stopped walking, scanned the area, and pointed towards a small bench off to the side.

“Could… could we sit down for this?”

...oh, shit. “Uh, sure. Yeah.”

Somehow, Katsuki felt as if he’d been in this situation before.

_I’m so used to him being there for me, but… have I really been there for him lately?

Now that he thought about it, Katsuki wasn’t sure he’d seen Todoroki so quiet before.

“Shindou… he’s not a bad person. Maybe his intentions aren’t always selfless, but he’s not out to hurt anyone. He just wants to get ahead of the game.” Todoroki started, hands curling and uncurling in his lap. “He’s a good sparring partner, for the most part. His quirk is interesting to work against. I’d probably consider him at least somewhat of a friend. But I…”

Todoroki paused. Clenched his fists. Swallowed.

“When he proposed having sex, being friends with benefits, I… I thought I’d be happy with that. I think he genuinely liked me. Likes me. Me, on the other hand…” He trailed off, seemingly unable to meet Katsuki’s eyes. “I think I liked the idea of being with someone in that way. And he was
available, willing to offer it with no strings attached, and I... I said yes.”

Shit, Todo...

“Do you regret it?”

“No, no… the opposite, honestly.” Todoroki admitted. “It’s... well, just know that I don’t mean to sound awful or anything, but seeing Camie and Momo? You and Midoriya? I think it gave me some sort of expectation for what I needed, too. And with my first choice taken, I just... I jumped on what was available.”

...first choice?

“W-Wait, what?” Katsuki fumbled, trying to make sense of everything. “You—were you jealous of all of us? And there’s someone you’re into?”

Todo, what the hell are you—

“Not anymore. Looking back, I don’t think it was any more than a small crush. Probably just some sort of admiration combined with the fact that he was always around.” Todoroki mumbled, and yep, he was definitely avoiding his eyes now. “Wouldn’t have gone anywhere. Wouldn’t have wanted it to go anywhere. But I couldn’t completely shake it for over a year.”

I... wait, what?

“...who?” He asked, trying his best to ignore the twist in his stomach. “Who was this?”

“Don’t make me spell it out for you.” Todoroki bit his lip. “Please, Katsuki.”

Oh... oh no. No, no, no... you never use my...

“Tell me you’re joking.” He begged. “You can’t possibly be serious.”

“I’m serious.”

Katsuki felt as if he was going to be sick.

All this time... or, well, back then... he had a bit of a crush on... on...

“I’m over it. I can promise you that.” Todoroki repeated. “Can you believe me when I say that all I want to be is your friend? And all I want to do is support the relationship you have because I can see how happy you are with him?”

Shouto...

“You had a crush on me.” Katsuki said, dumbfounded. “And you-- you watched me fawn over another guy for years.”

How? How much did I miss? How much did I hurt him?

Todoroki nodded, rocked in place, and kept staring, staring, staring at the ground.

He’s listened to me talk about him for so long. Listened to me get off on him for so long. Helped me through arguments and dates with him.

“I don’t want to hear you apologize for anything. Give me that, at least.” Todoroki asked. “Trust me...
when I say it wouldn’t have worked. Not just because Midoriya is in the picture, but mostly because you… well, I know I saw you in a different light after you helped me get past my biggest obstacles near the beginning of high school. You’re the first real friend I ever had. I attached myself to that amazing, passionate part of you, and I’m still… I’m still learning how all this works. How relationships work. How people work.” Todoroki said, the words tumbling out in a way Katsuki hadn’t heard in so, so long. “We’re still young. Maybe we’re mostly going to keep being heroes, and maybe some people like you and Camie and Momo know what you’re looking for in a partner already, but me?”

*I can’t believe this. I can’t believe he—*

“I think I want to take some more time for myself.” He said, the confident façade giving way to the shaky, uncertain core beneath it. “Just… some time to keep searching. I’m still playing catch-up from everything I missed out on in my childhood, after all. A-And—”

“Shouto.”

His friend stopped.

“Look—look at me.”

*Please.*

Todoroki wasn’t crying, no, but those eyes held a vulnerability Katsuki hadn’t seen since their first year sports fest.

*He’s always been more into action than words.*

And with that thought, Katsuki leaned over and hugged him.

“Just know that I ain’t going anywhere, okay?” He promised, holding him close. “You’re my best friend, too. Don’t… don’t know where I’d be without you in my life.”

Todoroki stayed quiet, but hesitantly, oh-so-hesitantly, began to hug him back.

“Also. You’re fucking stupid.” Katsuki muttered, head buried in the crook of his friend’s neck. “God. I can’t believe your bullshit sometimes. And if you ever thought that I—shit, I dunno, that I’d think bad about you or whatever for this? That I wouldn’t be your *friend* because of this? Then you’re—fuck, you’re *dead* wrong.”

From that silence came a laugh, a squeeze, and some mumbled garbage over Katsuki’s own shoulder.

“Guess… guess I was a little nervous.” Todoroki finally said, the subtle tremor in his voice revealing more than his words did. “Thanks.”

*Dumbass.*

“…this is a bit of a strange position to be hugging in, though.” His friend said, and Katsuki could admit that yeah, *maybe* half-leaning, half-stretching to reach his friend on the side of the bench was awkward. “Standing up would probably be easier. Or if I sat in your lap, or you—”

Katsuki rolled his eyes, gave him one last, tight squeeze, and let go. “Wanna go ahead and get back to the dorms? Maybe grab dinner tonight?”
“...Katsuki, do you really want to go out for dinner with the limp you’ve been sporting all day?” Todoroki asked, looking at him like he was an idiot. “Our whole class already knows you got some. Do you want everyone who watched you win the sports fest to know, too?”

Well, when you put it that way...

“Fine, fine.” He grumbled, then stood up from the bench. “Let’s just go back to the dorms. Run by the cafeteria later. All that.”

“Maybe a movie tonight?”

“Sure, as long as it’s not something shitty.”

“That documentary about polar bears we watched last time wasn’t shitty. You just need to expand your tastes.”

“Maybe the small ones were cute, but that was three hours of the most monotonous talking I’ve ever heard in my life.” Katsuki sighed. “No more nature films. Please. Anything else goes.”

“Alright, alright. I think I’ve got a few ideas…”

Katsuki wasn’t sure if he’d regret that ‘anything else goes’, but for right now?

We’ll have fun.

They started up on their walk back to the dorms, filled only with familiar, teasing conversation and some echo of the closeness they’d once remembered having before. Maybe Katsuki had gotten wrapped up in his boyfriend to the point where he’d neglected some of his other relationships, but with all this out in the open now?

We’ll get through this. We’ll get closer again. We... we both want to.

“...by the way. You never said what you wound up actually telling Shindou.” Katsuki reminded him, more curious than anything at this point. “When I fought him, he seemed like he was being fairly honest. For once.”

“Oh, right...” Todoroki sighed. “I mean, I think it was my loss to him that resulted in me thinking about all this, and so... mostly, I just told him I wanted to be friends, at most. Fellow heroes. No sex, no physical stuff, and just a reminder that we’re not dating, and that I have no interest in dating right now.” He shrugged. “Shindou didn’t seem too surprised. Didn’t put up much of a fight. He just said okay, if that’s what you want, and left.”

He really isn’t a bad person... and that, in combination with the stuff he told me about the media during our fight... hng. Think he cares in his own weird way.

Anxiety was rolling in his stomach once again at just the thought of what had happened back in the locker room. He wanted to believe, believe more than anything else that he and Deku could live their lives without people probing into them, wanted to stay deep in the naivety that they could work as pro heroes without the media trying to scrape up every tiny bit of information on them every second of every day.

It’s... it’s not fair. I love him so much, but I’m so tired of having to hide... it’s not his fault, not at all, but I really don’t know what we’re going to do.

He forced the thoughts away—it was another problem for another time, and right now, the only
things that mattered were his friends, his boyfriend, and—

_Fuck._

Katsuki stopped right in front of the dormitory door, earning a confused look from Todoroki in the process.

“It’s Monday.”

_Dammit, dammit, dammit…!

“Yes…?”

_Tomorrow’s… oh, fuck._

“Tomorrow night, I… shit, well…” Katsuki swallowed, trying to calm himself as best as possible. “Gotta go home for the evening, ‘cause… ‘cause, uh…”

The rest of the sentence came out in some jumble of cursing and actually saying the rest of the words, but Todoroki only looked more and more confused.

“Come again?”

_Breathe. Breathe. We’re good._

“My… my mom wants to meet Deku.” He finally got out. “He’s coming over to my parent’s place tomorrow night, and… we’re all going to have dinner.”

_It feels like a trainwreck waiting to happen._

“…can’t say I have much advice to offer in that department.” Todoroki snorted. “Good luck. Don’t let Midoriya smash the table in two.”

_God, that’s almost the least of my worries._

“I just hope my mom doesn’t weird him out or anything. Or that he weirds out my mom.” Katsuki said, reaching for the handle. “Ugh, I’m just ready for it to be over.”

_At least Deku probably won’t be too nervous. He deals with life-threatening situations all the time. This kind of challenge should be a piece of cake for him._

He swallowed.

_Right?_

“How about we just get our homework done, grab dinner, and watch that movie.” Todoroki said, patting him on the shoulder. “No use dwelling on it when it hasn’t happened yet. Let’s just have a good night. Take your mind off of everything for a bit.”

_Right, right… off of everything._

They went inside, up to their respective rooms, but just before going in, Todoroki stopped.

“…one more thing.” He started, fidgeting with his doorknob. “Just, thanks. For being my friend.”

“Dumbass.” Katsuki shook his head, set one foot in his room. “I should be thanking you for that.”
No response, but he was almost positive Todoroki answered with a small smile and a shake of his head.

*I missed talking to him like this.*

The rest of their night was spent with food, laughs, and shitty movies, all in the comfort of Katsuki’s dorm room. And for as much good was going on, for as much bad was going on, being able to escape like this?

*I’ll take it. I’ll take this.*

[Deku] hey kacchan!!

[Deku] aha well um i have a few questions if thats okay

[Deku] should i dress nice? Or casual? Maybe my hero suit??

[Deku] does your mom have a pollen allergy? does she like flowers?

[Deku] chocolate?

[Deku] jewelry?

[Deku] cookies? healthy snacks? yoga?

[Deku] and ur dad?? um wait shit i dont know what dads like ive never really had a dad

[Deku] ahaa im fucked arent i

[Deku] oh god im sorry for all the spam im just panicking a little but dont worry about it its fine!! everythings fine!!!

[Deku] actually on second thought maybe we should

[Deku] not

[Deku] do this

[Deku] because um well you know like we had

[Deku] we did

[Deku] and

[Deku] i fucked your moms son oh my god what is she going to think of me im supposed to be a hero is she gonna know that i had sex with you like really good sex but is that gonna be weird i dont know ive never met anyones parents before and i really dont know what im doing but your mom seems cool from like that one brief time i saw her but oh no ohno i lied to her at the sports fest itold u im youre mentor i ve never been your mentor unless your talking about mentor in bed which probably isnt the best thing to mention who someone whos son im tryign to date oand im kinda freakign out maybe alitttel just a little i swear dontwo;ry im (1/2)

[Deku] fine everythings fine im gonna show up and im gonna be good and everythigns gonna be great cause i mean theyre your parents and anything that made you has to be great because youre amazing and i love you so much and i jsut wanna hold you and hug you and kiss you and fuck you
again and i hope that your parents dont hate me because i really dont know what id do and im sorry for all this really im sorry but im just scared like really really scared but logically it should be fine so im just gonna calm down now and you dont have to read all this i think im pretty sure im rambling at this point and (2/2)

[Kasu] wait you said your parents are in the fashion industry right

[Kasu] oh no

[Kasu] oh no

[Kasu] oh n

“Oh my fucking god.”

[Kasu is typing…]

Katsuki stared at his phone as the little message at the bottom kept popping up, then down, then back up again, and tried—tried—to figure out what to say in response. Maybe they were heading over to his parent’s house in less than an hour, and maybe he was a little nervous too, but this? This?

[Kasu] Deku.


Then, on second thought—

[Kasu] wanna call for a minute?

He didn’t give Deku a chance to reject the offer, though, before hitting his number and waiting for him to pick up. But the phone rang, rang, rang, and…

“Hi! You’ve reached Pro Hero Valiant! If you’re hearing this, I’m out protecting the city! Please leave a message if you need me, and I’ll be there as soon as I can!”

Katsuki groaned as the call went to voicemail, knowing full well that Deku was probably just waiting out the ringer because he didn’t want to have a breakdown over the phone.

Deku… c’mon, babe.

He called again, heard that stupid, cheery-ass voicemail, and repeated. Repeated. It had to have been at least five, maybe six times till his boyfriend picked up, but even then did the voice on the other side stay quiet aside from the faint sound of muffled breathing and mumbling, mumbling, mumbling.

“Deku?” He asked, only for his boyfriend to give him a small just a sec and go quiet again.

He’s… fuck. He’s really freaked out, isn’t he.

“…hey. You hanging in there?”

Please respond, please—

“…y-yeah.” Came the answer, broken and stilted. “M’sorry. Just…”

At least he’s talking now.
“I-I don’t wanna make a horrible first impression. S’all.” Deku mumbled, phone clearly too far from his face. “I’m sorry, I-I probably spammed you a lot, this is just a lot for me, and…”

*One step at a time.* “Did you take your meds?”

“Yeah…”

“Clean yourself up?”

“Mhm.”

“Are you getting dressed?”

“That’s… yeah, that’s about where I stopped.” Deku said, a hint of stability back in his voice. “I… I-I know it’s not super rational. Your parents are probably fine. Whatever I look like when I go will… probably be fine… but it’s just been hard to convince myself of that, you know?”

*Oh…*

“Yeah. I get that.” He said, relieved that he was at least slightly more relaxed now. “Should I leave early and meet up with you at your place before we go?”

“No, we should stick with the original plan because it’s probably too risky right now to go together, but… it’s. It’s fine. I’m okay.”

*What is he trying to—*

“I’m trying to convince myself that I’m okay. That’s—that’s why I’m talking. I think.” His boyfriend said, clearly just trying to breathe. “I’ll be okay, I promise. Just… need to get myself out the door.”

All Katsuki wanted to do was hug him.

*I don’t blame him for being nervous. This… this really is a lot of pressure for him.*

“Well, for starters—” He said instead, figuring that guidance might be helpful right now. “Yeah, my parents work in the fashion industry. No, I’m sure they aren’t expecting anything off-the-charts in terms of that. Just, uh… I dunno. Jeans, shirt, shoes that haven’t been run through the ground should be fine.”

“A-Ah, okay. Right.”

“You probably don’t need to bring my parents anything. My mom’s not allergic to flowers, though.”

“Oh, um… got it.”

*Better.*

“Everything’s gonna be okay.” He repeated. “Promise. We’re gonna have a good dinner, gonna have a good night, and my parents are gonna like you.”

*What’s not to like about you, after all?*

“You’re right. Everything’s gonna be okay.” Deku echoed, and for the first time, Katsuki *actually* believed him. “I… I think you can hang up now. I’m gonna get going real soon anyways, so…”

“I’ll leave you be. Just be there on time, ‘kay? You have the address?”
“Yeah! Yeah, I’ve got it. I’ll meet you there. And be, um, calm.”

More than anything, Katsuki wished he could be there in person to just hold him. But after a last round of I love you’s and we’re gonna be okay, they hung up.

_Time to get my ass over there, I guess._

He wasn’t as sore as he was yesterday, but there were still dark marks scattered all across his body, including his neck, so long sleeves and pants were a requirement whether he liked it or not. And makeup.

_Wish it wasn’t so damn warm already. May’s come too fast._

But the trip over there was alright, getting near his house was fine, and waiting for Deku didn’t take long, either. That said, the beanie smashed over his boyfriend’s hair and the awkward sunglasses on his nose didn’t exactly make for the most… composed… ensemble. He knew it was for the ‘disguise’ he tried to keep up on the streets, and that it’d come off when they got inside, but still.

“You bought flowers?” Katsuki said, motioning towards the small, orange bouquet in his boyfriend’s hands. “I think we have some vases. The old hag would probably like those.”

“A-Ah, that’s good! I’m glad.” Deku laughed, pitched-up nervousness stringent in his voice. “So we’re, um, gonna go up and knock? That’s how this is gonna go?”

“Mm.” He nodded, and lent a hand to his boyfriend. “No time to waste, yeah?”

But Deku simply took off his shitty sunglasses, stuffed the beanie in the small backpack he’d brought with him, and proceeded to stare at Katsuki a little too closely.

“You used makeup to hide those hickeys, didn’t you?”

_Oh my god._

“I-I mean, yeah!?” He sputtered, heat rising to his face in an instant. “I don’t want my mom seeing that shit!”

“Mm, but they’re all still there, right?”

That voice of his had dropped to an unfairly deep level, too reminiscent of just a couple nights ago.

_You fucker, I…_

“Yeah, they’re… they’re all still there.” Katsuki rubbed the back of his neck, every bruise on his body now far more present. “Everywhere.”

And in an instant, Deku’s face went from _I’ll have him home at eight to your son calls me daddy, too._

“Hot.” His boyfriend murmured, and took his hand, those piercing eyes still trained on his neck. “Wonder if there’s going to be any left by the time I get to fuck you again.”

_Holy shit._

“We. We should get inside.” Katsuki said, emphasis heavy on that last point. “Or I’m gonna start stripping in my driveway, and I _really_ don’t think either of us could deal with that right now.”
“Fair… mm, yeah. Fair enough.” Deku said, and squeezed his hand. “You were right, though, Seeing you is, ah… helping. The nerves. And while I’d much rather pin you against the side of your house right now, kiss you, and suck your dick, I think I can make it through this dinner as long as… well.” He paused. “As long as you’re here.”

Katsuki managed a small smile, shook his head, and tried to channel his inner social energy for strength. “I fucking love you, Deku. Let’s—”

_Hm. Wait. What would Camie say?_

“Let’s, uh. Let’s get this bread.”

_Weird. Weird. Weird._

Deku stared at him for a long, long, moment, clearly confused, but didn’t question it as they went up to the door and knocked.

Waited.

Held his boyfriend’s hand tighter, tighter, and hoped.

_We’re gonna be okay. Everything’s— everything’s gonna be—_

The door cracked open.

_Fuck._

There was a small whisper from the other side— something like _Masaru, get down here_, something like the door shutting, then opening again, and some form of confusion from their own side of the door.

_What the hell are they—_

This time, the door flew open and nearly smacked them both in the face, the culprit behind the awkward welcome being none other than his _mother_. Nerves were swapped for irritability as she looked them up, down, up, down, and finally stepped back from the doorway.

“We got here on time. Can’t bitch at us for that.” Katsuki grumbled, hating the slight tremble behind it.

“Wasn’t gonna bitch at you for that, you shit.” His mom started, a small, wary smile on her lips. “But, Katsuki. Valiant. I think we’d better get you two inside.”

_This… this is happening._

His boyfriend had fallen quiet beside him, clearly anxious, but—

“Sounds good.” Deku said, steadier than he’d been all day, and Katsuki felt him squeeze his hand that time. “After you, Kacchan.”

_Right. Let’s go._

It wasn’t as if he hated being at home. There were certainly perks about living in the dorms, mostly surrounding easier freedoms and the privacy he craved, but his parents had never been ultra-controlling of him, either. Sure, his mom was annoying and his dad too weak-willed for his liking, but on the whole, nothing he couldn’t deal with. He watched as Deku gave his mom the flowers with
a small smile and proceeded to shrug off his jacket in the doorway to reveal something perfectly acceptable underneath, then the small group headed towards the deeper part of the house.

“You have a lovely home, Mrs. Bakugou.” Deku commented, head turning to peer at each and every corner as they turned towards the living room. “No wonder Kacchan turned out so incredible, being raised somewhere like this!”

He’s already struggling for conversation starters, isn’t he.

“No need for the formalities.” His mom said, and motioned for them to sit on the couch. “Just call me Mitsuki. My husband, Masaru, should be down here in a minute.”

Dad’s late, great. Need him around to keep her from going off sometimes.

“-A-Aha, okay!” His boyfriend said instead, doing a wonderful job at putting himself into a more vulnerable position. “Um, Izuku. I-I mean, I’m Izuku. That’s—that’s my name. If we’re doing first names and not family names at least, because my family name is Midoriya, and Valiant is just my hero name, not my like, name-name, and—“

Oh, god.

Katsuki elbowed him, cutting off his boyfriend mid-ramble. “Shut up, Deku.”

“Right, right! I’m shutting up now!”

He wasn’t quite sure how to describe the look his mom was giving him, some strange mixture of amusement and surprise, but it didn’t appear to be anything bad.

That’s step one, I guess.

“It’s, ah… definitely different to see you in a civilian setting, Izuku.” Mitsuki commented, still examining Deku. “And while I can’t say I’m surprised to see you here with my son after accidentally coming across some things, it’s… like I said. Different.”

“O-Oh. Different.”

“I’ve been watching what few interviews you have online over the past week or so. Reading up more on you.” She continued, somewhat careful with her words. “What stuck out to me the most, though, was your insistence on staying single. I know that some of these interviews are older because you’ve done so damn few of them, but still. I’m curious as to what changed your mind.”

“…oh.”

Quiet.

He’s been here for two minutes, lay off!

“T-That’s, um… back then, I…” Izuku swallowed. “I think. I think those— those interviews were before my accident. I wasn’t, ah…”

Deku…

“I-I really, really wasn’t in the greatest place at the time. I can admit that much. And while my feelings now have obviously shifted, changing that public image as a single hero is, ah… tricky. E-Especially because I’m, um…”
“Because you’re dating a high schooler?”

Deku didn’t manage a verbal response to that question, only a small, reluctant nod.

“Don’t worry, I don’t have an issue with that. I mean, my husband and I have about the same age difference as you two do, and for as much as an asshole as Katsuki is, I want to believe he’d have enough sense in him to wind up with someone trustworthy.”

*That’s… that’s good, at least.*

His boyfriend, however, couldn’t seem to come up with something to say back.

“And—oh!” She said, only stopping as Katsuki’s dad entered the room and sat down beside her after waving to Deku. “Izuku, this is my husband.”

“Just- just, um, Masaru is fine.” He smiled, softer than his mom’s tiger grin. “I’m glad you made it here safe, ah… Izuku?” After a nod, he continued, a curious look on his face. “Those—oh, those on the table…” his father said, pointing towards the new, small vase at the center of the living room table. “Those flowers are lovely. Did… did you bring them by?”

“Oh, yeah!” His boyfriend nodded, still clearly jumpy. “I-I, um, I’m glad you like them! The orange just reminded me a bit of Kacchan, so I thought they might be good to bring here, and, uh… yeah, t-that’s about it!”

*He’s still so nervous, but the gesture is cute.*

There was another exchange of simple pleasantries, and with Deku having gone a few notches quieter now, the rambling wasn’t as present. In exchange, though, were trembling hands and weak smiles, fear nearly *radiating* off of him. He knew *why* his mom asked about that particular subject first, knew that it was at least somewhat important to know, but Katsuki *also* had the privilege of knowing how much Deku hated reaching back to that place in his life.

*We’re past that now. We are, we are. They…*

Katsuki gulped.

*They just need to see that too.*

In place of more questions, though, Mitsuki announced that dinner itself would be happening shortly and ushered the group to the dining room. Everyone washed their hands thoroughly, Deku more than once, and the two of them sat down at the table to wait. But when his parents disappeared back into the kitchen to grab food, Katsuki stole the opportunity to talk to Deku again.

“Hey.” He pat his shoulder, brushed his cheek. “You okay?”

Deku’s eye twitched, lips trembled, and hand carefully, carefully reached under the table to hold his again.

“I… I really, really wish I could say yes.”

*He’s so scared. Fuck, he’s so…*

“She doesn’t hate you. Promise.” Katsuki tried to reassure him. “She’d have kicked you outta here by now if she did.”

“Oh! Nice to know I haven’t been fucking kicked out of your house! T-That’s— god, that’s *great!*”
Deku exclaimed, quivering like a leaf. “I’m so sorry, I—I’ve probably just been a huge embarrassment already, a-and—”

Katsuki tugged down his shirt collar and kissed him before he had the chance to speak.

*Quit talking.*

And sure enough, his boyfriend almost instantly began to relax. It was almost strange to be in complete control after their sex-fest, but Deku was open to being led through a soft, slow, easy kiss, and for just a moment, they could forget where they were.

...that was, until they couldn’t.

“*Katsuki!* No sucking face at the goddamn *dinner table!*”

Oddly enough, it was Deku who whipped back first, stuttering out a loud, far-too-formal apology despite the fact that it’d been Katsuki who initiated. Maybe the kiss had helped, maybe it didn’t, but his parents seemed to brush it off fairly fast with a roll of their eyes and a shove of a bowl in front of them both.

“Ah, this looks great!” Deku said, legitimate excitement in his voice now that the shock of fear had dissipated. “God, I love a good curry. Thank you so much!”

*Food makes things better. Food always makes things better.*

Katsuki dug into his own bowl with a fervor, thankful for the familiar heat he could hardly ever find at the school dining hall. Not that the U.A. food was bad, not at all, but his parent’s familiar spice profile was something he always missed when he was away.

“So, how long have you two been together?” His dad asked. “I imagine you’ve been keeping this from us for a while, but—oh, Izuku, are you—!”

“M’fine!” Deku sputtered, and for the first time since they started eating did Katsuki bother to look over at him. “O-Oh, *mm*, yeah… s-shit, that’s—! Yeah, t-that’s the good stuff!”

*Fuck. He… he doesn’t have that much of a spice tolerance, does he.*

Sweat was visible on his forehead beneath the dark green curls, face red from literal heat and embarrassment now.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Masaru asked again, skeptical. “If you need something different, we can—”

“We’ve— w—we’ve been dating since my birthday last year, w-which was, um, July fifteenth.” Deku choked out beside him, trying his very best to stay calm and shovel food in his mouth between sentences, very clearly ignoring the concern. “So almost a year! T-That’s, um, yeah!”

There was a hissed *wow, s’hot* in Deku’s words somewhere, and while he knew that the food tasted fine, Katsuki couldn’t help but feel bad that he couldn’t catch a break even *now.*

“Almost a year, you say?” Mitsuki echoed, then turned to Katsuki. “You’ve been dating him for *almost a year,* and you didn’t think to say a word about it?”

*Uh oh.*

“I was hardly home anyways.” He said instead, shoving food in his mouth with a tinge of
aggression. “Who the hell cares if we’ve been dating? I dunno about you, but damn. I think we’re doing pretty fucking good!”

Deku set his drink back down on the table with too much force, and Katsuki could feel his stare on him. “Oh my god. You—you really do cuss out your parents.”

“IT’s not exactly something I try to encourage,” Masaru attempted to say, only to be cut off by Mitsuki elbowing him in the side.

“My house, my rules.” She said, and glared at Katsuki. “He’s a disrespectful little shit, and while I really have no idea how he wound up with someone like… well, you… I’m hoping he doesn’t talk to you the same way he talks to us. Isn’t that right, Katsuki?”

“Holy shit, I talk—”

“Oh, don’t worry!” Deku interrupted. “Kacchan’s wonderful, and though I love hearing his voice, he always shuts up pretty fast while he’s sucking di— a-aha, when he’s sucking face!”

Katsuki choked on his curry and nearly dropped his chopsticks in the bowl.

*nevermind. neither of us are getting out of here alive.*

Deku at least, had the wisdom to pile more food into that too-loose mouth of his and force himself to be quiet for a minute. Meanwhile, his parents just stared at the both of them, probably unsure of how to respond. His mom buried her head in her hands eventually, sighed, and then came up again.

“Okay. New topic.” She conceded, and turned back to Deku. “Izuku. Because you never do interviews, why don’t you talk about yourself for a bit?”

“Myself.” His boyfriend repeated, staring dead into space. “Um. Right. That.”

*please. please. can we get through one subject without anything awful happening.*

“Uh, yeah.” Mitsuki said. “The stuff outside of heroing. Because while I might be wrong, I’m going to assume that there’s reasons that Katsuki likes you outside of your job and your, ah, body.”

“…oh. Yeah.”

Deku had gone still as a statue, and for as bad as Katsuki felt for him, it was a little funny to see him shaken up like this. But he took some sort of pity on his boyfriend, leaned over and whispered hobbies, favorite things, stuff with friends, and hoped that he’d be alright.

“O-Oh, um… sometimes I hang out with my friends when they’re, uh, available, which winds up being not very often because Ochako and Kirishima are on duty a lot too, but sometimes I go see Jirou’s concerts? Er, um, Earphone Jack?” He said, probably trying to find his grounding. “There’s this coffee shop down the street that I like, but they never let me actually pay for the food so I just tip them a bunch instead, and going there is kinda nice… hah, there’s not too much I can do without being recognized, so I don’t spend too much time off duty out of my apartment unless it’s out training with Kacchan on the beach…”

...that’s… shit. That’s right.

“Mm… okay, I understand.” Mitsuki nodded. “Is there anything you like doing at your apartment?”

“Ah! Um, yeah!” He exclaimed. “My favorite things to do are cook, garden, and Kacchan!”
And everything fell silent.

Katsuki couldn’t do anything but stare as Deku’s face shifted from slightly-happy, to realization of what he’d said, to downright horrified. His boyfriend’s hands slapped themselves over his mouth, just as the small, terrified no, no, no no no no no flew out from beneath scarred skin. For as red as Deku may have been in bed, nothing compared to the utter scarlet over every visible inch of his body.

“So, Valiant.” Mitsuki narrowed her eyes. “Care to elaborate?”

We’re fucked.

Not even Katsuki was sure he could come up with a response right now, much less Deku.

“But,” she continued, her gaze fixed on his poor fucking boyfriend. “That’s a new tongue piercing, isn’t it?”

Please. Please, have mercy.

“And Katsuki, don’t think I didn’t notice the fact that you’re wearing long sleeves. And pants. And poorly applied color corrector.”

Are. You. SERIOUS.

“A-Ah, honey, they look a little scare—”

“Do you think I care right now!?” Mitsuki exclaimed. “I’m sorry, but you do realize that Pro Hero Valiant has been sticking his goddamn dick in our son!? Shit, I knew he was a bottom, but my god, we—we never even had the talk with him!”

Oh no.

“I-I mean, when we saw that dildo on his desk, it wasn’t like the possibility was out of the question, a-and—”

Oh. Oh, no, no. No no no no no.

“Trust me, I know that! But there’s a big fucking difference between Katsuki shoving colored silicone up his ass and Valiant pounding him into a goddamn mattress!” Mitsuki exploded, fire burning in her eyes. “You know that’s what they went and did after the sports fest. You know that’s why I saw them together then. My—my f-fucking son has been dating him for almost a year, and I thought it was just that half-n-half kid for a while, but no. It’s—it’s this one.”

At this point, Katsuki was surprised Deku hadn’t started crying.

What… what can I even…

“Honey, Katsuki’s eighteen. And… if they have been dating for that long, and they really are happy—look, they seem happy—then they’re probably being safe, aren’t they?” Masaru said, then reached across the table to pat Deku on the shoulder. “Izuku, if you need to use the restroom, just go to the hallway and walk all the way down on the left.”
“Actually, Masaru, I’d really like to talk to him without Katsuki for a bit. I just—” Mitsuki shook her head, hands pressed to her temple. “It’s not that I don’t trust Valiant. I just can’t get my mind around the fact that this has been purposefully kept from us for years! Yes, he’s a hero, but you’d think that’d come with some honesty, right!? He’s basically an unknown on the news in terms of personality! How do I know that my son is being treated right by someone who refuses to talk about himself and has a reputation for fucking villains up on the field!”

No… please, no, he’s not… h-he’s fine, and I… I didn’t say anything because…!

“Kacchan.”

Huh?

Deku wasn’t looking at him, wasn’t doing much of anything other than trying to keep his composure, but eventually managed to shake himself back to reality enough to meet Mitsuki’s eyes and hold his voice steady. “I’m—I’m fine. Promise. And… Mitsuki.”

What are you—

“Whatever it is you want to ask of me, I’ll— I’ll answer.” Katsuki watched as those scarred hands folded over each other on the dinner table, still shaking but determined to stay steady. “I don’t want to leave without at least a little of your honest trust. I won’t. Kacchan—Katsuki—is one of the best things to have ever happened to me, and I’m not going to let any animosity you hold towards me get in the way of that.”

Katsuki’s mouth fell open, and Deku only shone brighter, brighter.

“Have at me.” Those green eyes glistened, lips curled in a tight, determined smile. “I won’t hold any information back.”

This time, it was his mom that looked stunned.

He’s amazing. Holy shit.

“…how about we continue this in the living room.” She dipped her head, less inflamed than than before. “Izuku.”

It was a quick shift. Katsuki wound up staying instead, settling close enough to Deku on the couch, but not too close as his parents seated themselves in the chairs right across from them. This time, despite Deku’s agreement to complete vulnerability, the positions didn’t seem as uneven. And in some way, somehow, he could’ve sworn that his boyfriend was excited.

Nervous energy, maybe? Turning that fear into power?

Mentally, Katsuki took notes.

“No time to waste, I guess.” Said his mom, legs crossed and arms folded over her chest. “Why did you two meet again after Katsuki’s rescue?”

“U.A. scheduled me to come in and assist in a practice session.” He started, annunciated and steady. “I wound up being paired up to fight against Kacchan’s team for my second round. I won after dislocating both of his shoulders, and carried him to the infirmary. We talked for a bit, and then didn’t have a single bit of contact until U.A. asked me to come back assist with final exams, which… happened to fall on my twentieth birthday.”
Boom, boom, boom. Deku hadn’t missed a beat. And here Katsuki was, left to fall in love with him over, and over, and over again.

“And… and after that?”

“Kacchan gave me a note. His number. Spa coupons that I forgot to use before they expired.”

Wait— “You asshole, you never used those!”

“I was stressed, okay? I couldn’t find the ti—”

“Fucker, that’s why you were supposed to use them!”

“W-Well!”

“Alright, alright.” Mitsuki interrupted. “I think I see how that went down. But wasn’t your accident around that time, too?”

Katsuki expected some sort of hesitation, maybe a small flinch, but his boyfriend didn’t shy away. “Mhm. I got into my accident a couple weeks later.” And before Mitsuki could ask more, he continued. “If it’s my medical history you’re concerned about, I shattered both of my legs and had to have rods implanted in my femurs, all while dealing with a mild concussion and unaddressed mental illness.”

You’re… you’re really spilling all this? Deku, this—this is so, so—

“Izuku.”

She was staring at his boyfriend with absolute shock.

“Don’t you realize how personal this all is?” Mitsuki said, a hand coming up over her mouth. “You… you’re really, really willing to…?”

“I said anything, didn’t I?” Izuku’s hand came up to rest on Katsuki’s leg, and for as calm as he was trying to stay, he could feel the tremor in those palms. “I wouldn’t lie about something like this.”

I love you so, so much.

“They never talked about the details on the news.” Mitsuki managed, wide-eyed. “I can understand why, I guess, but it’s… it’s different. Hearing this all from you, as a person, rather than the you who’s a hero.”

“I try to keep the media away from my personal life as much as possible. Glad to know it’s working.” He felt that hand squeeze his leg, almost as if trying to gain some sort of comfort from the small action. “I’m sorry if that’s made me less, ah… ‘human’, in a way, but I want people to see me through my actions rather than my words or my looks.

You’re so fucking strong, I can’t take it.


The conversation trailed from there to a discussion of how they’d gotten closer through the texting, the culture festival, the beach dates, training, their first kiss, the disaster area, and finally officially asking each other out. Katsuki wound up joining in at some point, the so-called interrogation turning more into a lengthy storytime. His parents certainly warmed up as they went along too, offering occasional quips, comments, and even laughter at times. And upon realizing that they hadn’t actually
fucked until very, very recently, Mitsuki was immediately more understanding and even a little apologetic about making assumptions about their relationship so quickly.

However, when they reached a certain point, the conversation lulled to an awkward stop.

...my turn, I guess.

“Me ‘n Deku… Well, remember when I was attacked last year?” Katsuki asked, hesitant. “I, uh… didn’t tell you both the full story.”

I hope this doesn’t scare them too much.

“It—that attack was my fault. Or, partly so.” Deku sighed. “Turns out, we were stalked while at the amusement park we told you about. This guy—just a one-off villain, thank god—discovered that Kacchan and I were in a relationship, and tried to use him to manipulate me.”

“Didn’t work out ‘cause the villain was an idiot.” Katsuki snorted. “But, uh, yeah. That’s around when I kinda realized that this shit actually needed to be kept as quiet as possible, and with that in combination with the stuff that’d happened to Deku in the past and how they talked about him on the news, I… I didn’t wanna tell you about us. Or anyone outside of my three closest fucking friends, really.”

So, I didn’t.

His father nodded, understood. His mother, more reluctantly so.

“I don’t like it, but I get it. God… even from us, though…” Mitsuki shook her head. “I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t worried. How do you two plan on dealing with this in the future? What’s going to happen if your relationship is put in the public light?”

And for the first time in at least an hour, there was no response.

“I… well, honestly?” Deku laughed, short and tired. “We’ll, um… cross that bridge when we come to it.”

I don’t know a thing about dealing with the media… just gotta stay undercover till I do.

“We’ll be careful.” Katsuki said, almost more to assure himself than his parents. “We’ll… it’ll be okay.”

At least, I sure as fuck hope we are.

Those warnings he’d gotten at the sports fest from Shindou and the gossip in the locker room yesterday returned unbidden, and all he could do for now was force it away, force it away, and focus on the here and now.

We’re good. We’re fine. We’re making it through this first obstacle, and while I definitely need to meet Deku’s mom too, this is… this is a start.

“God.” Mitsuki groaned. “What am I going to do with you two…?”

Katsuki let Deku hold his hand, the familiar fingers helping him feel a little better, at least.

“We’ll stay safe as best we can.” His boyfriend said, and wrapped his free arm around Katsuki’s shoulders. “Right?”
“Mhm.” Katsuki nodded. “We’ll stay safe.”

*Safe as we can, anyways.*

His parents shared a look and a whisper before turning back to them, some new acceptance shining in them.

“Alright.” Masaru smiled, alongside Mitsuki. “Well, Izuku… I admit, I wasn’t totally sure how to feel about you, but… I trust that you’ll watch out for Katsuki.”

“Still not sure *why* you want him, but…” She paused, and gave his boyfriend the warmest look he’d seen all night. “If you want my bratty son, he’s yours. I know he’s a bit of a handful, but if you want him, *please. Take him.*”

_Fuck, ye—*

“Oh, he’s not too much of a mouthful!” Deku laughed. “Not more than I can handle, and he really likes it when I—”

Katsuki slapped a hand over his boyfriend’s mouth before he could say another damn word, and with a small _oh_ and an apology after realizing what he’d said did he pull it away.

_We’re not doing this again. Not listening to you make shitty innuendos again._

“And, a-aha, if you were to not talk about the sex you have with him in front of me, it’d be very appreciated.” His dad stuttered. “Please.”

_Please._

“A-Aha, right. Yeah. I’ll do that.” Deku stuttered in response, and with a sharp and _horrifying_ realization, Katsuki was struck with the fact that his dad almost _scarily_ resembled Deku in more than one way. Then, with a glance at his mom, felt that fear sink deeper, _deeper._

... _like mother, like son._

He groaned.

_Thanks. I hate it._

Apparently he wasn’t alone in his observations either, though, because catching his mom looking back and forth across them all with some slight terror in her eyes was enough to tell him she’d noticed it too. But they managed a relatively pleasant goodbye, got out the door, and shared one long, last kiss before parting ways again.

“I guess overall, that _could’ve_ been worse. Aside from that first part, anyways… whoops.” Deku sighed. “Well, I didn’t break anything. You didn’t blow up anything. So, um… mission accomplished, I suppose?”

“...sure.” He snorted. “Won’t be the last time you see ‘em, so… yeah, this was alright for a first time. Maybe. Kinda. Eh, who knows.”

_One day, you might be stuck with them as your parents-in-law. They’ll get used to it._

“Well, I dunno. I guess we’ll have to meet up with my mom eventually too, but… ugh. It’s been so busy at work lately, and it’s been hard to find any time to really go out and do anything else because the crime rate’s been so damn high.” Deku sighed. “I’ve got patrols all next week, and while I might...
be able to catch a break for a few hours on Saturday, I… I dunno if it’ll happen.”

Oh…

“I’m so ready for all this garbage to be sorted out.” His boyfriend continued, shaking his head. “Not sure where all the villains are coming from, really. There’s no apparent organization between them, so we think that people have just been working as individuals, but… a-ah, sorry, not gonna worry about that right now.”

I… I wish I could help you.

They stopped at the end of the driveway.

“I’ll, um… I’ll text you. Call you.” Deku promised. “Soon. Lots. A-And, um, we’ll figure out times to do things again.”

“Do things?”

“Mhm.” His boyfriend nodded. “Y’know. Like I said earlier, there’s… one thing I’m coming to enjoy doing more than most anything else.”

You fucker, shifting the conversation just like that…!

“Are you just calling me a thing?” Katsuki pouted. “C’mon, give me more credit than that.”

“You’re more than just a thing, so much more.” Deku said, and kissed him on the forehead. “But you certainly are a pretty little thing when you’re all marked up ‘cause of me. And baby, I—” He leaned in closer, a hand ghosting over all the poorly-hidden bruises. “I’m so excited to see you in my bed again.”

Oh my god, you’re so fucking horny.

Not that he was any better, really.

“Well, we can deal with planning that later. S’getting late, and I have the rest of a math assignment to finish before I can pass out.” Katsuki admitted. “Be safe going home, ‘kay?”

“Of course I will. Always am.”

“Always, my ass.”

“Well! I do my best!”


Then, they split off after one last-last kiss, a hug, and the promise to talk soon again too.

We’ll figure out the rest of this publicity shit eventually, if we need to, but for now?

He allowed himself a smile, despite it being a nervous one.

Maybe just the apartment will be okay for now.

Chapter End Notes
it was hard to write some parts of this bc i got so embarrassed i couldn't look at my screen so LOL idk how it was to read but i wanted to yeet myself into the sun for a good chunk of this!!!!

Also!!! I redesigned deku’s hero costume so check it out!! (i like it a lot ngl)

My twitter is @aeronines, and here’s the list of all the art for this fic, and the playlist!!

EDIT 6/12: i am so sorry but i think i'm gonna have to push next update back to either 6/18 or 6/20 (next tues or thurs) but no longer for sure!!! sorry about this last minute afljkd
“Pro Hero Valiant.”

Three little words, accompanied only by the midnight summer breeze.

“If you don’t mind,” the reporter started, stepping closer to Izuku. “I have a few questions for you.”

Going home from Katsuki’s house should’ve been the easy part—hopping on the train, getting off at his stop, making the short walk from the station to his apartment—but almost as soon as he’d turned into the small alley to finish the trip, this had to happen.

“I’m sorry,” he said, moving to walk around the reporter. “Contact my agency if you need something.”

Guess this damn hat wasn’t enough of a disguise this time... god, when will they leave me the hell alone!?

“I said I had questions for you, Valiant. Not your agency,” she continued, shoving a small recording device close to his face. “It’s not often that you let yourself be seen in public off-duty. Did you have something going on tonight?”

Do I— “Do I look like I’m ‘letting myself’ be seen right now?” he said, trying to keep his voice as level as possible. “I’m sorry. I’m going to have to decline. Please contact my agency if you have any inquiries.”

Just leave me the hell alone, would you!?

“So the rumors were true...” she leaned in closer, looking more towards his mouth than his eyes. “You really did get a tongue piercing. Interesting, considering your lack of a personal life to put it to use in.”

Stay calm, stay calm— “What I do with my body is my business,” he bristled, just trying to breathe. “I’d rather not say it again. I will not be answering any questions of yours.”

God, and right after all the shit I pulled at Kacchan’s place, too... can’t I catch a damn break today!?

“Alright,” she said, that damn recorder still mere inches from his face. “Then, I suppose your agency won’t mind a few inquiries regarding contact between you and third-year U.A. student, Bakugou Katsuki?”

No.
“You’re hesitating.” The reporter pushed, leaning in. “Thinking twice about turning me away now?”

“There,” careful, careful—“has been no contact between Bakugou and I outside of educational and workplace activities.”

You don’t have anything to prove otherwise. I was careful today. We weren’t stalked. I checked the area before I kissed him.

Izuku knew he was a bad liar. Knew it from the bottom of his soul. But this wasn’t lying about he and Katsuki’s escapades to his mother, wasn’t trying to convince his therapist he was perfectly fine, wasn’t faking illness to call in sick to his workplace after a wicked night of sex.

This is for us. This is for his safety.

That said, Izuku had no idea what he’d do if she pulled receipts.

Keep your composure, keep your composure, please…

“…then, what was that display at the sports festival?” She asked, moving on. “The whole stadium saw you run down the bleachers. We saw your illusion on the field. So why were you so panicked? Why would that be used against Bakugou?”

Choose your words wisely.

If nothing else, the darkness helped to obscure any misgivings on his face.

“I’m not sure how widely known it is, but it’s no secret that I’ve helped out at U.A. multiple times in the past,” he said, each word thick in his mouth. “And I’ll admit, Bakugou is one of my favorite students to spar with. My guess is that the illusion was utilized because the person he was fighting was his classmate—she would be well aware of this fact, and probably planned to use it against him. Obviously, that didn’t work, but…” he sighed. “I ran down because I was confused and wanted to see it closer. Think about it—if you suddenly saw a mirror image of yourself out of nowhere, you’d run down too, wouldn’t you?”

He’d shoved his hands deep in his pockets earlier, thankful that their mad shaking was out of sight.

Ignore how scared I am. Ignore how fucking afraid I am for my boyfriend.

And thankfully, thankfully, she went quiet.

“…I see.” The reporter finally replied, still not leaving his eyes. “Nothing more, Valiant?”

“Nothing more,” he blurted, hoping the urgency hadn’t given his game away. “Now, please leave me be. I know you news people probably know where the hell I live, so let me go the twenty feet past you to my apartment so I can sleep before my four A.M. shift.”

The recording device was lowered, clicked off, and put away, just as the reporter broke her too-even stare.

“You’re clearly nervous.” She pursed her lips, but didn’t pull the recorder back out. “I don’t believe that’s what you say is all there is to this, Japan’s perpetual bachelor. You can say your work comes before everything else all you want, but when physical proof of you and that high schooler being together surfaces, I hope you’re ready to talk.”

There won’t be any physical proof. Not unless we decide to out ourselves, anyways.
“I don’t think that’s something I’ll need to concern myself with.” Each word scraped through his mouth like a razor, bloody and raw, but all Izuku did—could do, really—was shoulder past the reporter in stark, frigid silence.

I won’t. I won’t. I won’t.

He slipped through the shoddy apartment gate without being trailed, but even with the knowledge that he’d been let to go free, Izuku’s legs carried him to the lobby before he even touched the stairs.

Was there anyone like that reporter here? he asked. Did anyone go up to my apartment? Did someone come in here and bug the place?

It was all he could do to keep his voice from cracking, crumbling, shattering under the weight of everything that’d happened that evening. He was soundly assured that no one with the reporter’s description had come by, that nothing suspicious had happened, but that didn’t mean Izuku didn’t take care to examine every step and every tiny crack in the wall before entering his apartment. It was still locked—realistically, no one could have been there.

I’m fine. I’m fine. Everything’s… everything’s fine.

But even with that logic, the only thing that could quell his paranoia was a full sweep of his personal living space for cameras, recorders, anything that didn’t belong.

Ten minutes to midnight, Izuku collapsed on his bed, buried his face in his hands, and cried.

No one’s here. No one’s in my space. I’m safe. I’m safe. Kacchan’s perfectly safe, and I… I-I…

Blearily, Izuku tossed around the idea of searching for a new apartment, somewhere that wasn’t contaminated with all the pain and fear and distress this one held despite all the good that had happened between its walls, too.

“I-It’s fine. I’m… I’m fine.” Izuku mumbled, pulling his legs to his chest. “No one’s gonna find out. No one’s gonna find out before we tell them. No one’s… n-no one’s gonna…”

God, I’m so fucking scared.

For the first time in forever, Izuku legitimately had no idea what to do. Nausea rolled in his stomach as dizziness blurred in his head, and despite the dinner going (somewhat) well, the sheer stress of the whole evening was beating him down more than he’d expected. A part of him was tempted to call in sick to work in the morning, but laying in his apartment alone would probably be worse for the shitty mental state he was already sporting.

Should I contact my therapist? Schedule an emergency appointment? Call a friend? Call Kacchan?

Lying alone with his thoughts wouldn’t do anything but worsen the fear, after all.

Katsuki had probably had enough of his bullshit for the evening. His therapist would be asleep. But his friends…

Are they around? Could they talk, even if it’s only for a little bit?

Izuku reached for his phone, dialed, and hoped for the best.

I don’t know what to do, I just don’t know what…

“Ugh, shit…” came the yawned voice from over the phone. “Izuku… mm, somethin’ going on?”
In that moment, Ochako had never sounded so comforting.

“I… w-well, I—”

“Oh…! Wait, you went to Bakugou’s parent’s place for dinner, didn’t you? Oof, something happen? They skin you alive?”

*Might as well have, but…* “It, uh… could’ve been worse.” Izuku mumbled, trying his best to keep himself composed. “I-I mean, comparatively, it wasn’t all that bad, so I really shouldn’t complain about—”

“Wait, comparatively? Compared to what?”

Just thinking about the recent incident was enough to make him sick.

“That’s, um… that’s why I called.” Each word came out dry, parched. “S-Shit, I… I was just on my way home, turned in the alleyway, and ran right into a reporter.”

“…oh, shit.” There was a rustle of clothes that rose with the urgency in Ochako’s voice. “And the reporter was—”

“—waiting for me.” Nails dug into his leg. “Asked me directly about Kacchan even after I basically told her to fuck off.”

“Izuku… Izuku, that’s really, really not good.” Ochako’s voice was tight with fear, with panic. “Did she have evidence? Proof? You—you didn’t incriminate yourself, did you?”

“No, n-no… all she brought up was that shit at the sports fest,” Izuku swallowed. “But she kept pushing me, trying to get an answer out of me, talking about my tongue piercing and the fact that I was out late and kept talking about Kacchan, a-and I…”

*It’s fine. It’s fine. She doesn’t have proof, and I didn’t admit to anything, but…*

“I-I don’t care what they say about me.” Acrid bitterness clung to every word. “The media’s been giving me shit for years, and a little more isn’t gonna change things. I’m… I’m just…”

*His parents were skeptical of me at first because I never talk about myself on the news, and the language that reporter was using when trying to ask me about him was only negative.*

“Scared for him?”

The tears on his palms had long since dried.

“…yeah.”

It was easier when he wasn’t the one saying it.

“I just…” Izuku’s fingers tangled themselves into the fabric, though the touch hardly provided an ounce of comfort. “He’s… he’s got his whole career ahead of him. He hasn’t set foot on the field on his own, not really, and I don’t want anything to be ruined for him because of me…!”

“Why would his career be—”

“Because my reputation has been in the goddamn garbage disposal for years!” Shaking, trembling, white-water rapids twisted in his head. “F-Fuck, I—you know I can’t hardly go out without long sleeves! You know people talk behind my back constantly! Everyone’s… s’like everyone’s waiting
for me to fuck up again so that I can be outed as the fake hero I am! And if Kacchan—if he has the misfortune of being associated with me, then he might have opportunities taken away before he even has the chance to start…!"

*I didn’t think about this much before. Never thought I’d get this far. Hardly considered the fact that he… that him being a hero means his face will be all over the news to begin with.*

Izuku knew in his gut that Katsuki would succeed, well and far beyond most other people on the field. Knew that realistically, there was a good chance they could work as professional partners in a few years. But his boyfriend didn’t have the baggage that he had—didn’t have bad history, didn’t have a ruined body, didn’t have a bone-deep disgust for the press. Sure, maybe his reputation had improved in recent years, and maybe his fellow heroes didn’t look bad at him for it, but the rest of society?

*I… I don’t want Kacchan to experience what I have. I never want him to feel like the whole world pinned its disappointment on his shoulders.*

No, they weren’t going to break up. No, they weren’t going to split apart unless something real, something *drastic* came between them. No, they—

“Izuku.”

*Oh god, oh god, she’s still listening.*

But Ochako’s voice was only calm, only soothing. “I don’t wanna tell you everything’s going to be okay. You… you, more than anyone else, know that. This isn’t an easy situation, but it’s also not the end of anything, yeah? Heck, nothing has even *happened* yet.” She paused. “Just… maybe, try to make a plan in case something does happen. Let your agency’s PR team know about your relationship. Shit might happen, but the least you can do is be prepared, right?”

...*huh.*

“I don’t like the idea of doing that.” Izuku mumbled, staring at his feet. “I really, *really* don’t. But you’re right.”

*It makes me sick to tell anyone about this, but it’s… unavoidable. If we’re both going to be in the field, and we’re going to continue this relationship, then… we can’t hide this forever.*

They’d already had enough close calls, after all.

“…Izuku? You okay?”

“Fine, fine,” then—“Aha, nope. Nope! Nope, I’m scared as *shit!*”

*Why don’t we just quit our jobs, move across the ocean, settle down in a town where no one knows us, and I dunno, ride horses till the end of our days! That’s gotta be better than this, right? Right?*

“Hm, maybe…” Ochako pondered, a slight hum rolling off her lips. “Okay. We’re—y’know, we’re just gonna rip off the bandaid! I think I remember our patrols lining up for tomorrow, so while we’re on break, I’ll go with you and we’ll talk to your agency’s PR team. Moral support helps, right?”

Izuku would rather throw himself off a cliff than willingly disclose his relationship to people outside of his immediate friend group, but…

“It… yeah, it helps.”
“Alright. So…” A long yawn interrupted her words. “Sorry, m’tired. Gonna go back to sleep with Eijirou, so you better rest up too.”

_Dunno if I’ll really be able to sleep tonight, but…_

“…I’ll try.”

Ochako hung up before he could say a proper goodbye, and after finally managing to change into his pajamas and stress-cry into his pillow for another half hour, fell into a fitful sleep.

_Plans are good, plans are helpful, but these ones…_

Izuku’s hand slipped into the hole Katsuki had burnt into the matress.

..._these ones should never have to be made in the first place._

“Well, damn. I almost feel like they shouldn’t have accepted that as easily as they did.”

“No shit,” Izuku sighed. “Makes me wish I hadn’t freaked out as much before we went in. All… all I had to do was say ‘yeah, we’re dating,’ and they were cool.”

“Cool might be pushing it, but they didn’t look like they wanted to strangle you!” Ochako exclaimed, as if trying to grab at the smallest bits of hope in sight. “At least your PR team agrees with the whole lay-low approach. And them recommending you stick around me and Eijirou on duty means we can spend more time together!”

_Gotta keep looking at the upsides. Gotta keep looking at the upsides._

“I… yeah, you’re right.” Izuku nodded. “But don’t forget that they also recommended breaking up, waiting till Kacchan had gone pro to get back together, and I…”

_I can’t do that. Won’t do that. That’s not fair to me or him…!_

“Hey. Izuku.” Ochako grabbed him by the shoulder, stopped him in his tracks. “It’s gonna be okay. They didn’t say you had to, it was just a recommendation, so don’t worry about it! Things are gonna be alright.”

He bit back the easy for you to say in favor of a short nod and a shove of her hand off of him, trudging towards his agency’s exit with the hope that a villain meddlesome enough would indulge him on his afternoon patrol. Kirishima would be meeting up with them for the remainder of the shift, though, and for as much as Izuku loved seeing his friends, right now—in this situation—the thought made him feel more awful than anything else.

_The media will notice if your performance starts tanking, _his PR team had told him. _You need to keep your fieldwork at or above the level you’ve been working at. You can’t afford to let it fall, because the media will see that as their way in._

He’d quit caring about his ranking long ago, and for as rational as that logic was, Izuku could hardly find it in himself to give two shits about what the media thought of him personally.

_Doesn’t matter if they say shit about me. I’m used to them saying shit about me. It’s… It’s Kacchan I can’t afford to have hurting._

But for as much as he wanted to do everything he could to protect his boyfriend, another part of him pulled back. Izuku didn’t want to have that same argument with him again, didn’t want to endure a
fight borne from his supposed lack of trust for Katsuki. They’d have to talk more about this particular type of situation for sure, discuss details and work out plans and make preparations for future arrangements with his boyfriend’s graduation drawing nearer and nearer, yet even so…

*What if it’s not enough? What if Kacchan’s too turned off by all this mess to even want to be with me any longer? What if—*

“Izuku! Wait up, you’re going really fast!”

_**Ochako.**_

“S-Sorry, sorry…” They fell into an easier pace, and Izuku forced himself to stop thinking about all that stuff for now. “Is Kirishima joining us soon? He was out patrolling in Sector Three for the morning shift, wasn’t he?”

“Mhm, and yep! We’re gonna be meeting him at the destination—they told me while you were in with your PR team that we’d be taking on Sector Twelve for the afternoon patrol.”

“One of the most dangerous areas… well, I guess that makes sense.” Izuku nodded, secretly hoping for a bit more action. “Anyone else gonna be around there with us?”

“Nah, s’just us today…” Ochako pursed her lips. “We’ll have our hands full. Something to keep all the media stuff off your mind, right?”

“Aha, you’re right… well—” he cracked his knuckles, then his neck. “No time to waste in getting over there, huh?”

Not that the process of simply _getting over there_ was as easy as it sounded. Small villains, pickpocketers, and a few off-hand reporters had to be dealt with on the way to their area, and Izuku had to be extra careful to avoid letting his tongue piercing show for fear of more rumors spreading.

It was stupid. So, so fucking _stupid_ that he couldn’t even make the smallest of bodily modifications without the media wanting to be privy to every bit of it.

*That’s just how it is, though… everyone wants a story, and people like me carry the biggest headlines around.*

“Izuku, over here! Eijirou’s just up the way.”

“Oh, awesome.” _Backup. Backup’s good._

Kirishima greeted him with a cheery shout and a wave, dark circles under even _his_ eyes despite the honest smile on his face. “Midoriya! How’ve you been since the sports fest?” A finger tapped against his chin, and— “Wait. Lemme guess. Having a little fun with your boyfriend, avoiding the press, and calling in ‘sick’ to work so you have an excuse to enjoy your morning after?”

A furious blush rose over Izuku’s face at the near-perfect account of his past week. “I’m allowed to enjoy myself, aren’t I??”

“‘Course you are, buddy. I’m just messin’ with you.” Kirishima pat him on the back, nothing but support in his words. “You two deserve some time for yourselves. And hey, least that high collar of yours is being put to good use, am I right?”

_Actually, maybe I should just let the next villain we see off me instead! Maybe that’d be better than more goddamn embarrassment!*
Then again, Izuku wasn’t sure anything would be much worse than the garbage he’d spewed at Katsuki’s parents’ house.

“In short, yes. In not-short, let’s talk about that later.” Izuku ducked his head, pulling in front of the group. “We going out together or splitting up for coverage?”

“Your agency recommended sticking together,” Ochako reminded him. “You know, for the whole ‘staying inconspicuous’ thing.”

“I was asking more in terms of doing my damn job, but if you think we can manage this Sector better as a group, then that’s… that’s fine,” Izuku grumbled. “God, I need more villains to show up today. Really in the mood to throw a few punches. Beat the shit out of a couple people, like you do.”

“Hey now, that doesn’t sound very Valiant of you.”

“You know what, Red Riot? Y’know what? How about I take half this place, and you two take the other,” he huffed. “Let me throw hands in peace.”

He could’ve sworn there was a murmur of something happen? and a he’s just pissy about the press, let him get it out behind him.

Shut it. I’m not “pissy.”

They ran across another purse-snatcher not a minute later, and instead of the usual injury-free breakup of the situation, the villain left the premises with two fresh black eyes and a bloody nose.

Well, maybe I’m a little pissy.

Getting rid of the small fry was enough to ease the near-insatiable itch under his skin, but it took every bit of strength to keep himself from launching fists at every innocent (and not-so-innocent) reporter he saw on the streets.

If nothing with more firepower comes along, I’m gonna have to hit up the gym after this. Still feel like tossing someone across the entire fucking city, but I think the urge to murder is gone, at least!

Kirishima’s urging was the only reason he even wound up taking his five-minute patrol break, yet pacing back and forth in the mouth of a downtown alleyway had never felt so restraining. He wanted—no, needed—to get back on the street, to find someone else to take out his frustrations on, to —


That small, near-invisible hum from his belt pocket was a new enough distraction. Izuku fished his phone out, flipped open the couple of new messages (all from Katsuki, thank god), and allowed himself a brief moment to forget his impatience and read.

[Kacchan] know ur probs busy but

[Kacchan] think u got any free time today or tomorrow?

[Kacchan] i kinda, uh

[Kacchan] miss u. wanna see u again

[Kacchan] hanging out w friends rn but its not the same as u
Izuku’s heart swelled at just those few messages, and despite the fact that they’d seen each other the literal night before, couldn’t help but echo those sentiments.

[Izuku] i miss u too, baby<3

[Izuku] might be able to grab some time tonight? but are you sure that you’re

[Izuku] well

[Izuku] up to another round so soon?

“Hey, we should probably get going again,” Ochako nudged him, pointing out towards the street. “Time’s up.”

“Yeah, yeah… sorry, just finishing up, hang on,” he mumbled, still staring at his phone as he followed his friends back out on patrol.

[Kacchan] didn’t say we had to fuck

[Kacchan] not that I’d. Um. Turn that down

[Kacchan] but okay yeah maybe I want you to fuck me again look it feels amazing

So cute, Izuku grinned as he typed out a reply, so fucking cute.

[Izuku] so what youre saying is you missed my dick, huh?

[Izuku] i guess ill take it, even if you dont really miss me:(

[Kacchan] not what I said, dumbass!


“Date night,” he murmured, sure there was a mile-wide smile stretched across his face. “Kacchan wants a date night…!”

“Yeah, and I want you to turn off your phone and save the heart-eyes for later.” Ochako rolled her eyes. “Come on, where’s that fire you had earlier? Even if it was just out of spite?”

“Shh, we’re planning!”

“You guys can plan later.”

“Y-Yeah, but—!”

“Get your ass in gear, Valiant.” Ochako said, punctuating her sentence with a firm slap of said ass. “Yeah, you fucked him once, we get it. But he’ll wait! Remember, you’re still on duty, and destroying your boyfriend in bed isn’t the same as destroying villains!”

“I know, I know, just lemme—hey!”

Before he could finishing type out an appropriate reply to Katsuki’s most recent message, Ochako snatched the phone from his hands and shoved it into her pocket.

Oh, you jerk. You absolute asshole. I’m going to get you back for this later, mark my words, I—
“Valiant!”

Wait, Kirishima…?

“Watch your three! Something—shit, there’s something big out there!” His friend called out, jolting Izuku back to the present. “I’ll take the left. Uravity, watch the right. Valiant, get up high and give us a surveillance report!”

*Dammit, hero names means it’s serious.*

A part of him *almost* wished he was as pissed as he’d been not ten minutes ago as he scaled the side of a nearby building, lewd fantasies of Katsuki’s too-perfect body tainting every heroic thought in his mind right now.

*Ugh,* he thought, iron soles digging into concrete as he spun around to scan the area. *Guess that’ll be my motivation to get this done.*

Nothing on the right. Nothing down the middle. Nothing behind him, but—

*Oh, shit…!*

“No clear view of the target yet,” he said, slamming the button on his comms unit and leaping towards another nearby building, “but I’ve got eyes on a large cloud of dust near Red Riot. Still unsure if we’ll need backup.” Another jump, another look. “Uravity, do a check for other heroes in the vicinity! Do we have any other incoming reports on this target!?”

“No, not from what I’m seeing!” Came the swift reply. “Do we need to evacuate the surrounding areas?”

That looming cloud of dust was only growing bigger, *bigger.*

“Yeah—yeah. Call the police, have them send out a mass alert.” A gloved hand grazed over his lips, the familiar heat of battle pumping adrenaline through every inch of his body. “I’m going in closer. My guess right now is that the villain can generate some sort of sandstorm thing, so we’ve gotta deal with this fast. Damage costs could be high if we take too long—!”

“If it really is like you say, then you’re gonna be our best bet for taking it out quick.” Ochako reminded him. “I’m sure you’ve got enough hot air in you to blow it away!”

“Is that *really* what you wanna say to the person who’s gonna get our asses out of this!?”

“I mean, she ain’t wro—”

“Red Riot, Uravity, this is an official request to shut the fuck up.” Izuku scowled. “You wanna engage in hand-to-hand combat with a giant dust cloud? See what happens?”

There was an exasperated sigh from one end of the comms unit, and a small chuckle from the other. “Alright, alright. I’ll start working on the ground evacuations,” Kirishima said, more serious this time. “If it’s just dust, do you think we could tell ‘em to just go inside? Maybe just clear the streets?”

“That’d depend on if it’s like, spinning or not, right?” Ochako asked. “If it’s just dust, we could treat it like a tornado warning. Get people to building interiors, away from windows and all that… whaddya think?”

*Hm…*
He had to be at least four hundred, maybe three hundred feet from the steadily-growing funnel. No clear target in the middle, just sand and debris and wind.

*If civilians are in the midst of that, they’re gonna be in trouble. But first, I’ll need to take out the source so I can rescue them…!*

“Do that.” Izuku affirmed, started to regret getting rid of his costume’s face mask the closer he got to the target. “Diameter of the cloud appears to be at least two hundred feet at this point.” And growing. “Focus on watching the outside. I’ll let you know if I need help!”

“Over and out, Valiant.” Ochako answered. “And be safe on your end, alright?”

“I will.” He jumped closer, and finally, finally, got a look at the roaring funnel in the heart of the city center. “Promise.”

*I mean it.*

Izuku couldn’t have been more than a hundred feet out from the whirlwind—no, cyclone—and already he could hear the horrible, thunderous moan of the twister, loud as a runaway freight train careening at breakneck speed. Dust and debris ping-ponged between the sides of skyscrapers, sandpaper scratches already blistering his cheeks as he forced his way towards the center.

*C’mon, c’mon... the sooner I can find the source, the sooner this’ll be over...!*

Blurred shadows of civilians darted in and out of focus in the thick of the storm, panicked screams and shouts of terror echoing up to his reach. Izuku wanted to jump down and help more than anything, but saving a few to sacrifice the many?

*I have to keep moving. I have to find the source. Is there—shit, is there anyone else who can help!?*

Rigid fingers gripped his comms unit, but each futile attempt at communication was met with empty static.

*Shit. Shit. That’s not...*

Wicked spears of sand shot out through the hardly-visible area, finally forcing him to slap a crackling palm over his mouth in order to keep himself breathing.

*...that’s not good.*

Izuku let loose one, then another, then another gust of his own wind towards the supposed center of the funnel, but the break it provided only gave him enough time to suck in a short breath and refocus himself.

*The longer I spend in this sandstorm, the less I’ll be able to breathe. And if I can’t hold out here with my power, then—*

A choked, ragged cough broke from his lips.

*Nobody else is gonna survive out here.*

He ignored the small flecks of crimson blood scattered on his glove, opting to suck in as deep a breath as he could before dashing back out into the center of the storm, his own raw power crackling around him the only barrier between life and certain suffocation.

*Maybe I should’ve asked Ochako to come with me. She has a helmet.*
More screams, more howling, whistling wind.

*Maybe Kirishima would’ve been better. He wouldn’t get scraped up by this because of his quirk.*

Then again, he’d stopped feeling the awful grating against his cheek so long ago, too.

*Am I bleeding? Am I hurt? I can’t… can’t feel much…*

But there was no time to think—no time, not when the screams were gradually dying down around
him with echoed explosions, not when the tempest was only growing thicker, growing stronger,
growing—

*Wait.*

The storm wall sat in front of him now, half a mile tall and screeching with one of the ugliest, most
horrifying sounds Izuku had ever head. But below that ghastly wail, down in the city center…

...explosions? Why… why the hell are there explosions!?

Katsuki was with his friends.

*No, he said…*

Katsuki was out with his friends.

*Not here.*

Two steps forward, power rippling through his body and obscuring whatever meager vision he had
left.

*Not here. Can’t be here.*

Heat coiled in his stomach, his arm, raw fury tearing at him from the inside out.

*Not here. Can’t be here. Please, please, don’t be…!*

A punch, a shock of bright, blinding light, and then—

“…d-don’t—be here.”

Nothing.

A small, slumped body lay not a few feet in front of him—the villain, he realized after too-long a
stare—bleeding and clearly unconscious.

Izuku coughed.

*They’re still breathing,* he noticed, stumbling to the villain’s side. *Thank god. I let myself get carried
away. Should’ve been more careful. That was… that was too close for comfort.*

Usually, he tried his best to leave the villains at least semi-conscious. The police didn’t appreciate
having to wait for them to wake up, and the less damage they received, the less they’d have to
provide medical treatment…

*Okay, okay. It could’ve been a whole lot cleaner. But it’s done now, so—*

“…uh oh.”
Izuku got to his feet again, coughing up more gritty sand as he did, and looked around for the sudden voice.

“H-Hey, who’s—” he broke off into a choked, gravelly wheeze, still trying to see what was going on among the small dunes that had come out of the sand falling from its cyclical form. “Who’s there?”

On second look, hidden among the small hills was something new—something like small, glistening domes that looked too much like ice lay nestled between them.

But the villain… the villain was using sand and wind, not…

“Ya know, I love y’all, but I dunno if I wanna be the one waiting around when the pros find us! So let’s go, we should—”

“Camie, please. You were doing just as much as we were.”

...oh, god.

Those voices were too, too familiar.

“Well, Todoroki… maybe you left some amount of physical evidence, but she has somewhat of a point? We did our part, we weren’t seen, so… let’s leave while we can, maybe?”

Izuku rounded the corner of a filthy building, caught sight of the three people in front of him, and sighed.

Don’t make me take you all to the police, too.

“Really?” He asked, stepping into view. “I would’ve thought you all knew better than to intervene in a situation like this.”

Todoroki, Camie, and Yaoyorozu just stared at him with a dumb look on their faces, some strange combination of oh shit and thank god, it’s only him.

Great.

“Hey, Midoriya!” Camie greeted, guilt flaring on every one of her features. “Hah, funny seeing you here! That victory… that, uh, that sure was something!”

Is this how I sound when I’m nervous?

“I’m on duty right now, so just call me Valiant. Please.” Izuku sighed, crossed his arms over his chest, and shook his head. “There were evacuation alerts sent out. Why did you three think it was a good idea to stay here?” Then, with a point towards one of the ice domes and a small glare at Todoroki— “Excuse me. Stay out here and use your quirks without explicit permission.”

“Shit, he really does have daddy energy.”

“Would you like to repeat that for me, Utsushimi Camie?”

“… sorry, Valiant.”

“Hmph. Better.”
At the very least, the three students had the audacity to look mildly ashamed. Izuku found it a bit strange that Katsuki wasn’t there, considering he’d said he was hanging out with his friends, but…

*Guess that means he wasn’t a part of this whole fiasco. Good on him.*

A fresh wave of dizziness washed over him as he looked around again, trying to make sense of the few civilians wandering the streets and the still-weird ice domes littered across the small plaza. The sand had stung, had scraped his skin raw and left his cheeks to bruise and bleed rivulets that soaked into the sturdy fabric of his hero costume. Izuku would have to go to the hospital after this and get himself taken care of, but at the very least…

*Most of these civilians… they don’t look like they’re in rough shape? How did they avoid the storm?*

He shook his head, palm firm to his temple, and sighed.

*One thing at a time.*

“What exactly were you three doing out here?” Izuku said, gesturing to the structures. “Todoroki, I know this was your quirk. Explain.”

“Well, we were just hanging out, and the sandstorm started before a warning had been sent out.” Todoroki shrugged. “Didn’t really know what else to do, so… for the people that got caught out on the streets, I started making those shelters. Momo made blankets for the people we put inside, and Camie helped to lead people to safety with her illusions when the winds picked up, and Katsuki tried to get a hold of you when it started. He didn’t know why you weren’t picking up when you’d just been replying to his texts. I was just working on melting down the last of the structures when you showed up, and…”

Wait… “Wait, what?” Izuku’s eyes shot open, any pain fading away. “You—you’re telling me that Kacchan was out here!?”

The three students exchanged an awkward glance, a series of nervous, mumbled laughter, and eventually a small yeah, he was.

*Those explosions… those explosions, I knew I heard explosions, I did, and…*

“Where is he?” He asked, more a plea than a question. “You said Kacchan’s here, but he’s not with you, so where is he?”

*Where is he? Shit, where’s my fucking boyfriend!? Where’s—*

“…Deku?”

Sand-covered hair, clothes, and a face nearly as bloody as his own appeared behind the small group of students, and for as many words as he had to say to Katsuki about whatever stupid thing he’d done, all his body could do was run forward, pull him into his arms, and know that he was there.

*Kacchan, Kacchan, Kacchan…*

“You look… y’look like shit.” Katsuki mumbled, face buried in the fabric of Izuku’s well-made hero suit. “You the one who took it down…?”

“Mhm, and… were you helping out with these rescues?”

“…you gonna be angry if I say yes?”
A part of me wishes I was.

“Not as much as I should be,” Izuku whispered, still low and raspy. “M’sorry I didn’t reply to your texts. Ochako took my phone.”

“Hmph. Figures,” Katsuki said, face still buried deep in Izuku’s chest. “I don’t blame her. S’what you get for texting me on duty.”

“Shut up, or I will report you for using your quirks like this.”

“You wouldn’t.”

“Wanna try me? You—you really wanna try me?”

“You’re a fuckin’ softie, Deku, so—”

“Excuse me, Pro Hero Valiant?”

...oh no.

He pulled himself from Katsuki at top speed, spinning on unsteady heels to face the new voice and hope he didn’t look as nervous as he felt.

Just be a civilian, just a civilian, just someone who needs help and saw me and—

A camera. A microphone. A too-familiar woman, and a disappointed frown searing into his face.

“Um,” he said, stupidly. “Did you need something?”

The reporter—the same damn one he’d run into last night—tapped her foot against the gravelly ground and stared at the two of them, hardly a foot apart.

Leave. Leave. Leave.

“I admit, I am a little curious as to why you were just engaging in such close contact with Bakugou Katsuki.” Those eyes watched them like a hawk, laser-focused and missing nothing. “Or, more telling may be the rate at which you two pulled apart. It’s almost as if you were doing something you shouldn’t.”

“Hey, why don’t you—”

“Ka—Bakugou.” Izuku grit out, an arm stretched in front of his boyfriend. “I ordered you to go over with the other students, didn’t I?”

“When did you—”

“Bakugou.”

That name was acid on his lips, but nothing stung worse than the thought that he might’ve just fucked everything up because of a simple, delirious hug. But despite the lie, the complete lie, Katsuki obeyed with naught a question and left.

I’m sorry. I was too out of it. I wasn’t thinking. I should’ve been paying attention. I shouldn’t have ran when I saw your face.

“Pro Hero Valiant, would you mind answering a few questions for me about this incident?” The
reporter pushed, but this time, he had little choice but to concede.

“Happy to oblige.” Leave me alone. Leave us alone.

At least this time, he could pretend the rasp was because of the sand.

“Alright, here we go.” That microphone was too close, too close to his lips. “You look like you took a beating in there. Could you give me a short playback of the fight?”

The hardest part about this interview would be keeping himself from breaking down.

“Of course.” Teeth grit, fists clenched. “I was out on patrol with Pro Heroes Uravity and Red Riot, and off in the distance, we noticed the dust cloud beginning to form. They took the perimeter evacuations while I targeted the source of the sandstorm.” This is fine. This is fine. “The sandstorm continued to grow as I ran in, but I took out the villain easily once I made it through the worst of the storm.”

“Told out the villain, huh?” Those words were piercing, scathing. “Is that what that body over there was? The one left abandoned to be found by the police?”

“Don’t act like I killed the villain,” Izuku hissed, hardly able to reign himself in. “There was a sizable amount of area damage, and the shouting from civilians in the vicinity made rescuing my new top priority.”

“But you still left the villain there, didn’t you?” The reporter leaned in, absolutely unwavering in her resolve. “You left the villain that caused all of this havoc alone?”

“Again, keeping an unconscious person company was not my top priority, so please stop making assump—”

“I’m not making assumptions, Valiant. What I’m asking for are the facts.”

Oh. My. God.

“The facts!?” Izuku bristled, fury bursting at the seams. “What, so you can take them out of context and try to wreck whatever public image I have left even more? Why the hell do you people keep trying to—”

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe. I... I have to...

He could feel the tears beading in his eyes, hear the crack in his own voice start to grow further, further.

I’m being recorded. I can’t—fuck, I can’t afford to screw this up.

“...yes, I left the villain alone after I defeated them,” he finally admitted, the sour half-truth rancid in his throat. “My... my sincerest apologies for the outburst.”

The reporter nodded, and Izuku felt sicker than he’d been in the center of that storm.

“Thank you for the answer, Valiant.” I hate it when you say my name. “Also, do you have any insight as to why these four U.A. students are at the scene of the crime?”

Why are you bringing them into this!?

Saying they were illegally using their quirks to rescue would be an issue. Saying it was a simple
coincidence could spark theories he didn’t want.

What option can I use? What options do I have?

“I granted them permission to help in the crisis,” he stammered, hoping his voice hadn’t cracked yet. “They’re, uh, third years. I’ve helped out with their class before. And they all have their provisional licenses, so when I was unable to contact backup—I, um, wasn’t able to reach other heroes because the service in the middle of the storm was completely gone—and with their quirks, it seemed reasonable to have them help out in the spur of the moment. I’ve since rescinded their permissions to fight, but that’s why they’re here.”

Believe me, please, please.

The reporter remained silent for a long, long moment.

Was that an answer that worked? Was that an answer that’s safe?

“Last question, Valiant,” came the reporter again, and Izuku could’ve cried from relief at getting past just that question. “Could you explain to me what you and Bakugou Katsuki, recent winner of U.A. High’s sports festival, were doing together just before this interview?”

I’m being recorded.

“We—”

Think. Please, even if it’s just for now!

“Bakugou and I—” Stay calm. Stay calm. “Bakugou was lightly injured during the fight. I was checking up on his injuries.”

“Checking up on his injuries.” The reporter raised an eyebrow. “Is that what they’re calling—”

“Hey, Valiant!”

Oh my god. Oh my god. Oh my god, Ochako, I love you so much.

“Hey there!” Ochako said, appearing at Izuku’s side in an instant. “Ah, sorry if I interrupted something! But Valiant, the police wanted to get a report from you, so I’d strongly recommend going all the way to the other side of the plaza and getting that taken care of!”

At any other point in time, Izuku might’ve made a snide comment about her not-so-subtle directions, but considering the situation, just nodding and doing as he was told would certainly be his best option right now.

Other side of the plaza. Right. Right.

Granted, the police were there when he arrived, but so was Kirishima and the students. His friend gave him a pat on the back, Katsuki hung out awkwardly on the edge of the group, and he was asked—professionally, this time—about the accident. That said, he did slip a little white lie about giving the students permission to use their quirks into the discussion, figuring it was the least he could do to credit them for the good they’d done.

The lingering problem, though, was the fact that the damn reporter had mentioned Katsuki by name on a recording that would more than likely be broadcasted.

And I’m… I know I’m not a great actor.
He didn’t speak to Katsuki throughout the whole conversation, just stuck to answering routine questions and going through the motions. The reporter hadn’t gone live until after they’d separated, and no other news source had been in the area. Sure, he might’ve looked a little constipated while answering, but he hadn’t said anything directly incriminating.

“That said, I have to hope that she didn’t take any pictures of us hugging. I hate having to put my bets on this, but… it’s not like I have another choice.

The last thing Izuku wanted to do was grovel to the media, to beg and plead for the smallest mercy to leave hints of he and Katsuki’s relationship alone. He wasn’t the type to deal with them in the first place, much less get on his knees and pray for even the barest reprieve.

Now, though?

If that’s what it takes to remedy this… if that’s what I have to do…

Izuku took pride in his work. Fighting, saving, heroing—that was what he’d built himself on all his life.

How much of myself will I have to lay bare before this is all taken care of?

“Valiant, I think that’s all we need from you for now,” the policeman said, shaking his hand. “I’m sorry the media was giving you trouble again, but we really appreciate your efforts on the field.”

Right. Yes. I’m not awful at my job.

“I’m here to serve.” Izuku dipped his head, managed a small, honest smile. “The students are in the clear too, right?” He’d pushed the legality of their narrative as hard as he could, because for as much as they had broken the law, the benefits certainly outweighed whatever consequences they’d garnered.

“…I think we can keep the details of this one to the field.” The policeman smiled, looking over the students. “Did that reporter ask you about them specifically?”

“I—ah, yes.”

“I’m going to talk to her about censoring the footage, then. Personally, I…” The policeman wiped his brow. “W-Well, I’d rather not get U.A. involved if I can avoid it. Dealing with the administration can be a pain, to say the least.”

Censoring the footage? Wait… hold up, that’d mean—

“You’re gonna tell her not to release it?” Izuku’s jaw dropped, some sudden spark of hope flaring up within him. “Oh god, that’d be—t-that’d be really great. And it’d, um, definitely make your lives easier!”

The policeman chuckled. “Your issues with the press aren’t in any way a secret. I’ll talk it out with her and get it sorted out, okay?”

Okay. Okay. Yes, yes, that’d be great…!

He got out a small noise of agreement, trying to contain his excitement at the prospect of that pointed interview never going public. But one more handshake, one more round of thanks to Izuku, Kirishima, (and the students) later, and the small group was left alone again.
“Dude, what happened with that reporter?” Kirishima asked, a slight twinge in his voice. “Ochako saw you talkin’ with her, and she was all like ‘oh shit’, and then ran off to save you from the interview? Was it really that bad?”

“I mean, it could’ve been wor—”

“Midoriya Izuku, you are one helluva dumb bitch!”

Oh, god.

Ochako stormed up to the small group, arms crossed over her chest and a tight frown on her face. “Are you so out of it that you didn’t realize that you’re still in public? Do you really not remember what happened last night and this morning!?”

“Come on, I hardly did anything!” Izuku protested. “Not my fault the media likes to blow everything out of proportion.”

“Izuku. We literally just met with your PR team to talk about you and Bakugou, and then you decide it’s a good idea to go and hug him in the middle of the battle’s aftermath!” Ochako threw her hands in the air, completely exasperated. “I saw you two from across the field, and I couldn’t make it fast enough to stop it before it started, but god. You—you are so fucking stupid!”

...whoops.

“W-Well, when you put it that way…”

“Hey,” Katsuki interrupted, finally speaking for the first time since the semi-interrogation had begun. “I…I hugged him back. Wasn’t like, a one-way thing, so don’t take it out on him.”

Kacchan… hey, you don’t have to…

But Ochako’s gaze softened upon seeing the small frown over Katsuki’s own, and she backed down, if only a little.

“Bakugou, I know you’re smart,” Ochako said, the barest hint of a smile visible on those cheeks. “So don’t be stupid, alright?”

“Right, right.” His boyfriend’s slightly-shadowed face dipped down, seemingly unable to meet Ochako’s eyes. “Won’t happen again.”

Kirishima and Ochako went on to talk to the students for a bit longer about technicalities, about things they should and shouldn’t have done, and only after they were done did Katsuki appear by his side again, a bit quieter than before.

“Didn’t mean to get you in trouble.” His boyfriend tried to apologize, only for Izuku to cut him off with a wave of his hand and an it’s okay, was my fault too.

“So, uh…” Izuku’s hand ran through the back of his still-sandy hair. “Think you’d be okay with rescheduling that date night?”

“Okay!?” His boyfriend choked. “God, Deku, I want you to see a goddamn doctor before I shove my dick in that gritty-ass mouth of yours. Tomorrow, the next day, whenever’s fine. Just, um…”

His boyfriend took a quick glance around the area, then grabbed Izuku’s hand before he could yank it away. “Just let me know when you’re free. I—I’d really like to stay over again soon.”
“We’ll make it happen. Promise.” Izuku said, but upon Katsuki’s friends returning to his side, realized that their time was about up. “I’ll text you after I get back from treatment.”

Things are gonna be okay. We’ll see each other again soon, and I’ll get to talk to him and hold him and kiss him and fuck him and it’ll… yeah. It’ll be good.

But as Katsuki walked off, all Izuku wished he could do was kiss him goodbye.

Can’t let it get to me. That’s just how it is.

Izuku made to leave the scene himself to head to the hospital as well, but before he could get more than ten feet away, Ochako grabbed him by the arm, effectively stopping him in his tracks.

“Hey, um…”

Huh? Why is she so quiet all of a—

“That reporter.” Ochako pulled him in closer, voice so low only he could hear it. “After the end of the interview, she told me to tell you something.”

“Look, I don’t wanna hear a single thing from her, so—”

“She said you’re running out of time.”

...o-oh.

“Bullshit.” Izuku swallowed, trying to pretend there weren’t chills climbing up his spine and then crawling, crawling back down. “The— the policeman said he was going to tell her to censor the recording, and she doesn’t have anything else, and—”

“Look, I don’t know what she does and doesn’t have either, but I don’t think she was just talking about herself.” Ochako bit her lip, visibly nervous. “Please, just… be careful. I don’t want to see them make your life miserable again. And I know, I know it’s like the last thing you wanna do, but it might be worth it to take some time off, you know? Go underground for a bit, let the media talk die down…”

“What, so it can resurface as soon as I come back?” He scowled. “No. I won’t change the way I’m working because the press wants to know who’s in my bed.”

“Bakugou’s going to get involved.”

Shut up.

“If the media wants to drag my name through the mud again, then fine. I don’t care what they say about me.” Izuku said, hoping he sounded less angry than he felt. “And if they want to get him involved, then I’ll put whatever they want out there. Mark my words, I—”

His body—no, his legs—itched—and Izuku knew it wasn’t because of the sand.

“I’ll give them the best goddamn distraction they could ask for.”

I think I’m running out of time to do much else.
hahaha just know that i've been thinking about next chapter (rest of the fic, really) for a while (see: months) and i'm very very excited (aka: in pain) thinking about writing it

Hmu on @aeronines on twitter, and here's all the art for this fic, and here's the playlist!

also!! there may not be a chapter next week because i'll be at a convention real soon here (if y'all r at a-kon hmu!!) so don't expect one for next week just bc i'm finishing up a lot of cosplay stuff as well! definitely b back after that, though!
edit: i made a dumb mistake so next chapter gonna b up on friday instead of thurs rip
lmfao
...but you can't hide

Chapter Summary

plz be mindful that there is (primarily verbal) bullying this chapter, so i just wanna make yall aware in advance. kids are mean

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“...and, with that, class is over for the day. I’ll see you all at practice in the morning.”

Katsuki let his notebook fall shut, then shoved it back in his bag alongside his pencils and other crap from the earlier classes. With exams approaching again, his classwork had only been growing more and more stressful—but, such was the nature of school.

“Did you want to study in the library for a bit, Katsuki?” Yaoyorozu asked, packing up her own things only a few seats away. “These past couple lessons in history have been giving me some trouble, and I know you wanted some help with this week’s science material, too.”

“Mhm. Works for me.”

“Ooh! Ooh, will you guys tutor me in math if I order a pizza?” Camie bounced towards them. “I might fail the next exam if I don’t get some extra lessons in, so…”

“Yeah, yeah. S’fine.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Make sure you order it with extra sausage, though.”

“Midoriya’s not even here! C’mon, Kacchan. Get your head out of the gutter.”

“Oh my god, I wasn’t—”

A light hand patted his shoulder, followed only by Todoroki’s familiar form. “There’s nothing wrong with wanting dick, but right now may not be the time. Weren’t you at Midoriya’s a couple days ago anyways?”

Katsuki groaned, shrugging off his friend’s hand. “Yeah, maybe I was at his place, but—”

“Came back with a nice new limp, too!” Camie interrupted, bursting with glee. “I’m so proud of you, like, so proud of you, and—”

“Why the hell are we talking about this to begin with!?” He spun around, a sharp scowl carved into his face. “For fuck’s sake, I…”

But someone—two, three, four someones—were all staring at him, whispering among themselves and giving him a too-curious, too-suspicious look.

Shit, not again…

“Let’s—let’s just go.” Katsuki grit his teeth, trying to hold back the small explosions threatening to spark in his palms. “Don’t have time to be standing around.”
He’d been getting the stares, the looks, the side-comments and the hints of gossip all week. No one had had the balls to talk directly to his face, but it wasn’t like he was so stupid as to miss it.

Nobody knows about me ‘n Deku... s’all just rumors, just gossip, but that doesn’t mean that it’s... that it makes it better.

Yaoyorozu and Camie crowded in closer to him, and Todoroki reached for his shoulder again—this time, Katsuki didn’t shake it off.

“...would you feel more comfortable in the dorms, Katsuki?” Yaoyorozu asked, too soft for his liking. “There’s probably a lot of other students in the library right now, and we can use my dorm if you want.”

“I’ll go grab some ice cream, too—or, um, you were into that one orange sorbet, right?” Camie continued, and while he knew his friend’s efforts were put out to make him feel better, they only served to mask his bone-deep discomfort. Katsuki hated letting other people’s words get to him, but since the fight when they’d accidentally run into Deku the week before, he’d been hearing whisper upon whisper of Bakugou and Valiant and...together? Is that who’s been doing him?

Shut up. Shut up. Shut up.

“Your room’s fine.” Katsuki bit out, hands shoved deep in his pockets. “And thanks, Camie.”

Anywhere but here is fine. Anywhere away from the gossip is fine.

He hadn’t mentioned the rumors to Deku—not yet, at least. Katsuki was well aware that his boyfriend was already dealing with his fair share of press issues, and even though the interview footage that’d been broadcasted from last week’s fight had been censored on the big networks, bits and pieces of the rest of that unsolicited interrogation had appeared on gossip networks, and everyone—everyone—was narrowing in on that new name.

Bakugou Katsuki. Close contact with Bakugou Katsuki.

He’d ran to the bathroom upon learning about it. He’d hardly slept after the first murmurs of gossip had hit his ears. This week had been the worst test of his self-restraint that he’d ever had to endure—despite every small bit of slander whispered around him, even if the things he heard about Deku were nasty and downright wrong, Katsuki couldn’t afford to say a damn word.

I can’t let them know for sure. I can’t... can’t make it worse than it already is, for the good of both of us.

His bitten tongue grazed broken, bloody lips, and for as much as he tried to convince himself that everything was okay, the physical signs told him otherwise.

“At least we’ll have the chance to brush up on studying tonight,” Todoroki said, breaking him from his trance. “You said you needed help with scie—”

“Bakugou.”

That’s not a student talking.

“I need you to come with me for a bit,” came the voice again, not scary or threatening, but firm nonetheless.

Fuck.
Katsuki would’ve rather died on the spot than face Aizawa, but this was the one situation that he figured he didn’t have much of a choice in. He broke away from his friends on his own, waved them off, and managed to turn towards his teacher.

Still, he couldn’t meet his eyes.

“We shouldn’t be too long.” Aizawa said to his friends, right over Katsuki’s head. “Hopefully.”

Katsuki told his friends to go on without him. That he’d meet back up with them afterwards. Then, he followed Aizawa, knowing they were off to the teacher’s office without having to be told.

Don’t be about Deku. Don’t be about Deku. God, please, don’t… don’t ask me about Deku.

Aizawa had him sit on a small couch, offered him water, and sat across from him after dropping a small stack of papers in front of him alongside a small laptop. For as much as he wanted to believe everything was alright, though, Deku’s name lay printed on several of the scattered papers, and nothing else had happened to warrant a private meeting with his teacher.

“Bakugou,” Aizawa sighed, rubbing a hand over weary eyes. “This will be a lot easier if you’re honest with me.”

“Mm. Probably.” Dry, empty. As if he’d given up before the question was even popped. But Aizawa only shook his head, let out a long, slow, tired sigh, like he wanted this conversation over as much as Katsuki didn’t want it to start.

“If it’s any consolation, nothing will be held against either of you by the school staff or his agency.” Either of you. Of us.

His teacher shuffled through the papers, then pulled a couple out with a nearly unnoticeable grimace. “You’re dating Midoriya Izuku, better known as Pro Hero Valiant.”

Katsuki stared at the tap water in his glass. Blinked. Nodded. Guess it’s easier to admit when someone else says it first.

The papers were set back down in the pile, Valiant’s—Deku’s—face bright against the stark reports. He knew there were people looking at his boyfriend’s every move, but he hadn’t considered, or hadn’t wanted to consider, the idea that people were taking note of his actions too.

“I appreciate you making this easy.” Aizawa rubbed his eyes again, irritation dull on worn features. “They told me I wasn’t allowed to talk to you about this until we had enough evidence to keep you from running out on me, but I’d always taken you for an honest one. Told the higher ups they were ridiculous for hunting down every damn scrap of gossip they could find when you’d tell me right out what was going on.”

Oh.

“Can I leave now.” He asked, blunt and far-too-far from the present. “Got homework.”

Don’t wanna think about this anymore. Don’t wanna think about people sticking their noses where they don’t belong.

“Believe me, I…” Aizawa turned towards another, smaller stack of papers on the desk. “I’d much rather send you back to your friends than have to prepare you for dealing with the press, and other
complications that will likely come out of your relationship.”

...oh.

“I’m leaving,” he said, mechanically rising from the couch before even processing those two simple words. “The press can fuck themselves.”

“Midoriya thought that same thing, you know.”

Shut up.

“And I’m sure you’re well aware of what they’ve said about him in the past, and what they’re saying about him now. Midoriya...” Aizawa rolled a pen between his fingers, staring down at the files. “Midoriya was a student of mine. One of my best.”

“Yeah,” Katsuki mumbled, reluctantly falling back to his seat. “He’s... he’s amazing.”

“He’s an amazing target for the media, too. I know you’re smart, Bakugou,” Aizawa paused, “so tell me. Why do you think that he has reporters stalking him at every angle?”

Stop. Stop. Stop.

“That would make two of us, then.” His teacher shook his head. “Midoriya is a good hero, if not a little reckless. But despite issues with his mentality and other things, and despite his insistence in the past couple years on avoiding the press, I would never doubt his fidelity towards being a hero.”

If nothing else, that declaration was a good sign.

“Course he’s a good hero. What’s your point.” Why the hell does this matter?

“My point is that not everyone sees that. The media swarms in on failures like a moth to a flame—it’s ridiculous. You make one misstep like Midoriya did two years ago, and they’ll keep finding ways to dig in deeper and deeper.” Aizawa droned, dark eyebags somehow even darker than before. “You’d be appalled by the amount of money they make off of him—I’ve done my research. A pro hero who’s desperate to stay out of the limelight, but insistent on executing flashy rescues and overperforming on duty, and brands himself on being ‘a hero before anything else?’ Bakugou, you have to understa—”

“He’s more than a fucking hero!” Katsuki half-screamed, voice cracking at the end. “They—they don’t know jack shit about him.”

“I know he is. Trust me,” Aizawa nodded. “But when people hear rumors of the country’s most prominent, and most objectively attractive pro hero bachelor having someone else after he’s declared time and time again that he wants nothing to do with relationships? That sends their ratings to levels more absurd than you could ever imagine.”

Ratings... you’re telling me...

“You—you’re telling me that he’s being put through this shit because people want to fucking profit off of his life!?” Bile rose in the back of his mouth, each acid breath burning holes in his throat. “His damn job is to save people, not deal with this shit! All he wants is to be left alone!”

“It’s a shame his quirk isn’t suited to stealth,” Aizawa said, lips turned to a slight frown. “I went underground as a hero because I can’t stand the media’s filth either. While Midoriya and I have had our differences, this is never a situation that I would wish on him. And as his boyfriend, I’m sure it
hurts you to see him deal with this, but as his former teacher?”

...shit.

Katsuki fumbled with his fingers. “Bet it’s not easy.”

“It’s not. Not at all.”

Hunched over the table with calloused hands folded in his lap, Aizawa looked far, far more like a peer than Katsuki had ever seen him before.

“Midoriya is so, so incredibly young,” he continued. “And the burden of perfection that the media has put on his shoulders is far greater than anyone his age should have to endure. In their eyes, he’s barely human. So when those more human things come into his life, like you, their perception of him is ruined.”

I hate it. I hate it. I hate it so much.

“That’s—that’s stupid.” His arms went stiff, shoulders bunched together at his back. “Fucking stupid.”

“I’d agree with you, but unfortunately, that’s how most people see heroes. And because Midoriya has hardly shared anything about his personal life, it makes him even more interesting.” Aizawa snorted. “One might even see it as some twisted version of playing hard-to-get.”

I guess I understand where that would come from, but it’s... god, this is so fucked up.

“In addition to that, I hope I don’t have to explain why the headline ‘Pro Hero Valiant discovered to be dating U.A. student’ could cause problems.”

Katsuki stared at his lap.

Oh.

“What… what am I even supposed to do, then?” he mumbled, hands clenched against his legs. “Not gonna break up with him. We haven’t done anything wrong. All we’re trying to do is live our fucking lives, and I—shit, I don’t want our damn relationship just used as a way for other people to make money!”

“There’s that point, and there’s also the risk of agencies not wanting to take you on because of this situation. And, if I may ask… were you and Midoriya thinking about becoming hero partners at any point in the future?”

Kinda. Just a little. Only for the past three damn years…!

But he nodded, nodded, and waited.

“Personally, I think you two would make an excellent team,” came the approval, far more than he expected. “When I watched the both of you work together in the second year final exams—that matchup was a complete fluke, by the way—the means in which you moved and worked together was incredible, and I know that if given the chance, your teamwork will only improve.”

Awesome, awesome, so—

“Which is why I’d be irritated if the media were to try and frame your relationship in a negative light before you have the chance to prove that the both of you make a legitimately good team.”
...there’s the catch.

Katsuki’s shoulders slumped forward, another wave of anxiety crashing over him once again.

All I’ve wanted… all I’ve wanted for so long…

“I’m gonna be his goddamn partner,” he said, barely audible through clenched teeth. “Don’t care what anyone else says. S’what I’m gonna do.”

I’m gonna… I will, I wanna, I…

Katsuki would deny the quiver in his voice and the uncertainty gnawing at his chest for years to come.

I… I’m…

“I can’t promise you it’ll be easy to do this,” Aizawa’s gaze flicked back up to meet his. “But if nothing else, I wanted to say that in regards to you as a U.A. student, and to Midoriya as U.A. alumni, the school will support you both as much as we can.”

...holy shit.

“Are you serious?”

Aizawa dipped his head. “I’ve discussed this with the school board, and while they were hesitant on the idea at first, the truth of the matter is that you two are both young, growing heroes with an incredible amount of potential, and as a school for heroes, it’d be a disappointment on our front if we were to let two people so promising be shot down before they could get their feet off the ground.”

While it disgusted him that this conversation even had to happen in the first place, hearing that his school would be willing to do that much for him and Deku…

“Thanks.” I hate it, I hate this situation. “It means… means a lot. Really.”

Even if this is the preparation for a worst-case scenario.

Aizawa smiled some sort of sad, tired smile, then glanced up at the clock. “I’ll leave you to study. I’m sure your friends are wanting to see you, but just know that if there’s anything you need help with in regards to all this, you can always come to me.”

Katsuki got to his feet, still so far out of it, but nodded. “I… I will.”

He couldn’t find the strength to say anything else.

The walk back wouldn’t—shouldn’t—have taken more than ten minutes, but Katsuki’s legs had turned to lead and refused to carry him any faster than his sluggish brain could process everything that had happened.

I… I just…

Even with all the support U.A. was offering him, the thought of going over to Deku’s place again brought with it both aching need and chilling fear.

Is it safe to do this? Can we really keep this relationship up?

Katsuki pushed open the school exit, bag heavy over his shoulders. Long, overcast clouds crowded
the summer sun, and the usual bright greens that accompanied him were so dull, so washed out, so—

“Oh man, did you see that guy get dragged to the teacher’s office after class?”

Katsuki ducked his head, started walking faster, hoping, hoping that the idiots meandering around the sidewalk wouldn’t notice him.

“Who, Bakugou? Yeah dude, he looked like he was about to shit himself!”

Fuck, fuck…!

“Serves him right. Hope he’s finally getting called out for what a fake he is so the rest of us don’t gotta be associated with his ass anymore!”

“Whoah, whoah. A fake? This the stuff about him cheating at the sports fest again?”

Keep walking. Keep walking.

“Yeah! I mean, come on. Everyone knows he got his pro hero fuckbuddy to rig that win for him. No one just walks out of the ring on the last round of their third year sports fest, and that illusion wasn’t a coincidence either. And you heard what happened at his final exam last year too, right?”

It took every ounce of self restraint to keep from crying, from screaming, from running up to the idiot students on the side of the walkway and prove that his skills were anything but fake.

“Ohh, when he and Valiant got paired up in the exam and he fuckin’ destroyed everyone?”

Shut up.

“I heard Bakugou was acting so damn cocky before the match started. Makes sense if he was just planning on throwing his boyfriend at everyone to win…!”

Shut up.

“Hah, shoulda known he was just Valiant’s bitch! Big-talking Bakugou didn’t start winning ‘till his daddy got involved!”

Katsuki nearly threw up on the spot.

I gotta keep walking. Please, please, I just gotta keep walking.

“Oh—wait, dude, over there! Bakugou’s—”

“Hah, perfect!”

Looking back, he should’ve sucked it up and ran the rest of the way instead. But one of those shitty kids, followed by one, two, three of his fucking buddies, decided it’d be a great idea to stop him in his tracks, hardly a hundred feet from the dormitory door.

Go. Away.

“The hell do you want?” He hissed, moving to push past the group of students. They must’ve been from the business department or the still-bitter part of general studies, because he didn’t recognize a single one as they grabbed his arm and refused to let him move any further. “Oi, get the fuck off of me!”
“Why, something wrong?” One of the taller kids teased, jabbing at Katsuki’s chest with a sharp finger. “You gonna call your little boyfriend to come save you?”

I can’t give them the reaction they want. I can’t. I can’t.

“I’ve got shit to do. It’s almost exam week,” he grit out, trying to tug his arm from their grip. “Fuck off.”

“Oh, gonna call up Valiant for a little study session, aren’t you?” One of the other kids cackled. “He went to U.A. too. Bet he’s gonna pound all those answers into you, isn’t he?”

Shut up. Shut up. Shut up.

Deku would be able to play it cool until he was safe. Deku would be able to get out of situations like this without causing a scene. Deku—Deku would be his example right now.

Anything I say or do will be used against me, so I have to…

“Didn’t realize that sleeping your way to the top was such an easy way of getting noticed.”

I have to…

“Man, bet all you had to do rise in the ranks was shake your ass a little for him!”

God, I have to—

“Must be fun,” the first person said, tilting Katsuki’s head up to face him, “whoring yourself out for a little bit of success. Hah, too bad you can’t seem to earn it on your own!”

Stay quiet.

A hoarse, raucous, mocking series of laughs followed as the other students knocked him in the shoulder, in the chest, even daring to slap his ass before walking off with that horrible, horrible howling in their wake.

Breathe. Breathe. I need to breathe.

Katsuki stayed frozen for ten, twenty seconds after they left, but when his legs finally decided they were going to move, it was in the clunkiest, most stilted fashion he’d felt in years. His friends were probably waiting for him at this point, but a good part of him just wanted to go curl up in his bed and stay there for another hundred years.

I don’t wanna hear this shit anymore. Everyone’s just wrong. I know everyone’s wrong.

But the nausea in his stomach just kept growing, growing, and a big part of him nearly ran to the bathroom to shower three times over right then and there.

That said, Yaoyorozu’s door was a haven.

“Katsuki! You made—” came Yaoyorozu’s voice, fading as she took in his pitiful form. “Oh, no… everything okay?”

Fine wasn’t the right answer. But nothing else was either.

“Just wanna sit down,” he said instead, thankful to his friend for stepping aside and letting him in without another word. Camie and Todoroki were staring at him, but they didn’t bother him as he got
comfortable as he could, settling back onto a plush pillow on the floor to lay down for a minute or ten. His friends knew what the past week had been like for him, but…

No one’s ever said that garbage to my face when my friends are around… as soon as I was alone, though, those assholes thought it’d be okay to do that to me.

Katsuki’s stomach twisted.

What the hell is my life coming to?

Even just the thought of that was enough to send another wave of nausea rolling through him, and Katsuki hoped the sight of him curling up on the floor wouldn’t alarm his friends too much. Camie pat his shoulder, ran a hand through his hair, didn’t push for answers. Todoroki carried on with what studying they’d started before he’d arrived, and the stable, constant stream of familiar voices was enough to help him calm down a little. They ate a little—him, not too much—but the casual atmosphere certainly helped.

Don’t think about what they said. Don’t believe them when they say I’m just a fucktoy. Don’t let them tell me how I feel. How Deku feels.

His phone buzzed in his pocket, but Katsuki, for the first time in so long, hesitated to pull it out. It’s… it’s probably…

[Deku] hi kacchan!!!!

[Deku] i got off work early today!! They got someone else to cover the evening shift so i could get a break

[Deku] but uh tomorrows sunday and im not working till noon, so if you want you could come over and spend the night again?

[Deku] maybe go another few rounds if youre up for it;)

[Deku] (1 image attached)

And oh no, the stupid picture Deku had sent was a hot one. He’d zipped down his hero suit to his crotch, one hand slipped in the crease of the zipper low enough to tease him with that gorgeous, gorgeous v-line. Scratch marks from their last bout of sex still sung over his chest, and just in the shadow of his hero suit was a small, perky nipple, just waiting for someone to get their mouth on it. Best of all, though, he’d stuck his tongue out far enough to show off the small, glistening silver ball inside, the hunger in his eyes enough to tell Katsuki everything his boyfriend wanted to do to him.

Hah, shoulda known he was just Valiant’s bitch!

Katsuki closed out of the message as fast as he could, trying to pretend that his hands weren’t shaking, shaking.

Get out of my head. Get out of my head. Get out of my head, dammit…!


A break.

“I-I…” his voice trailed off, and acting like he was actually okay was a failing effort now. “I dunno.
Don’t feel great.”

The small group fell quiet, and Katsuki almost regretted saying anything when Todoroki asked if his meeting with Aizawa had gone badly.

*That part wasn’t awful. Could’ve been worse. Just kinda overwhelmed, and then with those students, and Deku…*

He wasn’t sure he’d be able to text back in the next hour, much less that same night.

“Wanna talk about it?” Camie asked again, meaning only well. But knowing his friends, they’d just get angry and upset over what had happened to him on that short walk back—rightfully so, though right now, hearing more loud voices and accusative words was all he didn’t want.

“Later,” he finally managed, pulling his phone back towards his chest and shutting it off. “Nothing important. Promise.”

*It wasn’t important. What they said was just words. Just words. Just lies, and I know it…!*  

His friends didn’t push, and while he was happy to go the evening without talking about it, those stupid comments wouldn’t stop bothering him at every waking moment.

*I’m not Deku’s bitch. I don’t call him to come save me. I wouldn’t… I’d never whore myself out for success.*

Katsuki didn’t reply to his boyfriend’s messages throughout the evening, and he couldn’t even look at his phone before taking three separate showers in a futile attempt to scrub the insults from his skin.

*Not some helpless asshole. Not someone’s bitch. Not anyone’s whore.*

He spent longer than he would’ve liked in the confines of those bathroom stalls, doing things he’d refuse to speak about come morning.

*They’re wrong. They’re wrong. They’re wrong. I’m not…*  

Katsuki came back from the bathroom to four new, glowing notifications from only ten minutes ago.

[Deku] aha, sorry… forgot it was close to exams for you. im gonna head to sleep

[Deku] ill let you know when I’m free again!!

[Deku] i miss you and i love you, baby<3

[Deku] hope youre doing okay

If another fifteen-minute crying fit and pleading for the insults to leave, *leave* fit the bill for *okay*, then Katsuki supposed he was doing alright.

[Katsuki] sorry I missed this

[Katsuki] got a little sick when I was studying w friends earlier. I’m fine dw

[Katsuki] sleep well

[Katsuki] love u
In the confines of his lonely, midnight room, it was almost too easy to dwell on those lies.

He didn’t tell any of his friends outright what had happened that day, but made an effort to stick close to them, to not venture out into the halls without someone he trusted nearby, and to never, *never* walk to his dorm alone for the next week. Studying was hard, but talking was harder—and hopefully, Deku would take his sparse replies as a result of his schoolwork rather than any other reason.

*I don’t wanna talk about this. Can’t really talk about this. It’s not even a media problem right now, it’s just... just people being mean. I’ll survive.*

But that kernel of truth in the heart of their messages, the fact that Deku really *had* been there at his biggest wins in some form or another left him feeling more repulsed by his victories than he would’ve liked.

**Ground Zero,** he almost scoffed. **What a fake. Can’t even come up with a hero name on my own.**

Katsuki ran himself into the ground during practice. Worked until he couldn’t physically move anymore. Trained more than he should’ve, more than his body could handle for the amount of stress he was carrying on top of everything else.

And for the fifth time that week, he found himself staring at the greenish glow of his alarm clock at 3 A.M., wondering how he’d be able to haul his body to class through the maze of stares and not-so-subtle comments again. His friends were starting to catch on—Camie had been aware of the gossip from the start, as per usual, but now it was *them* refusing to leave him be rather than the other way around.

“Hey, Katsuki?” Yaoyorozu asked, just after their last exam. “Ah, I was wondering if you were planning on going to Midoriya’s tonight? I know it’s been some time, and with the weekend here, I was thinking that you might want to spend it with him...”

“Why are *you* asking me?” Katsuki said, slinging his bag over his shoulder. “Maybe. If he’s not too busy.”

**It's been over a week since I've seen him. Could be longer, but...**

“I think you should go over for a bit!” Camie joined them with a pat to Katsuki’s shoulder. “Relax, have some fun, maybe have dinner or something...you know, do something away from here!”

**Dinner... dinner doesn’t sound bad.**

“Like I said—maybe.” Katsuki repeated, trying to suppress the nausea welling up in his stomach. “If he’s not too busy. I’ll—I’ll text him when we get back to the dorms.”

He refused to admit the real reason that going over to Deku’s place right now was making him anxious.

**I’m not his bitch. I’m not his whore. I’m not weak. I’m not weak.**

“I hope it works out, babe!” Camie smiled wide, but Katsuki could’ve sworn there was *something* more in those lips. “You’ve earned some time off. I’ve seen how hard you’ve been working out there!”

“No joke.” Yaoyorozu nodded. “It’s crazy. I’m sure you got one of the top spots on the exams, though!”
“One of the top spots?” Katsuki rolled his eyes. “Sure. You know I beat you in the written portion this semester, that first place is mine.”

“And the physical portion?” Todoroki approached from behind. “I seem to remember doing better than you in that part?”

“Pfft, sure,” he groaned. “We’ll see when the results come out.”

*I know what I’m doing. I know what I’m doing. I’m not some—some fake…!*

“But seriously, you and Midoriya should go spend some time together.” Yaoyorozu pressed again, looking around the classroom to make sure no one was listening in. “Didn’t you say he was going to have this weekend off, anyways?”

“Well, he was trying to.” He pulled his phone from his pocket—no new notifications. “Don’t know for sure. You know his job’s unpredictable, so everything’s subject to move around ‘n shit.”

“I’m sure he’d be excited to hear that you’re free!” Camie nudged him again, a little stronger this time. “Especially ‘cause you’ve barely talked to him this week! Or even about him…”

*Oh. That’s what this is about.*

“I’ll text him,” he promised, turning towards the door. “I’ll go over tonight if he’s free. Maybe stick around for a bit over there. Dunno.”

Half an hour later, Katsuki received an enthusiastic reply from his boyfriend—yes, he had the next day-and-a-half off, and yes, he was dying to see him.

*I wanna see him too. Want to hear him again, talk to him again, kiss him…*

Katsuki swallowed.

*Kiss… kiss him again.*

The last time he’d been this nervous to go to Deku’s place was after he’d been attacked, just before they’d gotten in the argument that nearly tore them apart. This time, though…

*This is a different kind of feeling. Of fear.*

But he got his stuff together, said a quiet goodbye to his friends, and forced himself out the dorm door on his own. He’d have to run to the station, or at least out U.A.’s gates. After all, the last thing he wanted was more voices, more talking, more lies, *lies.*

*Maybe I really will feel better after I see Deku again. Maybe I should’ve talked to him more this week instead of ignoring him like a dumbass.*

The gate was close—no more than one hundred, two hundred feet away.

*Maybe I really am a coward for avoiding him because of those fucking words.*

There was no one between him and the street, right? No one there?

*But maybe this counts as running to my boyfriend. Maybe this counts as needing him for help.*

Katsuki stopped right in front of the gate, took one last wild, frenzied glance around, and only pushed the door open when he was sure those kids weren’t there. Realistically, the possibility had
been next to none to begin with, but…

I don’t know. I don’t know anymore. I thought… well, I didn’t think it’d be this hard. Just ‘cause Deku’s a pro, and just ‘cause he’s a little older than me doesn’t mean our relationship is wrong or weird, or that I’m any less than him.

Right?

He got on the train, making his form as small as possible in an attempt to stay hidden. Getting in a confrontation like he had with those kids in a space as cramped as this was the last thing he wanted.

Now, though, even thinking back to how he’d accused Deku of only seeing him for his body made him sick. They’d been through this—it wasn’t as if these feelings were new, not in the slightest. The last time these feelings had crept up on him, the worries had carved out a home in his own head, spurred on only by his own misgivings and fears.

But when someone else says it…

“...hey, over there? Is that the kid from the sports fest? Did you hear those rumors, they said that he’s…”

When someone else…

“...with Valiant? Yeah, I heard…! Poor kid, putting up with his bullshit. Remember how he butchered the end of that capture the other day?”

When someone…

“Such a shame… I used to like Valiant, but I don’t even know if I want my kids seeing him on TV now. Screwing up left and right on missions, screwing a U.A. student… so, so disappointing.”

When someone else says it, it feels like it might be true.

It might’ve been the middle of a burning, sweltering summer, but as soon as Katsuki ran off the train, he pulled the hood of his jacket as far over his head as he could.

Leave me alone. Leave him alone. Leave us alone.

Running into the shadow of the alleyway towards Deku’s apartment and out of the bright, blazing light had never been such a relief before. He’d poked fun at his boyfriend for living in such a dingy area before, but at times like these, Katsuki could begin to understand the appeal of being so disconnected from the rest of the city and its constant commentary.

Maybe when I move out, I should look for someplace like this too… at least, something away from people.

Though the thought of moving out and graduating was so far in the distance, anything was a welcome distraction from the lingering words plaguing his every move. He climbed up the stairs, tried to keep himself busy thinking about anything else, but the closer he came to his boyfriend’s door, the more his chest hurt with each thump of his still-beating heart.

I’m not coming here because I need help. I’m here because I want to be here, because he’s my boyfriend, and because we’ve been together for almost a year and I want him for so much more than his body.
One knock. Two. Three. All quick taps, right against the creaky wood of Deku’s shoddy door.

_I hope he’s not expecting sex_ was the last thing that passed through his mind before that door opened and Katsuki was let inside, pulled into an immediate hug as soon as he crossed the threshold.

“Kacchan,” Deku murmured, pulling him close to his chest. “Missed you. You feeling any better?”

_Oh. Right. I told him I was sick recently._

“Yes, I’m…” His own arms wound themselves around Deku’s waist, looser than he would’ve liked. “I’m fine. You?”

His boyfriend fell quiet, only to break the momentary silence with a small, short laugh. “I’m, ah… I’m alright. It’s been a long week.”

_Duh, I’m sure he’s been struggling too. I’m glad I didn’t dump all my problems on him after all._

“But,” his boyfriend continued, one hand trailing down Katsuki’s back. “There’s definitely something I’ve been looking forward to.”

“Something?”

“Mm. Er, well…” that hand squeezed his ass—one cheek, then the other. “Maybe two somethings.”

...oh.

Usually, he’d be excited. Today, though…

“You… you _were_ wanting to have sex?”

_Fuck._

“If that’s okay with you,” Deku said, kissing up on Katsuki’s semi-covered neck. “I wanna feel you, baby. Wanna touch you. Wanna hold you. Wanna—” his boyfriend’s crotch pushed forward against his own, the friction so good and so horrible all the same. “Mm… I wanna _fuck_ you, baby.”

_Dammit. Dammit._

Katsuki didn’t want to say no. Really, _really_ didn’t wanna say no.

_I don’t wanna make him sad. He’s clearly been having a hard time, and I…_ 

His boyfriend gave his ass another small squeeze, and all Katsuki could think of was the taunting, the laughing, the hands on his arm and the slap where Deku’s hands were as they’d walked away.

_Bet all you had to do to get to the top was shake your ass a little for him!_ 

Katsuki swallowed back the words, doing everything in his power to not let it get to him—not now, not tonight, not _ever._

_This isn’t them. It’s Deku. Just breathe. Just breathe. I know he sees me for so much more than that._

So he stayed still, didn’t object to the small touches and kisses and sweet nothings murmured against his neck as his boyfriend felt him up in the apartment’s entrance.

“You want this, Kacchan?”
He’d said yes.

“Mm, want me?”

*I do. I do. I know I do, I swear.*

They made it to Deku’s bedroom, kissing and feeling and shedding clothes all the way there. Katsuki managed a laugh as his boyfriend let him fall back against the familiar bedsheets, that pillow tucked beneath his head as a mouth teased against his chest, tugging his shirt up enough to press butterfly kisses to his stomach and have his teeth graze smooth, sensitive skin.

*It feels good. Really, it feels good. I do want this, I want him, I…*

“Don’t know how you’re always so cute,” Deku murmured, hands trailing over every bit of exposed upper body and fondling his nipples in the way that Katsuki usually liked. “God, I missed you. Know it’s only been a little more than a week, but…”

Those gorgeous, scarred fingers tugged at his waistband, and it was all Katsuki could do to keep from screaming.

*I don’t need to tell him to stop. I won’t tell him to stop. I’m fine, I’m just fine, I’m not letting those stupid words get to me, and I… I-I…*

“…Kacchan?”

*Bet he’s gonna pound all those answers into you, isn’t he?*

“Keep—keep going,” Katsuki begged, trembling hands cold around Deku’s own as he pushed them down towards his crotch. “Don’t want you to—”

*Shoulda known he was just Valiant’s bitch!*

Deku let go.

*No, no, don’t do that, don’t stop now, I’m fine, I promise, I—*

“No. We’re not doing this,” Katsuki heard, flooding him with some horrid mix of relief and utter fear. “You’re shaking.”

He might’ve croaked up an *I’m not*, but Deku didn’t resume what he’d been doing. Instead, his boyfriend offered him a hand up, another pillow to hold between his arms, and from somewhere, a half-full bottle of water.

*I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.*

“Are you sick, Kacchan…?” Deku asked, apparently still unsure of what the real problem was. “You, uh… god, you’re pale. Kinda sweaty, too. It’s not a fever, is it? Do you need to go to the bathroom?”

“I-I pissed before I came over.”

“That’s, um… not what I meant.”

*Oh.*

But Katsuki shook his head, let the nausea die down a little bit again, and tried to breathe, *breathe.*
Everything’s fine. Everything’s fine.

That pillow was a good source of comfort, if nothing else. He was glad he hadn’t taken his shirt all the way off; just feeling it slide back over his chest was enough to calm his rapid heartbeat to some degree. Katsuki hadn’t felt this way when they’d first gotten intimate with each other—hadn’t gotten so scared, so nervous, so downright terrified—but now, it was as if even the thought of the one person he trusted above all else touching him like that was a nightmare.

“So, you don’t feel sick? Like, illness-sick?” Deku asked him again, and he shook his head.

“No, I’m…”

“Don’t tell me you’re fine.”

What?

Deku didn’t reach for him, but there was a visible crease in his forehead and worry welling up in those too-knowing eyes. “I’ve been there. Don’t tell me you’re fine, because I know you better than that.”

Oh… oh.

Katsuki coughed.

“I’ve, uh… been better.”

“No shit.” Deku cursed. “Kacchan, I backed off because you suddenly looked like you were either violently sick or on the verge of panicking. I don’t know why, and I won’t know why unless you tell me.”

He’ll worry if I tell him. He’ll worry if I tell him.

“You weren’t like this last time you came over—yeah, you were a little nervous, but it wasn’t anything like this.” Deku frowned, almost as if he was trying to analyze his behavior. “When I started touching you, you started tensing up. Last time, you got more relaxed when I did it. Did someone hurt you? Did you get injured in practice? Are you dehydrated? Do you have a headache? Do you—”

“Can I hug you?”

Deku’s mouth fell open.

“O-Of course, Kacchan.”

Katsuki let his boyfriend pull him into his arms, let himself bury his head against Deku’s shoulder, let his arms wrap around that waist tight, tight, tight in futile search of even the barest comfort.

Deku, he… he feels nice.

And for the first time that week, Katsuki’s soul managed to find a bit of peace. This room was an oasis, and the last thing he wanted to do was track mud and filth into its comforting fold.

He wasn’t sure how long that they stayed there. Eventually, Deku’s hand came up to rub at his back, head tucked just over Katsuki’s own. It was nice, like this. A little peace, a little quiet, and a little space for them to just relax in a silence filled only with the occasional murmur and the rhythm of steady heartbeats. If he was a sword, Deku was his shield—knocking back the unfair blows thrown
his way, keeping him safe until it was okay to strike back.

*I’m not a coward. I’m not a wimp. I know what I’m doing, and I…*

Deku hugged him closer.

*I love him. He loves me. Doubting that would be a mistake.*

But he’d known that from the start, and even so—those idiots’ words had hit him hard.

*Why, why…?*

“...will you tell me what happened, Kacchan?” Deku ran a hand through his hair, only caring, only ever caring. “Please. Don’t leave me in the dark about whatever this is.”

*He wants to help.*

“Just… promise me you won’t get angry,” he mumbled, fingers curling into the thin fabric of Deku’s shirt. “Promise me.”

*Please. Please.*

“Angry…? Kacchan, did you do—”

“I didn’t do anything. Wasn’t me,” he stumbled, the words coming out in a rush. “Haven’t—haven’t even told my friends. Don’t want them to get angry either. Everything’s fine, I really shouldn’t let this shit get to me, it’s just…”

*I’m scared. I’m scared. I’m so fucking afraid.*

“I-I…”

Deku didn’t interrupt, let him take his time.

*Get it out. We’re always better off when we talk to each other, and I can’t… I can’t let this come between us. Not again.*

“...I-I mean, people… people stare.” Katsuki started, each word thick in his throat. “Been staring. Since that interview, people have been giving me weird looks ‘cause of all the rumors. They talk. I hear it sometimes. S’fine, really, it just happens.”

Deku didn’t respond then either, but somehow, his silence was growing colder and colder.

“The… well, the other day, I was just walking back to my dorm alone, and…” Katsuki bit his lip. “Group of shitty students, probably gen ed or somethin’, came up… c-came up, and said s-some shit to my face…”

The drop of a pin could’ve been heard in that frigid bedroom.

“What did they say.”

*Don’t wanna think about it. Don’t wanna think about it.*

“Was—was just a bunch of bullshit, s’fine, everything’s—”

“Kacchan.”
Something inside him broke.

“I-I just,” Katsuki said, each trembling word breaking to a choked mess. “I-I didn’t wanna cause a scene, ‘n they grabbed my arm, wouldn’t let go, said some garbage about—a-about…”

There’d been a hand pressed flat to his back, but now, those tough fingers had contorted to gnarled claws, frozen against Katsuki’s shirt.

“I… I’m not…”

Get it out.

“I-I know I’m not, I do, I…”

Salty tears streamed down his cheeks, soaking into the cheap fabric of Deku’s flimsy shirt.

“M’not… n-not sleeping with you to get ahead, d-dammit…!”

I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.

“N-Not a fake,” he sobbed, voice cracking at every interval. “Not… n-not weak. Don’t need you for everything, d-don’t need to—to whore myself out for success, don’t… m’not, really, m’not just your f-fucking bitch…!”

I’m not. I’m not. I’m not.

“S’just words, just words, I know they’re just w-words…”

Katsuki entire body was convulsing under his boyfriend’s grip, each desperate grasp at speech no more than a frenzied attempt to say something, something. Garbled nonsense, flurries of m’not, m’not, m’not, gross spit mixing with tears consumed every inch of him as finally, finally, he let himself fall apart.

In some sort of miracle, Deku’s hand went flat to his back again, massaging it in constant, slightly-stiffer circles. His boyfriend had stayed deathly silent through the whole process, but now, with the other coming up to weave itself in Katsuki’s hair and press his head closer to his chest—

“Hey, Kacchan,” he started, and in the midst of everything rushing through him, Deku’s anger-rimmed voice was the most soothing thing he’d ever heard. “Do you—” he pushed him firm against himself, Katsuki’s head tucked perfectly to Izuku’s chest. “Do you feel that?”

...feel? Feel...

Katsuki’s breath hitched.


“Back… back before we got together, at the beach, do you remember what you told me?” Deku asked, and all of a sudden, he remembered.

Your… yeah, your…!

“I can feel your heartbeat,” he whispered. “Y-Yeah, it’s… it’s so fast…”

“Is it nice?”
“Yeah. Yeah, s’nice.”

If he had a say in it, they’d never move.

He wasn’t totally sure why Deku had decided to do this now, but…

*I won’t complain. Not at all.*

They stayed like that for a minute, maybe five, maybe ten. Katsuki didn’t care, only ever focusing on that steady beat, on that thump, thump, thump, on Deku’s arms around him, on not letting go.

*I love you so, so much. Fuck.*

“You… you told me to not get angry.” Deku finally said, popping the bubble of quiet and warmth they’d formed. “I—I can’t even begin to describe how pissed off I am about what you’ve told me, but I know… I know that my anger isn’t what’s important right now. I’m gonna try to stay logical.”

...Deku?

“I hate the fact that you’re even being put in this situation, and I wish I had anything better to tell you, but… well, people…”

Fingers dug into Katsuki’s back again. “People can be mean. People can be so, so awful. I wish I could tell you some secret for getting them to shut up. I—fuck, I wish I had all the answers. And I’m glad that at least, you’re not letting them convince you that they’re right. ‘Cause they’re not. But this sort of thing… shit, Kacchan.” His boyfriend sucked in a long, sharp breath. “This is one battle you’re gonna have to fight without me.”

*Right.* Deku being involved too close would only make things worse, so much worse.

*If they already think I can’t handle shit on my own, I can’t prove them right.*

“I hope you have your friends helping you out with this.” Deku murmured. “They’ll be your best asset right now, I think.”

*Right, right… I guess I should actually mention this to them. Not just dodge the question.*

He nodded, teeth digging into his lip.

“Have you told U.A.’s administration about this?” came the next question. “I know it’s probably not what you want to do, but something like this would definitely fall under bullying and harassment. I don’t know how much they’d be able to do, but… it may be worth checking out.”

Katsuki grimaced. “You’re right, I don’t like the idea, but I’ll do it when I go back. Aizawa… he talked to me last week about the media and the rumors and stuff. Said he’d—he’d try to help me out.”

*Didn’t think I’d need to ask so soon.*

“Ah, that’s… that’s good,” Deku said, though there was some element of discomfort in his voice. “Aizawa, he… yeah. He told me he talked to you. That—that U.A. knows about us.”

“There’s worse people who could know.”
“Ugh, no shit.”

Katsuki shifted, letting out a long, slow sigh as he got comfortable against Deku’s chest again. “I just—god. Pisses me off when people start making assumptions when they start thinking we’re together. Ain’t like I’m some desperate student only after your dick.” Not your bitch. “Ain’t like I need you to protect me ‘cause you’re mister bigshot-pro-hero.” Not a coward. “Ain’t… ain’t like I’m trying to use you to get ahead.” Not useless. Not powerless. Not pathetic.

He sucked in a long, slow breath, trying to calm the rising tides of his own barely-suppressed anger. “I hate it. I hate it so much. And, just…”

*How do you deal with this, Deku? How do you live with everyone looking at you like you’re a failure? How…*

“How—how the fuck do you stay strong when people do this kind of thing?” Deku laughed. *Laughed.*

“Strong?” Hollow, just like that sad, sad laugh. “Kacchan, I… I’m not strong. Not like that. It’s more just…” he sighed. “When people talk shit about you for so long, you either start believing them or stop caring. There’s… there’s nothing harder to change than someone’s mind.”

...oh.

“All you can really do—er, well, I can do—is my job. I’ll keep being a hero for these people, and I’ll keep smiling when they need it, and I’ll keep caring. What the news says I am doesn’t matter, because as long as I stay true to what I believe, then eventually, people might see.”

“Nobody tells you how fucking depressing the life of a hero can be.”

“Aha, nope… not at all.” A failing smile fell over Deku’s face. “But on the bright side, I guess it brings you closer to the people that really matter, right?”

*The people that matter… of course Deku cares. I can’t doubt that.*

Not only that, but his friends cared about him. His teachers saw his strength. His parents approved (enough), and—

*Wait. Parents.*

“You, uh… if we’re talking about ‘people that matter’,” Katsuki said, “then would that include your mom?”

Silence.

“…oh.”

*Huh?*

“You’re right, you’re right…” Deku tensed. “Probably need to tell my mom about this at some point. Probably soon. Fuck.”

*Did I just mention something I shouldn’t have?*

“Better to do it sooner rather than later, with all this shit hitting the media fan. Don’t know how much time we have left anymore,” Katsuki said, only for his boyfriend to make some noise of disgruntled
agreement in response. “And come on, I’m sure your mom’s great.”

“She is, she is… I just haven’t, um, talked to her in awhile.”

“Why?”

Deku pursed his lips. “She’s, ah, never been too into the idea of me being a hero. Doesn’t like the fact that I get put in danger so much, and I’ll be perfectly honest, I really don’t know how she’ll feel about me dating… you.”

“Ah.” Katsuki swallowed. “Gotcha.”

But Deku just shrugged, nodded, hugged him again. “My birthday’s coming up in a couple weeks. Maybe we could go visit then? I think I’ve mentioned that she lives a few hours out before, so that could be a good excuse to bring you with me,” he said, a hint of a nervous laugh at the end of those words. “Aha, if nothing else, the chance of it going worse than me talking to your parents is practically zero!”

And for the first time that night—no, week—Katsuki let out an honest, ugly, highly-amused snort. “Gee, no shit. Just let me do the talking and it’ll be okay, ‘kay?”

“…we’ll see.”

They spent more time going over plans, making casual conversation about everything that wasn’t all the shit happening outside, and sharing a kiss or two, so much of the guilt and dread and bad feelings from before fading away.

He’s here. It’s okay. We’ve got each other.

“You’re staying the night, right?”

They made dinner together, traded teasing jabs for shoveling food down their throats.

“I’d rather stay the week, but yeah.”

After dinner was a movie, and Deku’s dramatic commentary proved to be far, far better than whatever shitty story was going on in the background.

“A week…? Ah, staying with you for that long sounds really, really nice…”

They’d showered together once before, but this time, the mood fell more towards soothing kisses and comforting touches and a few “accidental” instances of shampoo in the eyes.

“One day we gotta take a bigass trip. Just us. Go to some island, or the mountains, or wherever.”

Deku had set out a bottle of lube and a box of condoms on his nightstand, but the two wound up ignoring them in exchange for spooning and secret whispers that no one else would ever be privy to.

“A trip? Not bad, but I was thinking of something a little different,” Deku pondered, voice muffled against Katsuki’s back as he held him close. “I think I’m going to go apartment hunting soon.”

“Oh, good. Can you move somewhere closer to the grocery store so you don’t have an excuse to eat frozen meals half the time?”

“Shut it, I’ve been cooking! Those pizzas are for my cheat days and you know it.”
More kissing, more cuddling, more simple comfort. Deku’s bed was his favorite place in the world.

And I’m not gonna let those fuckheads convince me otherwise, Katsuki reminded himself, just as his eyes began to fall shut. I’m gonna survive this. I have to—no.

I will.

Chapter End Notes

:))))))))))))

In slightly other news than the shit happening here! I’m currently in the process of formatting/editing this fic for print, so if any of yall are interested, I’ve been talking more on my twitter about it!!

Thank u so much to my beta @aetherlite, and next chapter soon! (should be Thursday again, probably the week after next bc there’s a lot I’m trying to juggle, and sorry about the weird posting time for this one) and boy oh boy, guys. we’re in the home stretch now. buckle up
Oasis

Chapter Summary

we’re in the home stretch now :’)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Could you pass me the water and some chicken nuggets?”

“Mm, sure. Ketchup?”

“Ugh, please.”

Izuku grabbed the food from Ochako and shoveled it in his mouth, relishing in the basic, simple taste of shitty chicken nuggets slathered in ketchup from the far-too-many tiny packets scattered across the table. Cheap, greasy, but so goddamn good. And after being stuck in a crappy conference room with his friends for the past seven hours, nothing could’ve tasted better.

The past week might as well have been hell; he hadn’t managed an hour on duty without some civilian shouting disgusting profanities at him, hadn’t gone a day without being stalked in some form or another, hadn’t gone any time without remembering Katsuki’s tear-streaked face pressed against his chest and the horrible, horrible things his boyfriend had been told. Izuku was good enough at brushing aside the nasty words and accusations, but when they were directed at Katsuki, who’d done nothing to warrant them?

I’ve never wanted to fuck somebody up so bad in my life.

He’d gone to the gym after Katsuki left the next morning. Stayed there an extra hour, broke four more punching bags than usual, and didn’t leave till the worst of his murderous thoughts had been taken out on a perfectly nonliving target. Despite the things people were saying about him, Izuku wasn’t the type to threaten students, and now would definitely not be the time to prove the rumors right.

“Midoriya,” Kirishima started, the exhaustion-ridden voice pulling him from his thoughts. “Did you already call the morning talk show? Ask ‘em if they’d be okay with broadcasting it?”

“Yeah, yeah… it was a no anyways,” Izuku pursed his lips. “Don’t think they’re gonna wanna be the station I use, anyways. We’re looking for primetime, not something to listen to on the way to work.”

“That was one of the last ones on the list, though…” Ochako sighed. “Izuku, why is it so damn hard to find a news station that’d be open to having you make a ten-minute statement without interruption?”

He leaned back in his seat, chugging the water he’d been handed in one long gulp. “Why? Simple. If I go up there and make myself look good, they won’t be able to break the news themselves and make a killing off of it. Me talking first takes away whatever element of shock they’d get from some big, dramatic headline. This shit will simmer down faster if I just go out there and say it, but they don’t
“I mean, there is always a chance that they’ll let this whole thing go eventually—”

“For the last time, there’s not!” Izuku’s voice cracked, so, so tired after so much of this. “Reporters are gonna keep stalking me until they get something to show. News outlets are gonna keep vaguing the topic because Kacchan can’t say a damn word against it. People are talking, and I… I-I…”

I don’t want Kacchan to have to suffer any longer than he has to.

Just thinking about what Katsuki had told him—hearing his boyfriend’s voice break, crumble away into his shirt, about how every tortured word had been dragged from his throat like fractured glass, about how he’d tried so hard, so hard to not let their comments get to him, but even then. Even then.

Kacchan hasn’t had to deal with this crap before. Shouldn’t have to deal with this, not now, not ever. And it’s my fault he’s in this position, so I… I should be the one to take the blow for it.

Izuku huffed, crumpling the shoddy plastic bottle in his hand. “Anyways. What’s the next place on the list.”

“The, um…” Ochako squinted, “the Majesty Times?”


“Think it’s just some small-time newspaper agency. Won’t get the reach I want.” Izuku grumbled. “Ugh, skip it.”

But the remaining few press agencies weren’t any better, and a few angry phone calls later found the three of them shouting at the ceiling, furious and utterly exhausted.

It’s not like I want to do this, it’s just the only decent way to keep Kacchan from taking as much heat…!

Izuku let his head fall against the desk and wrapped his arms tight around it.

Just let this nightmare be over, please.


Some sound of acknowledgement must’ve come out, because Kirishima’s hand came up to rub at his shoulder while Ochako pushed more food towards him from the other side.

“I-I can’t do this anymore right now,” Izuku said, holding back the angry tears as best he could. “Need a nap. A drink. God, something.”

“After this is all over, I’m taking you out for drinks,” Ochako promised. “Tab’s on me. You deserve it.”

“Damn right I deserve it.”

They let him stay like that for a little bit, face flat against the table as he tried to recover, tried to breathe. Even his brief attempts of rest at home had been filled with too-vivid terrors, high-def horrors that made it hard to want to close his eyes. He’d scheduled an extra session—no, two—with his counselor, and at this point, Izuku was sure that those were the reason he’d managed to stay sane to begin with. His agency had even become sympathetic at this point, and as nice as the thought of
paid time off sounded, Izuku knew better than to duck his head and make it known that the rumors were wearing him down.

“…hey, Midoriya?” Kirishima asked, too cautious and too gentle. “You remember what tomorrow is, right?”

“What, is it the day the media decides they’re over me?” He let out a weak scoff, face half-smashed against the cool desk. “Hell if I know anymore. I think it’s July?”

“It’s, uh… dude, it’s your birthday tomorrow.”

...oh, shit.

Then—

“Oh, shit—!” He cursed. “Agh, told my mom I was gonna go out to her place this year. Kacchan’s coming with me, too. Dammit, I really don’t wanna deal with this meet the parents crap on top of everything else right now…!”

Not right now, not right now… god, I’m so tired.

“Not to mention, it’s… it’s gonna be our first anniversary,” he hiccuped, wishing there was some way he could give Katsuki the kind of celebration he deserved instead of more troubles, more bullshit. “F-Fuck. I should probably sleep. I… I-just—”

“First anniversary?” Ochako asked, more curious than anything. “Wait, you two started going out when we threw you that surprise party last year…?”

“Mhm. Was on my birthday.” He sucked in a breath, trying his best to think of the good times, of Katsuki’s brilliant smile, and of his voice—that warm, rough, broken—


“I-He, ah…” Izuku bit his lip, forcing himself to not let these memories be distorted too.

“Kacchan… Kacchan pulled me into the bathroom. Shoved me down to the toilet seat, sat on my lap, ‘n kissed me. Asked me out in the cheesiest way. It was so stupid.”

“So you liked it?”

“I loved it,” he swallowed. “I love him. He’s… h-he’s everything I could’ve ever asked for and more.”

We’re not perfect, far from it, but Kacchan… I’m so lucky to have him in my life.

Izuku managed a long, slow breath in, then out, trying his best to relax in spite of the situation.

“Sorry, sorry… think I’m gonna go home. I’m gonna need to at least try and rest before I get flayed alive by my mom tomorrow.”

“Aw, I’m sure it won’t be too bad!” Kirishima said, patting his shoulder again. “She seems cool.”

Cool, yeah, but I have no fucking clue how she’s gonna take me dating a high schooler when even just seeing me heroing me on the news is enough to make her worry.

But he wasn’t in the mood to argue—instead, he nodded, stood up, and gathered what little he’d brought before hauling himself out the door and to the train. Maybe it was barely past eight, but Izuku was ready to crash in his bed and sleep for another twenty years. There might’ve been a stalker
following him back, maybe a reporter or two, but he’d become too numb to the concept to even care anymore. Nonetheless, he was smart enough to stick a new reminder to the fridge to schedule yet another counseling appointment, knowing he’d need it after whatever trials the next day would bring.

*At least I get to see Kacchan tomorrow,* he told himself. *At least I get to talk to him again. Hold him again. Maybe I can steal a kiss or two if I’m lucky.*

Those thoughts got him through a shower, a shave, a breakdown, and a single glass of shitty wine before bed.

*In less than twenty-four hours, my mom’s gonna know about Kacchan. In less than twenty-four hours, I won’t have to dread it anymore. And in twenty-four hours…*

He stared at the empty space beside him, at the burned mattress he still hadn’t replaced.

*Maybe you’ll be here with me again, Kacchan.*

Izuku fell asleep with a weary arm around his pillow, and a scarred hand in the hole his boyfriend had left.

---

“*You did* tell her you were bringing me along, right?”

“W-Well, ah, about that…”

“*Oh, don’t* tell me you’re gonna have this be some sort of surprise,” Katsuki snorted, leaning back against a column in the near-empty train station. “If I was her, I don’t think I’d be too happy about my son just showing up on his birthday with a *friend* in tow.”

Izuku fell into place beside him on the concrete column, tired. “I told her I was bringing someone else. Didn’t…” he laced his fingers between Katsuki’s. “Didn’t say who it was or who you are to me.”

His boyfriend fell quiet beside him, and despite having been fairly optimistic about meeting his mom before, Katsuki’s apprehension was nearly palpable.

*What can I do to make him more comfortable…? I guess the most I can do is keep myself from seeming scared.*

So Izuku simply held his hand, waited for the train to come, and hoped that being near him would help. He was thankful enough that the station was more on the outskirts of town—going to towns as rural as his mother’s didn’t usually allow for any super fast transportation, but being out there with only a couple other people milling about in the station was fine, at least. The summer heat had been brutal out on duty, but now, in the comfort of a loose (long-sleeved, duh) shirt, and a simple hat and sunglasses, Izuku managed to relax more than he had in days despite what they were going out to do.

A part of him wondered if going to the country for the day would clear his head, or at least help him relax—and so far, those hopes were proving true.

“*Hm? S’that the train?*” Katsuki asked, pulling him from his thoughts. And sure enough, there it was—small, older, but the *best* part of it all—

*There’s hardly anyone here, and no one is paying us any mind.*

Izuku hadn’t dared to do it earlier. Now, though…
“Let’s go, Kacchan,” he said, and before either of them stepped forward, leaned down to peck him on the lips. “You can sleep on the ride there if you want.”

Katsuki stood there for just a moment, clearly caught off guard by the sudden kiss; but it didn’t take long for him to nod and follow along. Nobody gave them a second look as they boarded, and their cabin was empty save a couple of lonely passengers.

“…you did check to make sure no one was around first, right?” Katsuki glanced out the window, staring out at the now-barren station. “I know you mentioned having a bunch of people stalking you lately…”

“I did. I’m sure.” Izuku assured him, and this time, Katsuki was the one to kiss him. Fuck the other people in the traincar—no one could see them from the position they were sat in, and if a little mouth-to-mouth was what it would take for him to get comfortable, then really, what reason did he have to refuse?

Plus, it’s nice to see him initiate.

“Hey, Kacchan.”

“Hm?”

Izuku wrapped an arm around his shoulders, pulled him close to his chest. “You wanna come to my place after we get back? We can cook dinner, catch up, cuddle…”

There was a shift of a head against his shirt before there was a verbal response, and not for the first time, Izuku couldn’t help but marvel at just how perfect Katsuki fit against him.

“Sounds good,” he said, happier than he’d sounded in so long. “Wasn’t sure if we were gonna be able to do anything on our anniversary… I don’t have a whole lot to give, but even just being around you for a while would be great.”

“Wanna make out on the toilet again? You know, a little reenactment from last year?”

“Oh, shut up…!”

They laughed, and Katsuki reached for his free hand again, calloused fingers tracing bumpy scars in the way he’d loved doing even before they were together. But for some reason, Izuku noticed a certain thing about the small, gentle movements this time.

“His hands, they’ve… really gotten bigger.”

“Huh?”

“Your hands,” he repeated, and moved to place Katsuki’s on top of his own. “They… they’re almost as big as mine are.”

Katsuki didn’t say anything for a minute, maybe two—but when Izuku turned to look at his face, his watery eyes and small half-smile told him everything he needed to know.

“Guess they are,” he murmured, squeezing them again. “And they still fit.”

“They fit even better now, I think.” Izuku kissed him on the forehead, thankful that the seats were tall enough to block them from view. “…but, you’ll still never be taller than I am.”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing,” Katsuki snorted. “Remember what I said a while back? I like
“Right, right... I guess it is good for spooning.”

There was a kiss to the back of his palm, then another beneath his chin. “Is your mom tall, too?”

“Nope, she’s short. Shorter than you.”

“Green hair?”

“And green eyes.”

“She mumble as much as you do?”

“...w-well, I had to get it from somewhere!”

“Heh. M’excited to meet her.” Katsuki leaned back against his shoulder, and Izuku could hardly see those eyes fall shut beneath his ever-fluffy hair. “Like you said, anything that made you has to be pretty great, right?”

“Don’t go quoting my panic texting! Listen, that was...” I can’t say I don’t agree with those thoughts, but— “that was a different situation. And besides, my mom’s a far better person than I’ll ever be.”

“Nope.”

“But—”

“Nope. You’re great.” Katsuki insisted, leaving no room for argument. “Don’t make me pound it into you, ‘kay?”

“Oh, you wanna do the pounding this time?” He grinned, and was soon met with a light elbow to the ribs. “What, you don’t? I think it’d be fun!”

Katsuki groaned. “Look, I think the reason you couldn’t shut up in front of my parents about our damn sex life was because you were too horny before you came out there, and something tells me you won’t want I love doing Kacchan coming out of that pretty mouth of yours when it’s your mom this time.”

Not to mention that he might still be sensitive about all that, especially if he’s still being bullied at school... fuck, right, I need to be more careful.

He offered a quiet apology, and his boyfriend grunted, tucked his head back against Izuku’s chest, and fell asleep fast enough for the remainder of the ride there.

Maybe I should get some sleep too... ah, why not.

The cell service wasn’t great to begin with, but today was a day to spend away from anything that could feed him garbage from the media. So he shut off his phone, put it away in his pocket, and let himself get comfortable with Katsuki for the time being.

I’m allowed to enjoy myself on my birthday, after all.

And finally, Izuku fell into a blissful, dreamless sleep—maybe it was only a couple hours, but that short time spent rolling through gentle hills and lush greenery was almost more restful that anything he’d managed all week.
“...Deku, s’this the stop?”

_Ugh._

“Hey, Deku, you awake?”

_Yeah, yeah— “yeah, m’awake,”_ he mumbled, _not ready to have been woken up already. “What’d you say before that…?”_

He rubbed at his eyes as Katsuki repeated the question, and with a bleary look around the area, confirmed it. “Yep, this is the place.”

Katsuki stared out the window, and for as much as Izuku liked the loud, brash side of him, there was always a part of him that couldn’t help but feel lucky that he got to experience those quiet moments of thought and contemplation, too.

“It’s small,” he said, and Izuku laughed. “What? It’s kinda pretty.”

“It is, it is… ah, I just still find it funny that my mom’s out here after having lived in the city for my whole life.” He shrugged. “But she likes it here, and she’s got real friends now… and really, that’s all that matters.”

“Hm. Makes sense.” _Cute, so cute._ “Never really considered settling down in a place like this before.”

“Maybe one day we can get a cabin up in the mountains. Live out in the woods together, hike every day, cook all of our food…” Izuku squeezed Katsuki’s hand. “Anyways! Let’s get going. Aha, don’t wanna keep her waiting.”

“…you don’t sound super sure of all this yourself,” his boyfriend remarked as they got off the train. “Positive she’s gonna be okay with having me here?”

“Yep!” _Nope! “Everything’s gonna be okay!” Everything could go horribly wrong!_ And sure enough, the squinted, incredulous look Katsuki gave him was evidence that the promises were as flimsy out loud as they were in his head.

“Well, we’re already out here,” Katsuki said, seeming to have resigned himself to whatever fate was coming. “Lead the way.”

_Rip off the band-aid. Get it over with._

Izuku reached a hand out to Katsuki, and his boyfriend took it—so natural, so _normal._

“Right, right… come with me.”

Katsuki stayed quiet the whole way through town aside from a couple quipped comments, a squeeze of Izuku’s hand (or two, or three), and the occasional greeting to the few people who waved at them. But despite the fact that most of the town knew that Midoriya Inko’s son was an (in)famous pro-hero, nobody treated them differently for it.

“See that?” Izuku asked, pointing to the small house near the end of the street. “That’s my mom’s place. She’s got a small garden in the backyard, and all those flowers in the front she grew herself, too.”

“Huh. So you both have a thing for plants, then?”
Some sort of realization spiked through his chest, and with a start, Izuku realized he’d never even considered that his inclination towards gardening had been in any part due to his family.

“W-Well, we both started doing it at different times!” He said, not sure what to make of it. “She only picked up the hobby after moving out here… a-and for me, I only started after my accident.”

But as they stepped up onto the small, shady porch, Katsuki stopped in front of a certain planter box—nothing particularly special among the rest of the growing, glowing blossoms—and stared.

“They’re orange, too.” He traced the edge of the box, the noon sun highlighting every petal and every strand of blonde hair. “Just like that one you have.”

“You always say ‘that one’,” Izuku murmured, standing behind him and looping one arm around Katsuki’s waist, “like you weren’t responsible for it getting to me in the first place.”

“Nah, that was mostly Camie’s fault,” he said, “she just chose it cause it ‘looked like me’ or some shit. All I did was stand and nod.”

“Hm, but still.” Izuku kissed the top of his head, and hugged him closer. “It worked. Or maybe a love of bright orange flowers runs in the family—you never know, baby?”

Katsuki huffed. “Yeah, yeah. Anyways, we should probably—”

“…Izuku?”

_Oh, no._

He’d missed the creak of the opening door behind him, missed the soft gasp from the familiar voice, missed Katsuki stiffening in his arms as she stepped out of the house, those knowing eyes trained on the back of his head.

“H-Hey, mom…” Izuku forced a wobbly smile, dropping his hands from Katsuki’s waist before turning near-frozen legs to face her. “It’s, ah… it’s been a while.”

And for as hard as meeting Katsuki’s parents had been, as hard as dealing with anyone knowing about their relationship was, nothing came close to the tidal wave of guilt his mother’s confused, watery-eyed gaze sent crashing down on him.

“Is—is this your friend?” she asked, not meeting Izuku’s eyes. “I don’t, ah… I don’t believe we’ve met.”

“Bakugou Katsuki,” his boyfriend said, stepping out and offering her a hand before Izuku could answer for him. “And just Katsuki is fine, ma’am.”

He could hardly watch as his mom took Katsuki’s hand and shook it slowly, obviously still confused and waiting for some explanation, or at least a confirmation of the situation. He’d told his mom he’d be bringing a friend, and while he hadn’t told her who it was outright, looking back almost made it appear as if he’d meant someone like Kirishima or Ochako.

_Not… not him. Whoops._

“Oh,” he heard his mom say, and all Izuku could do was stay quiet. “I don’t believe I’ve heard Izuku mention you before… you’re the friend he said he was bringing?”

But when Katsuki was the one to fall into an awkward silence, Izuku knew he had to do something.
“Yes, that’s… this is him,” he tried to laugh, and moved a little closer to Katsuki. “I-I’m sorry for not telling you more before, it’s just, he’s—well he’s, ah—”

“Is he a coworker?” she asked, more a plea than a question. “Izuku, is he—”

“My boyfriend.”

Silence.

Silence, as if everything had come to a standstill.

_Shit, shit, not already…!_

“Kacchan—ah, K-Katsuki is my boyfriend.” Izuku repeated, as if his mom hadn’t heard him the first time. “A-And I didn’t wanna keep you in the dark any longer, so we’re… w-we’re here.”

His mom didn’t look shocked, surprised, upset—but something indiscernible crossed over her face, and all that familiar dread came back in a rush.

“…how about we go inside,” she finally said, and Izuku knew it wasn’t a question. He nodded, numb from the tips of his fingers to his toes.

_I… I don’t feel great._

Just as he moved to enter, though, something grabbed his hand again—something warm, real, and so, so alive.

And this time, Katsuki was the one to squeeze it.

“C’mon,” he tugged, pulling him towards the door. “Don’t wanna keep her waiting, right?”

Right. “R-Right.”

Izuku hated feeling useless, but for the first time since his accident, he felt as if every scrap of power in his body had crumpled away like wet paper. Normally, he was content enough with his life, with himself, with the people he surrounded himself with; but when put in situations like this with his mother, the single scrap of family still in his life?

_I’ve already disappointed her in every other aspect of my life, so what’s one more, really…?_

They found their way to the couch, and despite his mom’s steady, watchful stare, Katsuki only scooted closer up against his side. It was almost funny—he should’ve been the one in control, the one who knew how the hell to deal with his own family, but his boyfriend—

_It’s like he’s trying to be some sort of guardian._

Katsuki had a solid grip on his thigh, and showed no interest in letting go.

_Like he’s… like he’s some sort of hero. No, not just any hero—my hero._

And maybe, maybe, that would be enough to get them through.

“I’m glad that you were able to come out here, Izuku,” she started, and all he could do was try to smile, try to nod. “Like you said—it really, really has been a while. When did you last come by? Gosh, the Christmas before last…?”
“Y-Yeah, that… that’d be correct.” He swallowed. “Meant to see you last year on your birthday, but I was at the disaster site, and then work picked up, and…”

*God, I’m such an awful son.*

“I-I’m sorry,” he mumbled, unable to meet her eyes. “I’ll… I’ll do better.”

But she only sighed and pressed her lips together, those green eyes of hers constricting him like old, weathered vines.

“Don’t worry about it for right now, Izuku. I’d rather talk to you than see you upset on your birthday, of all days.” She offered, and though the statement seemed reasonable enough, some part of him was still convinced that every moment spent in her presence only served to further her frustrations with him. “I bought ingredients for dinner if you’d want to help prepare something with me. You told me you’ve been cooking for yourself more, right?”

“Ah, well, most of it… I haven’t really been going out to eat, so—”

“Cooking for yourself?” Katsuki snorted beside him. “Is that what putting a frozen pizza in the oven is called these days? Is that single slice of green pepper on it what you call *eating your greens*?”

And suddenly, the room went quiet.

...quiet, save for the soft, growing chuckle from the other side of the room that could have only been coming from his mom.

“Is this true?” She asked, as if trying to find some sort of amusement in the downcast haze of negativity. Not an accusation, merely a question. “I suppose it could be worse, but…”

“I—I cook for myself enough!” He protested in vain. “Kacchan’s just exaggerating, I…”

Izuku faltered, less so because of the question and more because he hadn’t explained just why *Kacchan* was *Kacchan* and why he’d even *know* about his cooking habits in the first place.

“S’okay, Deku,” Katsuki said, patting him on the leg. “Hm… you make pretty good eggs, I guess?”

“Don’t play, you’ve eaten my cooking with *enthusiasm* before.” He pouted. “What about my curry? You like my curry.”

Katsuki huffed. “You’re right, you’re right… it could still go for a bit more spice, but it ain’t ba—”

“Katsuki?”

His boyfriend immediately fell silent, obviously uncomfortable despite his pieced-together wall of confidence. When Izuku was the one being talked to, Katsuki must have felt more at ease joining along. But now, with that gaze now directed at him…

“...why are you calling my son *Deku*, of all things?” What little smile she may have had dropped, replaced with some form of concern. “That’s—you know that doesn’t mean anything good, right?”

*Oh.*

“I-It’s—well,” Katsuki stumbled, clearly caught off guard, “when we first met, I misread ‘Izuku’ as ‘Deku,’ and… it, uh, stuck?”

*Wait, but…* “don’t you remember the rest?” Izuku frowned. “You said it kinda sounded like *you can*
do it. Never anything negative, not at all.”

“Oh, right. Everything’s still kinda cloudy cause I was so doped up on painkillers and just out of it, and—“

“I-I’m sorry, doped up on painkillers?”

...shit.

His mother’s alarm was stark in her voice, as if the fragile glass was finally starting to crack. “Just—just how did you two meet!? And also, why on earth are you calling this ki—I’m sorry, why are you calling your boyfriend Kacchan?” She shook her head, looking from one, to the other, then back again. “Look, Izuku, I know we haven’t talked much at all in the past—well, a very long time—but not telling me that you have someone as important as this in your life, especially after everything you’ve been dealing with? It’d be one thing if it was just a casual partner, but it sounds like you two have known each other for… for a while.”

Izuku fidgeted on the couch, and Katsuki’s hand had gone eerily still.

“So please, just… tell me,” she said, half-whispered and half-begged. “Tell me about whoever’s managed to get so close to my son.”

Whoever’s managed…? Hold up, don’t—“don’t say that like there’s something wrong with him.” Izuku bristled. “He’s not a threat, n-not like that, so don’t treat him like one. Okay?”

Already raising my voice. Fuck, fuck, fuck…!

He valued his relationship with his mom—or at least, valued it in the way that insurance was valued. Indispensable when you need it, but a burden otherwise. They’d learned to agree to disagree in most every situation; learned not to mention work, or home life, or much of anything that wasn’t simple small talk. Despite the hole the strained relationship left in his chest, though, anything was better than a full-on falling out.

But even so, nothing hurt worse than the disappointed stare in his mother’s eyes, than the slight downturned crease in her lips that spoke nothing but words of failure, failure, failure.

I’m sorry. I’m sorry. But I’m not going to change.

“Izuku, you…” she hesitated. “I say this because I know you have a poor habit of getting involved with people that hurt you. I don’t know who on earth this person is, and I’m sorry if I’m wrong, but he—Izuku, he looks very young…!”

Katsuki flinched, but held his tongue.

“I don’t know what you’re doing. I’m not asking for the details of your personal life,” she said, hands clenched in her lap as she turned towards Katsuki. “All I care about is your safety, because as much as this person may be important to you, I have no idea who it is that you’ve brought to my home!”

...that’s. That’s fair.

He sucked in a breath, trying to keep himself at least relatively calm in wall of the storm surging around him. On one hand, there was the fucking media—on the other, his own horrible exhaustion, exacerbated by long hours and sleepless nights and the knowledge that his boyfriend was being harrassed because of him. But even with all that churning together into some wretched cocktail, the
battle right in front of him was one that he could take on for now.

At least, I can try.

“Okay,” he started, trying to keep his voice at least somewhat steady. “Okay. I get it. I—”

“No, wait.” Katsuki cut him off, and Izuku’s stomach lurched. “I don’t get it. Deku’s been nervous as hell to bring me over here, even if he hasn’t said it out loud. I guess I can see why now, but… he’s your son, right? So why aren’t you talking to him with a bit of trust!??”

“Kacchan,” he warned, praying that he would stop talking. “It’s not an issue, it’s—”

“If you wanna know who I am, that’s fair. But it’s not fair to assume that I’m a fucking danger, of all things, to my goddamn boyfriend!” Katsuki hissed. “For the record, I’m eighteen. I’m a third year at U.A. High. I’ve been with Deku for the past year—today’s our anniversary, actually—and in all the time I’ve spent with him, all he’s ever done is care about me, and me about him. And maybe I don’t know all the history you guys have, but do you really think it’s fair to be so hostile right off the bat like that, especially when he’s already a fucking adult!?”

“Kacchan,” please stop, please stop. “Now—now is not the time.”

“Then what do you want me to do!?” Katsuki yelled, strained. “Just sit back and listen to this shit? Sorry if I don’t wanna hear you be treated like this on your own goddamn birthday, but—”

“Katsuki, stop.”

His boyfriend went silent—still visibly angry, but silent.

“Sorry,” he grit his teeth, each word pointed and brittle. “No, I’m not sorry. I’m pissed.”

Don’t make us have to leave early. I just want this to go well, or at least not terrible. But, now that he’s said all that…

Izuku swallowed.

...how on earth can I fix this?

“Mom?” he started—no use trying to hide the quiver in his voice now. “H-Hey, um… could I talk to you one-on-one for a minute?”

I don’t know what else I can do.

Thankfully, she nodded. But there was no denying the anger and hurt in her face, not after the fury-charged words Katsuki had hurled. They were both on edge right now, dead tired after the endless stream of accusations and assumptions over the past few weeks. It made sense that Katsuki’s defenses would be up—hell, his own were—but he hadn’t expected an outrage so strong so fast.

We both just need to survive for a little longer, just need to stay sane till I go public about our relationship and wait for the media storm to blow over.

“Izuku, I want you in the kitchen,” he heard, and stood up as fast as he could—but not before promising Katsuki that he’d be back soon, that he was sorry, that everything was gonna be okay. Following his mom felt like some version of a walk of shame, though, and turning his back to Katsuki hurt more than he’d expected.

“Follow me.”
I’ll figure this out, I’ll get this fixed, I…

“I-I’m sorry,” he stammered, just as his mom turned to look up at him. “I just… he’s a great guy, an amazing guy, and I just wanted you to be able to meet him before our relationship hits the media fan,”

“Izuku—”

“a-and he just doesn’t know you, I haven’t talked about you enough, and m-maybe it was a mistake coming out here to begin with,”

“Izuku, listen—”

“But I wanted you to be able to meet him because even if he’s a few years younger than me he’s really mature and we’ve been seeing each other for a while and by a while I mean like dating for the past year but we’ve been friends for like three years and he’s honestly the best thing to ever happen to me and I just love being around him and I love him and—”

A sudden, heavy shake to his shoulders cut him off, and Izuku nearly fainted on the spot.

“Izuku,” she said, and caught hold of whatever meager attention span he had left. “Look at me.”

Look at…

“I-It’s been… s’been a long week,” he managed, just as a rush of hot tears budded at the corners of his eyes and threatened to spill over his cheeks. “M’sorry.”

I’m sorry it’s him I’m dating.

Some sort of broken, whimpered sob jumped out of his throat, followed by another, another as he tried to stay steady, stay focused between hiccuped gasps and violent, uncontrollable convulsions.

I’m sorry I keep having issues at work.

There was no denying the tears now, not as his vision blurred to painfully bright streaks of fluorescent ceiling lights, tinged with bitter salt and smeared by scarred, trembling hands.

I’m sorry I’m not stronger. I’m sorry—f-fuck, I’m…

“M’s-sorry for… f-for…”

Whatever he might’ve said fell to pieces before he could get it out, his small crying fit turning to a full-blown sobfest. Hoarse, ragged gasps plagued his body as everything he’d shut away for weeks came pouring out, the fragile dam he’d constructed torn down by a single worried look from one of the only other people who’d seen him at his worst.

Heroes don’t cry, he’d told himself years ago. Heroes don’t cry. Heroes stay strong.

If that was still the case, Izuku was anything but a hero.

He didn’t hear the whisper of oh, Izuku, didn’t feel her arms around his waist till he was leaning into them, didn’t realize that she was holding him close, holding him like she’d once held him when he was young. And Izuku, despite towering at least a head-and-a-half over her, cowered like a frightened child in her comforting arms.

I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry…
“Let it out… it’s okay, Izuku. You can let it out.”

There was no telling how long he stood there, knees half-buckled and every bit of strength sapped from his bones as he cried, cried into his mother’s shoulder.

“You don’t need to apologize.” Those arms hugged him closer, and Izuku had no idea how to react. “Not until I apologize first, anyways.”

“No, you don’t have anything to—”

“I do, though,” she said—soft, but not resigned. “I… I shouldn’t have started making assumptions about him that fast. I didn’t even ask what his name was, or even tell him what mine is, but for as much as I hated that yelling of his, he…” she paused. “I don’t think he was entirely wrong.”

Not… entirely…

“I haven’t been trusting you as much as I should… you’re twenty-two now, and yet, I feel like the parent of a teenager bringing home his first partner. I know that’s not the case, but when you told me you wanted to bring someone else over, I did consider that you’d met someone. That said, I…”

“Didn’t think it’d be someone like him?”

She let go, and Izuku managed to stand on his own with only a flimsy grip against the countertop. “No. I… I didn’t. But, really—a U.A. student, Izuku…? Maybe he is eighteen, but still. You need to recognize the apprehension I may have to you showing up at my door with someone so much younger looking beside you. N-Not that you look old! But I… I was surprised, and I’m sorry for not treating him like someone important to you.”

“S’okay, I d-didn’t expect you to, and—”

“Isn’t that the first problem, though?”

…what?

Izuku couldn’t do anything but watch as his mother—his quiet, nervous, but caring mother—took a deep breath and looked up at him.

“I—I wish I wasn’t someone you had to be afraid to come to. I know we have our differences, and I know that things in your life don’t exactly match up to how I wish they were, but… it should still be my job to support you, shouldn’t it?”

Anything he would’ve said died in his throat, dried and shriveled away to nothing.

“And, Katsuki… Katsuki was right. Especially on your birthday, I shouldn’t shove my worry on you.” She managed a small smile, but Izuku nearly cried again upon seeing it. “I don’t know what’s been going on in your life, and I won’t know if you don’t tell me, but… if you don’t want me in it, I understand. The last thing I want is for you to feel guilty about doing what you love—hero work, dating him—because of me.”

Guilty…? Is that how I was…

“I—I never wanted to disappoint you.” Izuku said, barely audible. “S’my fault too, ‘cause I never even tried to talk to you about this stuff for years. S’easier to just avoid it and keep things simple, so I… that’s what I thought was best.”
...is it not, after all?

She pursed her lips, tilted her head. “I can’t say I like being reminded of how much danger you’re in on a daily basis, or how awful it is to hear people spreading rumors about you—not much touches this town, but there are bits of news here and there. I wish things weren’t as difficult for you—”

“That’d make two of us.”

“—but I know that you wouldn’t keep doing this job if it wasn’t what you wanted to do. And as your mother, I don’t want to be another burden on whatever load you’re already carrying.”

You’re kidding.

“No, not kidding,” she continued, and Izuku realized he must’ve said it out loud. “I promise. So maybe, ah… do you think we could try again with, um, today? Start over, talk instead of yell…” She laughed a weak laugh, some sort of faint light in her eyes. “When I saw you talking with him on the porch, in front of my flowers… I didn’t know what to make of it. But you—you did look happy.”

Izu nodded, even just the brief memory of Katuski pressed up against his chest warming his heart. “I think I was happy. No, I—I was happy.”

Happier than I’ve been in a while, anyways.

“And that’s what matters in the end, right?” she asked, and Izuku make some sound of acknowledgement. “You being happy. And if you’re happy, and he’s happy, and everything you two have is mutual… then, what place of it is mine to question that?”

“S-Stop,” he mumbled, already bringing his hand up to his face. “I’m gonna cry again. Don’t wanna cry again.”

“Do you want to go back out to the living room?”

“Mhm. Y-Yeah.”

Wanna see Kacchan again. Wanna hold Kacchan again.

He’d been strong for too long, but out in the isolation of the town, Izuku felt he could finally start to let down his walls again and just breathe.

“Then let’s do that.” His mother dipped her head. “If Katsuki is up to it, then let’s… let’s try again.”

It took a few minutes of hugs between him and Katsuki for them both to relax again, a few words whispered to know that it was okay, it was alright, and a single kiss—quick, chaste, but enough to know that they were there together again, that this was real.

We’re both okay. We’re going to make it.

“Hello,” came his mom’s voice again, still hesitant but now willing. “I’m… I’m Izuku’s mother, Midoriya Inko. Just Inko is alright, okay?”

Izuku watched as his boyfriend reached for her hand again and held it—not hard, not as a threat or some show of power, but in an honest, amicable movement.

“Let’s try again,” Katsuki started. “My name is Bakugou Katsuki—just Katsuki is fine, and,” he paused, working up the barest smile. “S’nice to meet you, Inko.”
The rest of the day went alright—some stories were told, Katsuki talked about his schooling and plans for the future, and of course, the topic of their relationship came up too. Izuku had learned his lesson from last time about innuendo, and aside for a hesitant question about his tongue piercing, his mother hadn’t come close to asking about anything related to that side of them.

“Would you boys want to help make dinner?” she asked later, after they’d mellowed out over tea and snacks. “I asked one of my neighbors earlier if he could bake me a cake, too—he was a little confused over the concept of a mint flavor at first, but it came out looking wonderful.”

“O-Oh, wow…! And yeah! Kacchan, wanna help with dinner?”

“Duh. You need all the help in the kitchen you can get.”

“I’m really not that bad! Just… ugh, just give me something to cut up and I’ll take care of it!”

“Mm, you remembered that knife skills lesson we had a while back?”

“Kacchan…!” He’d flushed. “…what, you think I’d forget?”

His mom was impressed by Katsuki’s finesse in the kitchen—while Izuku had been cooking for himself for the past few months or so, it seemed to come almost naturally to Katuski. Yeah, there was a kitchen at the U.A. dorms, but he’d never made much use of it while he’d been enrolled.

But dinner went well—almost too well, really. Izuku was just waiting for some big slip up, a phrase worded wrong, or something to set off deeply-repressed frustrations and bite at the edges of lingering anger. Through all of dinner, and even afterwards, though…

Everything’s okay. Everything’s... everything’s honestly okay.

They went out to the porch to watch the sunset after dinner, and as summer golds illuminated the vibrant greenery at the edge of town, all the way to the small garden in the front of the house. A few clouds tiptoed at the edge of the horizon, remnants of an afternoon rain shower that only served to decorate the jeweled sky. But in the chorus of loud colors and dainty decoration, only the low hum of cicadas held the tune soft and steady in the background.

“Can we stay here for a while?” Katsuki had asked.

In another life, we could.

The train would be leaving in twenty minutes; the last one of the day, and with set-aside responsibilities still looming over them, they couldn’t afford to miss it. Izuku promised his mom—for real, this time—that he’d come visit again soon, and even Katsuki and her shared an honest hug before they set off for the station.

“Hm. At least it’s empty.” Izuku remarked, and patted the seat next to him as he sat down on the train. “I might catch a nap… haven’t been getting enough rest lately, anyways.”

“Same here, ugh.” Katsuki’s head lolled back against his shoulder, just as it had been on the way over. “What are you doing tomorrow? Just work?”

“That, and I’m still trying to figure out the safest way to go public about this. Us.” He shook his head, dread welling up in his stomach at the mere thought of that. “I told you that Kirishima and Ochako were helping me out, right? We’ve been making some progress, but none of these news outlets are being cooperative.”
“Ah, yeah. You told me.” Katsuki mumbled, mood having dropped a notch or two in an instant. “God, it’s all so stupid. I don’t wanna have to feel like we need to go public about this. I know it’s probably the best option so the rumors don’t get out of hand, but… I dunno. Makes me sick.”

“With any luck, they’ll stop saying awful shit about us afterwards. It’s better than people trying to twist our relationship into looking like something nasty, though.”

“You’re right, you’re right…”

He… he sounds so tired, too… I hope this isn’t affecting his education much.

“Let’s not worry about this for now.” He tried to smile, and pulled Katsuki closer against him. “You still wanna sleep over tonight? Don’t gotta do anything, but we can just spend some more time together if you’re up to it?”

Katsuki nodded, almost never one to turn down the offer, and grabbed Izuku’s hand again. “Yeah. I’d like that.”

At least we’ve got each other, Izuku thought, and with a grimace—even if things go south, we’ll figure it out. We’ll be okay.

The train ride home would be another couple hours, and with Katsuki already asleep on his shoulder, Izuku tried his hand at doing the same.

Just a little rest, something to help me relax… need all the help I can get right now. Hng… at least the stuff with my mom wasn’t horrible, ‘cause that’s one more thing I can check off the list now.

But as expected, sleep didn’t come easy. With little cell service on the train (he’d kept his phone off the whole time at his mom’s, and opened it to find no bars waiting for him), Izuku found himself staring off at the darkening scenery, at the once-bright trees now dusted with pale moonlight and drowned in dark blues. A few more clouds rolled past overhead, and a couple of brief showers met them on the way back—nothing bad, nothing long, but he could see lightning off across the vast expanse of nothingness. Still no signal, not even enough to check the weather.

I hope it’s not rainy when we get back, ‘cause I didn’t bring an umbrella. I do think there’s a jacket with a hood in my bag…? Oh well. If nothing else, I can stop by the convenience store outside the station and grab one on the way back home.

Fingers drummed against clothed thighs, and Izuku wished he could calm his slightly-racing heart. There was still an hour or so of travel time left, though, and getting needlessly anxious about the situation would only make things worse. Apparently today was just the day of him forgetting things, though, because his extra anxiety meds had been left on his bathroom counter that morning as well.

We’ll be back home soon enough. No need to worry.

More lightning, more thunder, more rain.

It’s just nature. No need to worry. This train is well-built, even if it’s old. We’re not that far out.

Izuku repeated those words to himself in vain as he refreshed the weather app on his phone, cursing his luck as it failed again, and again, and again.

Come on, come on… we’re getting close enough to home, aren’t we?

The storms probably weren’t helping his luck either. It wasn’t like he was asking for much, just the
evening forecast, but even so.

*Ugh. Guess my good luck for the day has run out.*

Izuku refreshed the app once more in the hope that it’d work, waiting for nothing and expecting nothing. It’d be another dud, they probably wouldn’t get service again till they got back home, but with an offhand look back up to the upper corner, realized with a start that one tiny, tiny bar had appeared.

*Oh!*

*Loading, loading, loading...* the little circle spun around, and with some renewed sense of hope, Izuku waited.

*Just the radar, all I want is a glance at the radar. That'll make me feel a bit better, right?*

A flash of green, then yellow, then red—suddenly, the radar appeared, but Izuku only managed to catch sight of it for a moment before his phone exploded in a frenzy of notifications, all piling in at once.

*What? Wait, what?*

Kirishima and Ochako had texted him. Izuku zoomed to those first, not even bothering to click at the hundreds and hundreds of emails piling up in his already-full inbox. There were other texts, too, and what little social media he kept up with had imploded with notifications.

*What the hell... what the hell is going...*

He opened his texts from Kirishima first, hoping above all else that this wasn’t—no, there was no way, no way—

[Kirishima] hey dude, i dont think you should go home tonight

[Kirishima] come over to our place. bring bakugou with you if you dont think he'll b able to get back to UA safely

[Kirishima] were gonna get this figured out. promise

Izuku didn’t process the words. Couldn’t.

Next.

[Ochako] don’t look at the news

[Ochako] i know you’ve been out for the day so i dunno what you’ve seen if anything but holy shit

[Ochako] eijirou said it too but please come over to our place tonight. I dont think its going to be safe to go home

[Ochako] i called your apartment complex on your behalf and they said that nobody’s touched your unit (they’ve been keeping a close watch on it) but that theyve been flooded with calls and people from the media

[Ochako] god i hope youre okay

[Ochako] just make it here. please. take the backstreets or the roofs or whatever you have to do to
stay off main roads. I don't think they know where the pictures came from so the station should be safe, but god just be careful

[Ochako] and if bakugou doesn't come with you, no matter what he says, don't let him go home alone

[Ochako] text back when you see this

[Ochako] please

“Mm… we almost there, Deku?”

No.

“...Deku?”

No. No.

“Wait, are you okay?”

No. No. No, I...

“Don’t—don’t open your phone yet. Don’t look at the news,” he said, and gripped Katsuki’s hand tighter, firmer. “Please.”

...I can’t break just yet.

Chapter End Notes

im sorry for all the extra week breaks, im hoping to get the next chapter up next thursday too but in case that changes ill edit it in on here and mention it on my twitter! edit: yeah im gonna b skipping this next week again, ill be up the thursday after next! EDIT 7/31: I AM SO SORRY ITLL BE UP ON FRIDAY BECAUSE ALL MY BRAINCELLS DISAPPEARED BC OF THE NEW MOVIE TRAILER GO WATCH IT AND YOU’LL UNDRESTAND

And ahhhH CHECK OUT THIS ADORABLE DRAWING OF VALIANT by @LokitheB!! And here’s a link to the rest of the art for this fic, the fic playlist, and my curiouscat if theres any questions u really want an answer to!

As always, ty to my amazing beta @aetherlite, and i hope yall are ready for the next few chapters!
Sorry for the slight delay! Go watch the new movie trailer if you wanna understand why.

Don’t open my phone yet...?

There was something different in Deku’s voice—something raw, something worried, something—god, maybe even panicked. But now, his phone was burning a hole in his pocket, and Katsuki wasn’t sure he wanted to look after just hearing that ominous tone.

“Deku, what’s—”

“We’re getting off at a different stop,” Deku said, clearly trying to keep himself as calm as possible. “U.A.’s going to be safer for you, even if it’s a bit further away than Ochako and Kirishima’s place. Do you have a jacket? A hat? I guess it’s good that it’s raining because not as many people will be out, so—”

“What the hell is going on!?”

For as much as Deku’s rambling was starting to freak him out, nothing was worse than the utter silence that followed.

“Everything... e-everything’s gonna be okay,” his boyfriend finally said, less convincing than Katsuki had ever heard him before. “I’ll take care of it, it’s fine, s’just—fuck, I-I...”

Wait... no, don’t tell me...

“Th-This just speeds things up a little! I-I mean, I was gonna give it another day or two, but I guess we can just take care of it now, s-so...”

Katsuki swallowed back the cold, awful nerves eating at his stomach, and pulled out his phone as Deku kept rambling, rambling on. The cell service was shitty as hell, but after a moment or two of waiting for whatever it was to load—texts, calls, notifications—it spasmed in his hand, message after message still flooding in.

...you’re kidding me, right?

Deku might’ve made some sort of panicked warning sound. Might’ve tried to stop him, tried to tell him not to open it, tried to do something, anything bar grabbing the phone from his hand himself.

“Kacchan, it’s...”

Katsuki didn’t hear whatever it was he said next. All he could do was stare—stare, stare, stare and hope that he was still napping, that this was some sort of cruel nightmare instead of cold, bitter reality.
This is... oh, god, this is...

But looking back at him from every link his friends and acquaintances had sent him, looking at the emails U.A.’s staff had sent him only conjured up the same image and same headline over and over again.

“...at. At the train station this morning.” His mouth went dry, each word lead in his throat. “I—I didn’t think… I mean, you only kissed me for a couple seconds, it—it shouldn’t have…”

The grainy photo in front of him told no lies, though. Bleak skies, gray concrete, low light—and yet, there was no way it could be anything but—


A part of Katsuki wanted to cry. Scream. Shout to the world his frustrations and hope it’d answer back with more than hollow words of senseless comfort.

The other part, though, was numb.

“...m’sorry,” came the voice beside him, tissue-paper thin. “I... we—we just need to get through this next day or so, ‘kay?”

He’s... is he crying? No, not yet, not yet...
“Yeah. Okay,” he said, with the most mechanical nod he could muster. “Okay.”

It was still raining—he’d napped through a decent amount of the storm, always a heavy sleeper—but now, the roaring cadence of it against the train window was the only thing drowning out the nausea broiling in his stomach.

I… this isn’t real, it’s…

Deku’s hand was on his leg. One squeeze, then another.

“Let’s, ah… let’s just talk about what we’re going to do when we get closer, alright?”

*Let me forget about why we’re having to do this.*

But Deku’s weight was right there, right against his body, and his other arm came up to wrap around Katsuki’s shoulders like some sort of shield. And for as much as his boyfriend’s voice was shaking, as much as he was forcing every movement of his to be still and calm, Katsuki knew it had to be so, so incredibly hard for him. But that only made the truth of the matter more vivid, because after all…

*He’s trying to stay strong for me, isn’t he?*

“So,” Deku started, fumbling. “So, there’s a stop about ten minutes before the one we were originally going to get off at, and another five minutes after that. It’s a bit further from U.A. than I’d like, but I think it’s our best option.”

Katsuki nodded blankly, trying his best to even process the bare minimum.

*It’s our anniversary, and his birthday… we were supposed to go back to his place.*

Right now, all he wanted to do was slam his fist through a wall and then cry for a few hours in solitude. It wasn’t fair—none of this was fair, not to him, not to Deku, and yet—

“I-I think we’ll be best off if you exit at the ten minute stop,” Deku continued, too steady for the situation at hand. “The main goal is to get you back to U.A. safely, so being further from where the media may be will help your chances. Don’t let anyone stop you, don’t let anyone talk to you, and try your best to stay away from the cameras.”

Wait… “You’re making it sound like you’re not coming with me,” Katsuki said, confused.

Deku squeezed his leg again, shook his head. “Because I’m not.”

...oh.

“It’ll be safer for me to get off at the next stop, the one five minutes after yours,” he explained. “At worst, I can climb up to the rooftops and get to Ochako’s and Kirishima’s place from there, so don’t worry about me. Okay?”

He nodded again. Doing much else was too hard.

“We’ve got about half an hour before we reach your stop, and before we get there…” Deku pointed towards his phone, finger just barely trembling. “It’d be best if you could get one of your friends to meet you there. Tell them to bring a jacket you can throw on, and keep your head down and get on the train back as fast as you can.”

*Get a friend to meet me there… hide on the train back… make my way to U.A. as fast as possible.*
Katsuki wanted to throw up.

All around them, the rain was still coming down, down, and Katsuki contemplated for a moment if he’d be better off jumping out of the train and making a run for it.

*They saw us. They know about us. Everybody... everybody knows about us.*

Since talking to Deku the week before about what had been going on at school, he’d let his friends and Aizawa in as well, and things had become *slightly* more bearable. It’d been easier to shut the voices off, to pay no mind to the ignorant words and cruel comments. They weren’t right, none of them were, but now...

*They’ll just keep getting louder now, won’t they?*

He didn’t like going to Deku for help if he thought he could handle it himself—this time, though, Katsuki was staring at a dead end and legitimately had no idea what to do.

*Stay calm. Staying calm comes first,* he reminded himself. *I can’t afford to panic right now.*

“...Kacchan?”

*No panicking. No panicking.*

“Hey, Kacchan, are you—”

“M’fine.” Katsuki sucked in a breath, muffling his screaming soul for just a little longer. “You said text someone, right?”

He didn’t wait for an answer and instead opened his phone again, trying to wipe the glaring headlines from his memory and shove that damn picture of them down, down the drain. Texting someone was fine. Texting someone was easy. So many people had already sent messages to him, after all, so why was this any different?

[Camie] holy shit babe have you seen the news???? hope ur doin okay, and ill order your fav for dinner if youre coming back here tonight

[Yaoyorozu] Katsuki, are you doing alright? I hope you haven’t had to see that terrible article so many times already... let me know if you need anything, okay? I’m here for you.

[Todoroki] i know you can take care of yourself, but if anyone gives you shit for all this, im going to light their ass on fire.

[Todoroki] (the “all this” was referring to you and midoriya. and that article.)

But for as kind as their words were, just being *reminded* of what was going on was enough to make him feel worse. Opening up their group chat and trying to think up a coherent question was almost enough to push him past his limit, much less attempting to comprehend the whole of the situation they’d been thrown in.

*What do I even say...?*

“Katsuki, do you need some—”

“I’ve got this,” he bit out, trying to convince himself of it more than anyone else. And to his relief, Deku didn’t push. Heavy thumbs hit the keyboard—once, twice, three times—in the hope that something at least *partly* legible would come out of it.
“Deku, which station is it?”

“A-Ah, Platform Nine, right off of Fence Avenue.”

“And you said we’ll get there in…?”

“...about twenty-five minutes, now.”

Right. Right. It’ll be fine.

Katsuki stared at the message for a long moment, barely reading the words he’d thrown onto the screen before working up the courage to hit send.

Gonna be fine. Gonna be fine.

The train kept moving, and a part of him couldn’t help but envy how blissfully unaware their ride was as it rumbled, rumbled on. If nothing else, the thunder and lightning had calmed down, leaving only wind and rain to throttle the sturdy windows.

“Just treat this like a mission, okay?” Deku said, and squeezed his shoulder. “You’ve got your objective, and we just need to call in a little backup!”

“Like a mission,” Katsuki repeated, as if it held the answer to something. “R-Right. Yeah. Just a mission.”

If nothing else, that line of thinking helped him to separate the whole situation from himself to some degree. But his phone buzzed in his lap not a moment later, and as much as he wanted to ignore it, he didn’t have much of a choice in the matter. Katsuki forced himself to open it again, ignoring every bullshit notification that wasn’t from his immediate friend group.

“Oh…” he bit his lip, still staring at the group chat. “They’re, uh, coming.”

“Wait. More than one person?”

“Yeah, it looks like, uh…” Katsuki’s eyes went wide. “All of ‘em. Camie, Yaoyorozu, Todoroki—they all responded, said they’re on the way.”

Thank god. Oh, thank god.

“That’s good, that’s good,” Deku said, “So you should be in good shape going back, then?” He nodded.

Deku smiled a little, kissed the top of Katsuki’s head. “You’ve got some great friends. Seriously.”

“Pfft, no shit,” he mumbled, and forced some fake, hollow smile back. “They ain’t assholes. They’re good company. They…” Katsuki trailed off, one glance at Deku’s face reminding him that he really was lucky in comparison. “They’re—they’re good to me.”

Around them, the air fell quiet again, and the rain morphed into a steady drizzle the closer they got to the station. Deku checked the weather again fifteen minutes later after nothing but small words and gentle touches to report that the worst of the system had passed—with any luck, it’d still be strong enough to provide some level of cover and deterrence to the press when they arrived.

“How much longer?” Katsuki asked, numb tension curling tighter in his stomach the longer they sat there. “Friends said they were about five minutes out from the rendezvous point.”
Mission terms. Mission terms. That’s easier to understand than anything else right now.

“Ah, looks like… uh, six or seven minutes out.” Deku murmured, one hand around Katsuki’s shoulders as the other held his phone in what appeared to be a death grip. “Timing looks like it’s gonna work out, so hopefully you won’t have to wait around by yourself for long.”

“Mm. Yeah.”

Get to the next point. Move to the next goal.

“O-Oh, also,” Deku stuttered, clearly trying to not let the nerves get to him too. “Will you text me when you get on the train back and confirm the arrival time with me? I’m going to have Ochako and Kirishima keep a distant eye on it in case something happens.”

In case something happens to the train. ‘Cause something… something could happen to it.

He grunted in some form of acknowledgement. All they had left to do was wait—normally, his boyfriend was a chatterbox, filling the space with sound even if it wasn’t anymore more than inaudible mumblings and observations.

Now, he was dead silent.

Now, Katsuki wished the thunder and lightning would return again.

Now—

“It’s the next stop,” Deku finally said, voice completely unreadable. “Are your friends there yet?”

“A-Ah, looks like they’re close,” he relayed, only giving his phone the barest of glances. “You’re gonna text me when you get to your—uh, Uravity and Red Riot’s place, right?”

“Absolutely. I might have to snag some dry clothes off them when I get there, hah…” Deku’s face fell again as he tried to force a laugh, that wall Katsuki hated to see struggling to stay up. “We’re going to come up with a plan for tomorrow for sure, but just remember who all you’ve got backing you up too, right?”

My friends, my family, U.A.’s staff, and Deku… no, I’m not alone. Not this time. Not ever.

The train slowed, stilled—and just before it stopped, Deku kissed him again.

“For good luck,” he said. “Not that you’ll need it.”

Beside them, the doors slid open, and Katsuki could only yell one last stay safe as he ran out of the train and under the cover of the station. Gray clouds, gray concrete, gray skies; nothing to help and nothing to hurt. Nobody else, save a couple other people who had gotten off at that stop were at the station right now—not that that was much of a surprise, considering it was the last stop of the day and the train was only sparsely filled to begin with. But even with the clear non-threat, Katsuki couldn’t help the heavy chill crawling along his spine as he searched for his friends.

Where are they, where are they…

Not against the wall, not anywhere in the open platform. Aside from a small, strange group of people to his left and the stragglers from the train to his right, there was—

“Hey!”
“Hey, over here!”

That group of people had started waving. Katsuki wasn’t sure if it was reporters or stalkers or whoever else in casual clothes, though, so he started walking faster in the other direction with the hope that he’d run into his friends on the way back. Had he told them the wrong station? Did they go to the wrong location? Worry was settling deeper in his stomach, and Katsuki began to resign himself to getting back to U.A. without them.

**Come on, guys…! Shit, this is important!**

“Over here!” came the eerily familiar voices again. “Come on, over here!”

**What the hell is that group—**

All of a sudden, a warm, heavy hand grabbed his shoulder, and Katsuki wheeled around and punched the fucker that’d touched him before he even bothered to look at their face.

“Fuck off!” He screamed, and broke into a sprint. “Leave me the hell alone!”

**Gotta get to the train. Don’t have time to find my friends. I can’t afford to—**

Something cold, hard, and familiar materialized just beneath his feet, and in a split second, he realized what was going on.


The ice around his feet melted away, and Katsuki grabbed the hand reaching out to him. Todoroki still didn’t appear too happy about being punched in the stomach, but didn’t look like he was about to hold it against him. Speaking of appearances, though—some weird wig of sorts had been shoved over Todoroki’s too-distinct hair, coupled with a shirt he’d never seen him in before.

**What’s going…**

“Didn’t mean to surprise you like that,” Todoroki apologized. “That said, I forgot how hard you punch. Even unaimed, that was enough to throw me off for a few seconds.” He shook his head. “Glad you didn’t start running off, though. That would’ve added a whole new set of problems.”

“I-I mean—it was just, you look—” Katsuki stumbled, trailing off as Camie and Yaoyorozu walked into his field of view. “...wait. Are these supposed to be disguises?”

“Yes!” Camie announced, her hair tied up in a strange manner and looking like some fashionable businesswoman of sorts. Beside her, Yaoyorozu had adorned herself in an wine-red dress, hair wavy and flowing over her shoulders. “We figured that it’d be better than a group of well-known U.A. students walking the streets at night! So c’mon, babe!” Camie threw an arm around his shoulders and steered him towards the shitty station bathrooms. “Let’s get you fixed up a little, too!”

He was still shaken up, but allowed Camie to drag him into the bathroom with little resistance. Every inch of him was screaming to go home, go home, but this idea of theirs, admittedly, wasn’t bad. Especially when the disguises were being provided from Yaoyorozu, who had set aside her desire to buy goods honestly in favor of helping a friend.

*I was fairly recognizable before, and now… shit, don’t think about it.*
“Let’s just throw a little gel in your hair, flatten it out… oh, that doesn’t look like it’ll stay for long.

“Just give me a hat,” he mumbled, shoulders hunched forward. “It’ll be easier.”

Nonetheless, they slicked his hair down the sides of his head before shoving a baseball cap on top of it, and gave him a jersey to match.

“You can like, pretend you’re all sad cause the game you were gonna go to got rained out!” Camie explained. “Gives you a reason to look all mopey, too!”

...ah.

“How about glasses?”

“Ooh, that’d be nice on him…”

“Sneakers instead of those loafers?”

“Yes, definitely!”

Last of all, they gave him a pair of plain, brown contacts. He put them in without a word, but staring at the man looking back at him in the mirror only made the pit in his stomach grow heavier.

I shouldn’t… I shouldn’t have to…

“Katsuki?” Yaoyorozu asked. “You look a little pale, are you—”

“Let’s go.” Katsuki bit his lip, cutting off the almost inevitable are you okay question. “Don’t have time to be standing around.”

He rubbed his eyes as he walked out the bathroom door, and told himself that they were only watering because of the contacts.

The train station to the school was only a few minutes’ walk away. People were beginning to crowd the streets again as the rain thinned out, but with it already being close to nine, the dim light helped to hide them anyways. Katuski slunk along in the middle of the group—not because he wanted to, but because his friends refused to go anywhere else. He wasn’t someone who needed to be protected, not at all, but when they passed by a window full of TVs broadcasting the latest news, all he could do was stop and stare.

No… no, don’t tell me, are they…

Two newscasters were talking, and displayed behind him was that photo—that photo—of him and Deku kissing.

“...disappointing. So, so disappointing.” One of the newscasters shook his head. “Valiant has been doing just fine in regards to his actual victories aside from a few slip ups, but to see him attempting to seduce a student before he has the opportunity to step onto the hero scene himself?”

It was raining again.

“It’s absolutely disgusting. But, they’ll get what they deserve—after all, Bakugou Katsuki is bound to fail as soon as he gets out of high school if the rumors about Valiant helping him cheat his way to the top are true.”

“Baku, I think we should keep going.” Camie urged.
“And who knows how long they’ve been together?” The other newscaster questioned. “Looking back at the records state that Valiant’s debut involved Bakugou’s rescue, which could mean they’ve had this horrific relationship since Bakugou was in middle school.”

“...Katsuki?” Yaoyorozu said. “The station is just ahead, let’s keep going.”

“Valiant is a stain on the name of Pro Heroes—though his agency has made no official statement on the matter, much less himself, it’d be a miracle if anyone can still hold any ounce of respect for him after this.” The first newscaster scoffed.

“Katsuki, we should go.” Todoroki grabbed his shoulder. “Don’t watch. Don’t listen to them.”

“A part of me feels for Bakugou,” Fake sympathy creased the newscaster’s face. “At his age, it would be difficult to stop a famous Pro Hero from coming onto him. But he’s let himself be wrapped up in this game, and if he ever had the intent to go pro, showing how vulnerable he is right from the start is a bad omen for any future of his.”

He didn’t remember running to the alleyway right next to the store, nor throwing up in an already disgusting pile of trash.

“We’re going to get on the train, okay?”

He didn’t remember sitting down, nor his friends forming some sort of protective stance around him again.

“Hey, it’s the next stop. U.A.’s almost here.”

He didn’t remember getting off the train and walking back through the school gates, oblivious to the stares and jeering pointedly aimed in his direction.

“Sit down, babe... shh, it’s gonna be okay, we’ll get you some water and food. Anything you want in particular?”

“Actually, we should get him something easy on his stomach—it may just be from stress, but I think he’s actually getting sick.”

They brought him food. Katsuki couldn’t force himself to eat.

It could’ve been a minute or an hour that passed, a day or a week. That damn broadcast was playing in his head on loop, and with each poisonous word, the few defenses he’d managed to pull together were crumbling, crumbling down. He could deal with schoolyard bullies, he could deal with sword-sharp looks, but to hear someone declare to the whole country that he was nothing but a fraud and that his boyfriend was a freak?

What the hell is wrong with us loving each other? Why does everyone care in the first place!? 

Right now, he should’ve been in Deku’s apartment. At his kitchen counter. In his bed. It was their damn anniversary, his boyfriend’s fucking birthday, and after the highs and lows of meeting his mom earlier, they’d earned a goddamn break.

Wait. Deku. Fuck. I told him I’d text him, didn’t I?

Katsuki forced himself to sit up and pull out his long-since-silenced phone, only to see a flurry of worried texts from Deku at the top of his screen. He was supposed to have messaged him when he got on the train—with a curse, he realized that he’d probably scared the shit out of him by failing on
that promise, too. All he could type out was a short in home, srry for not texting earlier before shutting his phone off again and shoving the worst of his thoughts to the deepest corners of his mind. He couldn’t let himself break now, couldn’t stop fighting, couldn’t—

“Katsuki, look at me.”

...Todo—

“Katsuki.” Todoroki sat down on his bed next to him and shook his head. “It’s been an hour since we got back, and you’ve done nothing but lay here.”

“I’m allowed to lay here,” Katsuki mumbled, and pulled his legs to his chest. “F-Fuck, what else am I ’sposed to do?”


I really should call him back... god, I wish he was here right now. I wish he hadn’t had to split up back there.

“Did you hear me?”

“Oh, uh... yeah,” he said, but couldn’t find it in him to meet Todoroki’s eyes. “Really don’t wanna leave my room right now, I... I-I feel like shit.”

Don’t wanna see anyone. Don’t wanna have a breakdown in the bathroom. Don’t wanna... god, I don’t wanna leave!

“Why do you think I’m telling you to go do this stuff?” Todoroki pushed, steely eyes burning into his skin. “Do you really think that moping around is going to help?”

“I mean, it’s—”

“You mean what?” came the retort, just as firm as everything else. “Don’t you remember what we’ve been telling each other for years? That we’re not going to accept each other’s bullshit?”

Katsuki fell silent, unable to do much of anything in response.

“Look, I...” Todoroki hesitated, “I don’t have the right words. I don’t feel what you’re feeling, because I can’t. But I do know that letting yourself believe the garbage people say about the both of you isn’t the sort of thing you’d ever be okay with. You know the truth about all this, don’t you?”

Of course we do, but...

“S’not like knowing the truth is gonna help,” he said, holding back tears for the tenth time that day. “We’ve both known the truth since day one, but it’s not like we’re the ones they’re asking...! I-I was kinda confused when Deku said he was gonna go public about it himself, but I think... I think I get it now. It’d be easier that way.”

“But he didn’t have the chance to.”

“...yeah.”

Quiet, again, but the silence didn’t feel as crushing as before.

“How about this,” Todoroki started after a moment, “I’ll go check the showers and see if anyone else is in there right now. Would that be—“
“I don’t understand why the hell you’re trying to get me to do this. Can’t I just rest?” Katsuki asked, more a plea than a question. “I’ll eat in the morning.” Maybe. “I’ll shower tomorrow.” Maybe. “I’ll—I’ll go to class tomorrow.”

_I won’t. I won’t. I won’t._

His limbs were still stiff, still shaking from that god-awful train ride, and he hadn’t even bothered to peel off his shitty disguise since he’d walked through his door. Gel caked his hair, the contacts were starting to irritate his eyes, and the clothes were uncomfortable and unfamiliar against his skin. Maybe a shower was a good idea in theory, but even the thought of leaving his room was enough to make him nauseous again.

“That’s not—no, that’s not what I’m trying to say you should do.” Todoroki ran a hand through his hair, clearly frustrated. “I think you’d start feeling better if you at least try to retain some sense of normalcy. Rotting away in your bed isn’t going to help, and I know Midoriya is going to need you at least somewhat mentally there for the next few days. I… I think there’s a time and a place to crash, and now isn’t it.”

_A time and a place…_

He really did feel disgusting.

“…where did Camie ‘n Momo go?” he asked instead, trying to divert the conversation.

“Left half an hour ago to go study. Camie was struggling with the latest history lesson and wanted some extra help, considering exams are next week.” Todoroki pursed his lips. “I told them I’d stay with you.”

_Oh._

Katsuki’s toes curled into his sheets, and his dulled mind realized that he’d had to wash them after laying in them while dirty. Now, not even his own bed felt like comfort.

_Should I… fuck, I really should. I should. He’s right._

He bit his lip, and tried his best to settle the nerves welling in his stomach. “…could you check the bathroom for me?”

_Getting help isn’t weakness. Needing help isn’t weakness._

To his relief, Todoroki nodded almost immediately—got up, and made sure to shut the door behind him on the way out. No one would bother him in the main parts of the dormitory, hopefully; if nothing else, nobody in his homeroom had said anything to his face about the rumors in the past. And right now, he didn’t think anyone else in the building would dare to approach him while he looked like he’d just dragged himself out of a dumpster.

In the back of his mind, Katsuki wished that he could wake up in the morning and find that all of this was just some cruel, twisted nightmare. He still didn’t know how anyone had even _seen_ them kiss—Deku had checked the area right before, and Katsuki had scanned it all upon arrival. Realistically, he figured it could have been taken with the help of any quirk or specialty item; maybe a stealth quirk, the fault of a camera that could see miles, or even a hijack of the station security cameras. Not that the cause mattered much, not when everything had already made its way onto the news and weaved its way into every headline and discussion segment around.

Katsuki wasn’t one for murder, but the thought of wringing out the necks of those goddamn
newscasters and reporters was one of the few things able to put his mind at ease. The heat of anger was better than sickening grief, and if it was spite and defiance that got him the energy to take care of himself, then so be it.

*I gotta… gotta show that I’m okay, that this isn’t going to beat me down.*

Theory was one thing. Practice was another.

The knock at his door shouldn’t have startled him so much, though. Every muscle in his body was coiled and ready to spring at a moment’s notice, just as it’d been when he got off the train. Had he known it was Todoroki approaching him then, his friend *probably* wouldn’t have wound up with a fist to the stomach.

But he opened the door to welcome his friend back inside with an equal mix of thankfulness and fear when he told him that the bathrooms were indeed, empty. No excuses now—not doing the bare minimum to take care of himself would only hurt him later.

*I can’t let myself believe them. I can’t—god, it’s so hard, but I can’t let them believe that I’m some fake…!*

That wasn’t to say he didn’t check every corner before going down the halls, and he definitely walked a little faster than usual through them.

*I can’t let it get to me. I don’t have time for this to get to me!*

He slammed the stall door and checked the lock three times before jamming the bottle of shampoo in his hand and scrubbing it into his hair with a fury. That gel needed to leave, the dirt and the rain needed to come out, and everything—even the last few touches that Deku had left on him—had to be washed off, washed off. The warmth of the water was some relief after being stuck in the midst of filthy rain, but somehow, it still didn’t feel as if the searing burns from those watching eyes had faded. Katsuki wished his paranoia would disappear after feeling a bit better in his own skin, but even making the short trip from the shower to his room had his every nerve standing on end.

*It’s fine. I’m fine. I made it back safe, I’m clean, and…*

Katsuki didn’t let himself breathe until he was back in his room with the door shut tight behind him. Todoroki was still there, but aside from that, it was as empty as he’d left it.

*Nobody else is gonna see anything. I’m safe here. It’s just my room, dammit…!*

“Do you think that helped at all?” Todoroki asked, only honesty in his intentions. “You look a little more alive, if nothing else.”

“If ‘more alive’ means I’m a zombie instead of a fucking corpse, sure.” Katsuki managed a weak scoff and crawled back in his bed. “You gonna stick around?”

“I don’t mind, if you want me to.”

*If… if I want him to.*

Katsuki swallowed back his pride, nodded. “I, uh. I think I’d like that.”

*I don’t wanna be alone right now. I really, really don’t wanna be alone.*

“Well, if that’s the case, then I want to see you get something in your stomach before you assume the
fetal position again.” Todoroki raised an eyebrow. “We’ve got bread. Water. Other things, if you’d like. But I saw you throw up on the way here, and I know you’re only going to get sicker if you don’t eat.”

“I ain’t sick,” he grumbled, pulling his comforter up over his legs.

“Not yet, but keeping this up isn’t going to help your chances.”

Teeth grazed his lip, and with a small, short sigh, Katsuki relented and reached for the water. It was fine, but all it reminded him of was drizzling rain and droplets hanging on dirty windows just in front of TVs spewing lies, lies, lies.

He swapped the water for bread shortly after that realization.

*Just have to get through today. Tonight. Tomorrow, he tried to tell himself. It’s just the media. I know it’s all a lie. Just because everyone knows doesn’t mean we’re screwed, right?*

“Tomorrow’s… Monday,” he said, half to himself. “I know exams are next week, but did we have any quizzes this week?”

*Give me something else to think about, even if it’s schoolwork.*

“No quizzes, but there’s extra study sessions being held by Aizawa on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday after class,” Todoroki confirmed. “Think you’ll go?”

“I should. I’ll try.”

Just talking to Todoroki like this was okay. Small comments, quips, but no forced laughter—maybe neither of them could forget the situation at hand, but it could be pushed aside for a little while.

“By the way, did Midoriya make any indication he was going to call you tonight?” came the next question, not even ten minutes later. “I don’t know him that well, but he seems like the talkative type. I’d be surprised if he didn’t want to reach out to you.”

“He probably wants to,” Katsuki admitted, rubbing the back of his neck. “I… I should call him back. I should.”

*I want to hear his voice.*

“Then why do you sound so scared?” Todoroki tilted his head, apparently unable to comprehend his hesitation. “I’m sure he wants to help and get things resolved as easily as possible, so why would this be an issue?”

“It’s not an issue with him, it’s—”

“Does the media really scare you that much?”

*Huh?*

Katsuki’s mouth went dry as he tried to comprehend what he’d just suggested. “I—I’m not scared, it’s not that, I’m…”

*I’m fucking terrified.*

When he couldn’t come up with an answer, Todoroki tried again. “I mean, what’s the worst thing that could happen?”
“Oh, there’s a lot of shit that could happen.” He grit out, the pressure in his head building, building, building. “A whole lotta shit.”

**There’s too many voices. Too many faces.**

“All you’re telling me are vague assumptions, though.” Todoroki frowned. “Honestly, Katsuki, what’s the worst that could happen?”

Worry seeded itself in his stomach, tight and cold. “The worst?” He almost laughed, more out of sheer misery than anything else. “I-I mean, Deku’s reputation is going even further down the shitter. Mine’s gonna be next. F-Fuck, I dunno if I’m even gonna be able to land a job after graduation if they keep this shit up, because everyone’s fucking convinced that I’m—that I’m a goddamn failure, some fake, a-and I…”

*I’m not sleeping with him to get ahead. I’m not just his bitch. I’m not… no, I’m not, I’m not—!

“I’m tired,” his voice cracked, trembling like a leaf in the wind. “I’m so fucking tired. Why is it too much to just wanna love my goddamn boyfriend?”

He was glad the bread had been easy on his stomach, because all the pained dizziness was coming back in a heavy wave.

Don’t wanna think about this. Don’t wanna deal with this. I just want it to all go away.

“...is it really just your reputation that you care about?” Todoroki said, pulling him from his thoughts. “Since when have you cared what people thought about you?”

*Since when have I…* “It’s—I dunno, it just feels different when it feels like the whole country is watching.” Katsuki pulled his knees to his chest. “I don’t care, I know I’m strong, but when everyone’s saying that I’m not…”

*When people talk shit about you for so long, you either start believing them or stop caring.*

Deku’s words came back to him in a rush, and for the first time all day, Katsuki realized just what he’d meant.

Stop… caring?

“You’re strong,” Todoroki pressed, leaning in close. “Do their words make you any less strong?”

*Do their words…?* “I-I mean, no,” he said, heart thumping in his chest. “I’ve been training my ass off for years, and I know I’m a good hero. But I mean, it still might hurt my chances with getting a job if people don’t think they can actually trust me.”

“Who’s employing you, the *media*?” His friend scoffed. “No. Think about it—the people who are employing pro heroes are the ones who *recognize* strength. And if any agency is really just looking to bring you on board because of the amount of money you can make them, maybe that’s a shitty place to work in the first place.”

*He has a point…*

“I guess that’s true,” Katsuki mumbled, still unable to meet his eyes. “But us being together so publicly also makes each other targets for villains. I mean, I’ve already gotten attacked once for it. I’m sure it’ll happen again. I don’t wanna be a weakness for Deku just ‘cause I’m his boyfriend.”
“Don’t you trust his strength, too?” Another question, another. “I think he accepted you being a so-called weakness after the first time you were attacked. But didn’t you guys work that all out? About you both respecting each other’s strength? If he’s attacked, wouldn’t he be able to fend it off?”

...oh.

“Yeah, you’re right,” he said again, unable to object to those questions. “Deku’s strong. So strong. And I am too, so… we should be able to fight off whatever comes our way.”

It was nearly impossible to calm his racing heart, but despite the sweat beading on his forehead, a little more clarity had started to lighten the situation than before.

“So what’s the problem, Katsuki?” One last push. “Really, what’s the problem? If you’re able to work through the publicity, is anything going to be able to stop you two?”

No.

“No,” he said, as if he’d had some epiphany. “No, no, we’re… fuck, we’ve been through too much shit to let something like this get to us. We’re both strong as hell.”

And we both fucking care about each other, too.

An honest smile lit up Todoroki’s face, and in that light, Katsuki could feel his own burdens start to crumble away.

“So call him, okay?” Todoroki pat him on the shoulder. “I’m here if you want me. Camie and Momo and the school staff are here if you need it, too. You should know I’m not a liar, Katsuki,” his friend’s hand tightened. “And I know that you two will make it through this, and everything else you put your minds to.”

Yeah… yeah, we’re…!

“I told him I was gonna stand by his side. Be his partner. All that crap,” Katsuki swallowed. “I’m not going back on that promise, either.”

Not going back. Not on this, of all things!

And with one last reassurance, Todoroki left the room. That wasn’t to say his fears died away—the shadows spilling over his dimly lit room and the corners he couldn’t see behind all could’ve been hiding terrible secrets, after all. But turning his phone back on wasn’t as nerve-wracking, and though guilt gnawed at his stomach for ignoring Deku’s texts about getting in contact, he hoped his boyfriend would have a little sympathy for him right now. A few new messages sat in his notifications, and with a small, less-nervous touch, he opened them.

[Deku] ahhh good, im glad you got home safe

[Deku] i still need to talk to you though

[Deku] ive been discussing options with kiri and ochako. think we have an idea

[Deku] i wanna talk to you about it before i do anything, though

[Deku] call me when you see this. i hope youre feeling okay, baby

Well. If nothing else, he was more okay than before. Katsuki left no more time for hesitation, though, and pushed the call button before he could think twice.
“Kacchan?” came the worried voice on the other end before the call even had time to ring once. “Oh, thank god, I was getting afraid that you’d gone to sleep already. A-Ah, um, how are you? You did get home unscathed, right? Find your friends easily? Shower? Have dinner? Shit, sorry for all the questions, I just—”

“Yes, yes, yes, and yes.” Katsuki replied, the familiar cadence of his boyfriend’s rambling enough to put him at ease. “I—I’d be lying if I said I was feeling okay, but… could be worse, I guess.” He paused. “You?”

“Ah, well… by the sounds of it, about the same.” There was a low chatter in the background, as if someone was talking in the room beside him. “Got rained on running over here, but they let me borrow their shower, made me dinner, gave me some clothes to borrow… aha, Kirishima and Ochako are too kind. I’m hoping to be back in my apartment by tomorrow night, but they’re letting me crash on their couch until it’s safe to go home.”

“That’s, uh… nice of them.”

“Yeah! I mean, the circumstances could be better, but it’s better than holing up in a shitty hotel.” Deku sighed. “If you saw my texts, you probably already know, but we’ve been talking a lot about next steps. I don’t want to drag this out any longer than we need to, and I doubt you want to either. Right?”

Katsuki nodded before remembering Deku couldn’t see him. “Yeah. Right.”

“…A-Aha, yeah. So, um…” he heard a weak, stilted laugh from the other end, as if Deku was clinging onto his last bit of strength too. “I—well, we called a news station earlier. Now that things have gone public, they were willing to accept my request without much debate, and so… I—I’m, uh, gonna go do a live interview. The goal is to try and pull the attention onto myself instead of you without them twisting my words. I-If I go up there, ‘come clean,’ and talk a bit about some stuff, then I’m hoping they’ll forget about you and just come after me instead.”

“What!? W-Wait, Deku—”

“It’s fine! It’s fine, it’s… fine.” His boyfriend stuttered, obviously not fine at all. “I mean, I’ve kinda come to expect it at this point. It’ll happen, and it’ll suck, but then it’ll be over! A-Ah, hopefully.”

Katsuki couldn’t do anything but sit in a stunned silence, dumbstruck by the fact that his boyfriend was willing to put himself in a horribly uncomfortable situation in an attempt to bail him out.

“It’s gonna happen tomorrow evening. I’m gonna write up some prep stuff, make sure my agency is aware of everything, try to sleep… maybe.” The nerves were only rising more and more in Deku’s voice, and Katsuki couldn’t help but worry. “A-Anyways, um… if you wanna come to the studio, you’re more than welcome to. I’ll give you the details, and you definitely don’t have too, bu—”

“I’ll be there,” he said, the words out of his mouth before he even realized it himself. “I… I’m not going to let you go up there alone if you’re doing all this on my fucking behalf, okay?”

“…what? Wait, you’re not going to be in the interview, it’s just—”

“Not in it, but I can watch you?” Katsuki asked, not sure where his small drive had come from. “Would that be okay?”

Would that be okay? Would it?

“K-Kacchan…” his boyfriend’s voice cracked a little. “Fuck, I… I-I didn’t think you’d say yes.”
“M’not crying. Can’t cry yet.” Deku answered, just before Katsuki could even ask. “But, um… you being there would help. A lot. A-And you can bring your friends if you wanna, Kirishima and Ochako are coming with me, so it’s not like I’ll be alone if you’d be more comfortable at home… b-but, yeah. I would… I’d definitely feel a lot better if you were there.”

“I’ll be there.” Careful, so careful and certain for the first time that night. “I’d feel better knowing you were at least within reach.”

His boyfriend let out some sort of muffled sob on his end, followed only by a barely-audible you’re the best, baby.

I miss him. I wanna hold him. I wanna kiss him and touch him and make us both feel better.

The call soon fell quiet, the both of them clearly trying to recover from that sudden rush of information. Deku would be doing an interview the next day, Katsuki would be going with him, and with any luck, talking about their relationship themselves would calm the rumors down. He wasn’t certain what Deku’s plan was, but whatever he’d come up with had to be at least marginally better than Katsuki’s desire to send an explosion towards each news station in town and shut them up that way.

I’ll see him soon. I will.

Katsuki got up, turned off the light, then put in his headphones and let himself curl up under his comforter while still listening to the faint sound of Deku’s slightly-steady breathing.

“We… we’re going to be okay,” his boyfriend repeated, as if he was trying to convince himself of that too. “We’re going to be okay. Things are going to be okay.”

“Yeah, yeah… they are,” Katsuki said, and sighed into his pillow. “I still hate this, though.”

“…I know.”

“I love you.”

“I—I know. I love you too.”

Deku cleared his throat, and by the sound of it, was lying down too. “Hey, so… would you wanna go back to that onsen again? Or take another hiking trip?”

...huh?

“Both, at some point,” he mumbled, not sure what Deku was getting at. “Those trips were fun.”

“I thought so too. So, how about this.”

How about—?

“Next weekend, after your exams, how about we go up to the onsen for a few days?” Deku proposed. “Just us, the water, the room…”

What? “Next weekend?”

“Yeah!” Deku said, his enthusiasm absolutely honest. “You’re not in the middle of an internship right now either, so escaping for a couple days shouldn’t hurt.”
Katsuki closed his eyes, let himself imagine that the blanket around him was Deku’s arms or the warm water of that perfect onsen. “I guess you’re right.”

“Aha, yeah… gives us something to look forward to.”

Quiet, again. But as his body finally began to relax, one silly, stupid question came to mind.

“...Deku?”

“Mhm?”

His voice dipped, and he wasn’t sure if Deku would even be able to hear him at such a low volume. “Would you, uh… stay on the call with me tonight?”

There was a soft chuckle from the other end. “Like, while we sleep?”

“Yeah…” Katsuki murmured. “I wanna spend the rest of our anniversary together. A-And, uh… just knowing that you’re there makes me feel a little better.”

Deku laughed again, but seemed to be slipping into sleep himself. “Aha, okay. I like that idea too.”

With the dark shielding him, and the gentle rhythm of Deku’s voice in his ear, Katsuki felt as if the rest of the world had faded away.

It’s just us. Only us. There’s no reason to worry for now.

“M’gonna sleep,” he said, words as light as the tiniest star in the sky. “G’night, Deku.”

“Goodnight, Kacchan,” his boyfriend echoed. “I love you… love you so much.”

“Love you too, you sap.”

“Mm, says the one that wanted to sleep on call together.”

All he could do was smile.

“Fair enough.” Warmth ran from his fingers to his toes. “S’okay. I don’t mind sap.”

“Aha, yeah… I figured. Or you would’ve left a long time ago, wouldn’t you?”

“No…” He protested. “If it’s you, it’s… s’different.”

“Different, huh? Guess I could say the same about you.”

God, I wanna kiss you.

“Love you,” Katsuki said instead, taking what he could get.

He could practically envision Deku’s awkward, beautiful, perfect smile tucked against his rumpled pillow.

“Love you too, Kacchan. Love you too.”

We’ll be okay.

There were more hushed whispers, more sweet words running through static phone speakers, and more I love yous and good nights alongside every other midnight murmur.
As long as we have each other, we…

A blanket of stars cradled him, and slowly, slowly, Katsuki was rocked into a dreamless sleep.

We can do anything.

Chapter End Notes

I've been waiting so long to write this ending, so I hope y'all all enjoy what's about to come as much as I'm excited for it. I'll definitely be skipping a week before the next chapter is up, so look out for it the Thursday after next!

edit 8/13/19: dsjflk well I never expected this past week to be as hectic as it was, and in order to keep my sanity intact I'm gonna be shifting the upload date to next Thursday instead. I'm so sorry about this extra long break (trust me id much rather b workin on this than anything else LOL) but life things have been kicking me in the ass!!

edit 8/22: well the next chapter is like an inch away from being done but I wasn't able to get it done before my short trip so I think I'm gonna have to push it back a little more(no more than a couple days!! And I think y'all are gonna enjoy what's to come:3)

TYSM to my amazing beta @aetherlite, and if you've got any questions that u want answered, hmu on twitter or curiouscat!!
to stand by your side

Chapter Summary

sorry about the wait, but i hope yall enjoy this 17k monster of a chapter!!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Love you too, Kacchan. Love you too.

Hushed, barely even a whisper. Izuku couldn’t manage anything stronger, though—not after hours of fending off the brutal assault on his psyche, not after so much time spent holding back tears and trying to channel his fear into strength.

I love you, he heard again through the phone, hardly conscious.

I love you, I love you, I love you.

I love you too, Izuku repeated, matching Katsuki word for word. Love you too, love you too, love you too.

Not for the first time that night, the sheets felt scratchier than usual. Or was it the pants? Kirishima had let him borrow a pair of sweats while they ran his own through the wash, and while Izuku was grateful for every semblance of help they’d offered him—food, shelter, clothing—it was as if he was living in some tilted, slightly-distorted world. Focusing on Katsuki’s sleep-induced mumbling was easier, but with it getting quieter by the second, Izuku knew he’d need a new distraction soon.

By this time tomorrow, I’ll be done with the media.

He kicked the sheets back, favoring the chill of his friend’s AC over sweating out under the mound of blankets they’d given him.

By this time tomorrow, I won’t have to hide again.

He scratched at his legs again—for some reason, his scars kept tingling every time he started thinking about the interview.

By this time tomorrow, I hope they’ll lay off of Kacchan for good.

Izuku pulled a pillow to his chest as he listened to Katsuki drift off to sleep; it was a poor substitute for his actual boyfriend, but if he closed his eyes, it was easier to pretend the thing in his arms wasn’t actually a barely-used pillow, and that he wasn’t just laying on a spare air mattress in his friend’s living room. He told them he would’ve been fine with the couch, but they’d been insistent upon trying to do everything they could to make him comfortable. At least in this house, Izuku didn’t feel like he had every pair of eyes watching his every move. Falling asleep in his own room had proven to be difficult over the past week, and just knowing that he was with trusted people helped to fuel his comfort level slightly more.

Even so, the silence was still deafening.

Maybe I should grab some water... yeah, that’d probably be a good call.
He muted himself on the call before standing up, not wanting to wake Katsuki in case he accidentally tripped and fell face-first in his friends’ kitchen on the way to the sink. He kept the earbuds in, though—right now, that stupid, silly phone call was the only tie they could cling to, the only reminder that neither of them were alone.

Where are they, where are they…

Ghastly phone-flashlight white dripped from wooden cabinets and glistened off the tile floor as he stumbled into the kitchen, trying his best to remember where his friends had stashed the cups without waking them up. But god, he was exhausted—if Izuku had a say in it, he’d pass out for a week straight right then and there. For as much as his limbs ached with each and every step, his mind wouldn’t shut off; numbing adrenaline coursed through his veins, and the idea of actual sleep was hardly more than a pipe dream.

Trembling hands wrapped around one of the cabinet handles and pulled it open; they’d turn up eventually if he checked each one, after all. Open, close, open, close. He struck out on the first few, but as Izuku stuck his hand out to the second cabinet from the end, he smacked something else—something hard, cold, and clattering to the floor with a loud crash as he jumped back and screamed.

What did I—shit, shit, what did I just—!

“Izuku!?"

“Midoriya, are you okay?”

The overhead lights flickered on in an instant, and Izuku was left to squint and blink as he tried to adjust to the shift. At his feet lie shards of broken glass—he’d knocked over a bowl, by the look of it—and just in front of him, the all-too worried faces of his friends.

“M’sorry,” he said, voice cracking like the bowl on the floor. “I-It was an accident, I didn’t mean to, I was just looking for the cups a-and I—”

“It’s okay! It’s okay, promise” Ochako assured him, hands flying out in front of her. “Shit, I’m just glad you’re alright—you’re not bleeding, are you? Did you get cut at all?”

He managed to shake his head, frazzled mind keeping him frozen in place as Ochako and Kirishima swarmed to clean around him. All he’d wanted was a glass of water, just a fucking glass of water, but apparently even that was too much to ask for right now. If his hands were trembling before, they were almost violently shaking now; tremors wracked his body, and stress-induced nausea had flooded back into his stomach. Izuku was doing everything he could not to break, but even something as inconsequential as breaking a goddamn bowl?

I can’t take anything more right now, nothing at all…!

After Kirishima and Ochako managed to brush the majority of the glass bits from the floor, he was led back to sit at their tiny bar counter, an actual cup of water set in front of him as he tried to recover what little midnight sanity he had left. Half-melted ice cubes clinked against the glass as he brought it to his lips, cold water splashing over his them and dribbling down his chin, barely even making it into his mouth.

I’m a mess, he thought, cocking back his head in an attempt to suck down what little of the drink was left. Can’t even get a glass of water for myself, much less drink it.

Someone sat down on the stool to his left, then another to his right. Familiar hands crept over his shoulders, doing their best to keep him grounded. And set firm in his ears were his headphones, the
low, barely audible sound of Katsuki’s half-snores still trickling through them. Izuku had never been more glad to have muted himself—the crash of that bowl would’ve woken Katsuki up in an instant, and then they’d have been back at square one.

“S-Sorry,” he croaked, “didn’t mean to do it. I-I didn’t.”

*I’m sorry. I’m sorry. It was an accident, I’m sorry.*

“Hey dude, remember to breathe. You’re okay! It’s not a big deal, I promise!” Kirishima shrugged, and patting him a little harder than he would’ve liked. “Mistakes happen, it’s all good!”

“Eijirou’s right,” Ochako echoed him. “We probably just left it in a bad spot, so don’t worry!”

*They’re right. They’re both right.*

He set the cup down, fingers shifting to tangle in the wire of the headphones instead.

*Mistakes happen. It’s okay. It’s okay. It’s okay.*

Izuku had wanted water so he could relax. Now, the chances of him actually going back to sleep were slim to none.

“I—I, y-yeah, you’re right,” he swallowed, shutting his eyes and forcing himself to nod. “Should’ve turned on the light myself. I’ll buy you guys a new bowl if you want.”


Ochako hummed her agreement. “Trust me, that’s the least of our worries. I’m just glad you’re okay, Izuku—when I heard that sound, my first thought was that someone had broken through the window or something.”

*Oh. Someone breaking through the window. Guess that’s another thing else to think about, huh?* Instead, he hunched over the bar counter and did his best to stay calm.

“You guys wouldn’t happen to have any tea I could make, would you…?” Izuku asked, resigning himself to whatever the night would bring.

“Tea?” Ochako frowned. “I mean, yes, but do you really want to stay up all—“

“I don’t think I’m gonna go lay down again,” he mumbled, head drooping even further. “I’m too wound up to sleep, and sitting in the dark is…”

*I can’t open my eyes without thinking there’s someone hidden around the corner, and I can’t close them without seeing every other horror imaginable.*

“...not great.”

Thankfully, his friends didn’t push it. Kirishima got up to brew the aforementioned tea, and Izuku let himself listen to the soft, almost unnoticeable sound of Katsuki’s occasional half-snores through the mic while he waited. Ochako didn’t comment either, for once, instead opting to rub light circles over his shoulders and let him relax. By the time the tea was slid in front of him, he was able to get out a quiet thank you and take a sip without dropping or spilling anything from the mug.

*Progress. This is progress.*
And the more he thought about everything, it really was. Despite the situation being shitty as hell, Izuku had run towards help instead of away from it. He’d talked, communicated, did his damn best to keep his head on straight until he was in a safe enough place to fall apart.

Two years ago, he’d wound up in the hospital instead.

*Two years ago, I’d never have thought I was capable of living a life this good.*

“Is there anything else I can get you, Izuku?” Ochako asked. “I know you said you don’t wanna go back to sleep, but would you want an extra blanket or so just to have with you? Or, uh, maybe a pillow?”

Izuku shook his head. “I, ah… no, this is fine. Do you guys mind if I turn the lights in the living room on, though? I think I’m just gonna go over notes for the interview for a while instead.”

Katsuki snored again through the microphone, and Izuku couldn’t help but crack the faintest smile.

*I’m so glad he’s safe and resting, at least.*

Then, with a grimace—

*He’ll need it for tomorrow.*

“…if you say so.” Ochako glanced him over once more, and for once, Izuku didn’t mind the weary sympathy in her eyes. “You’ll tell us if you need anything though, right? I don’t mind if you wake me up.”

“Same here,” Kirishima said, a heavy smile on his face. “And if things go south tomorrow, you can camp out here as long as you need to.”

For as tired as he looked, nothing but warmth rest in that toothy smile.

“You guys are too good to me,” Izuku shook his head, cradling the mug in his hands. “I appreciate it. Think I’ll be okay for the rest of the night, but if anything comes up, I’ll let you know.”

*Promise.*

Kirishima let him borrow his laptop for the night, and Izuku was thankful for both the resource and distraction as they disappeared back into their bedroom again. As he wandered back into the living room, though, he noticed that their door had been cracked open slightly more than usual.

*Like I said,* Izuku thought as he sat down on the couch again. *Too good for me.*

But he turned away, pulled the thin stack of papers towards himself, and felt that familiar numbness return as he skimmed his notes from earlier. *Notes,* though, may have been too kind of a term for it. Hashed out words and jarring scribbles streaked the pages, hardly even coherent to *him.* Izuku had wanted to compile some collection of ideas to talk about up there, but even just an opening statement had been difficult to brainstorm. After all, how was it that someone went about saying *yeah, you can talk shit about me, but leave my boyfriend alone* without inciting even *more* backlash?

Izuku wasn’t sure, and at this point, almost too afraid to ask.

*I’ll talk about work,* he added to the notes, *talk about the facts. Talk about how Kacchan and I have only been together for a year. Talk about how I don’t want media attention, and…*

He stopped mid-thought to scratch at the scars on his legs again, and with a jolt, realized what he’d
just done.

*Talk about… talk about my…*

Shaky hands tugged up his sleeves a little, and with the gentlest touch, he traced over the ragged scars lying there like Katsuki had done so many times before.

...oh?

Izuku grabbed the pen again, new vigor flush through his veins as scraggly strokes scoured the pages, more life and more meaning to them than anything he’d come up with before.

*I need to give them a distraction.*

Writing, writing, notes and more notes.

*I will give them a distraction. I'll give them… I'll give them…*

His hands were shaking, but at the same time, this was the first and only plan he felt sure about.

*I’ll give them something they’ve never seen before.*

Izuku dropped the pen, stared at the blurring wall of words on the page, and from somewhere within him, breathed a sigh of relief. He knew Katsuki wouldn’t like the idea, but for all intents and purposes, it was the best thing he could do.

With a nervous swallow, Izuku set the papers back on the table beside him. He needed to find something to distract himself now.

Shaky hands reached to open Kirishima’s laptop, logging in with a tap of the button and pulling up the the browser window in one smooth, only slightly-stilted movement. Maybe an apartment search would do? He’d been looking at them on and off for months now, but after only a few minutes of rolling through webpages and rent numbers, Izuku closed the tab and lolled back against the couch cushions.

There had to be something else he could search for. Something other than reading wiki articles until his eyes burned, something other than watching videos till his headphones were cemented to his ears. Not like he wanted to take them out in the first place, not when Katsuki was still making those soft little grunts and sleepy noises that made everything bearable.

*At least Kacchan’s okay, he reminded himself. At least he’s okay, and at least we’re going to…*

Suddenly, faint reminders of his sleep-induced memories returned.

*We’re going to the onsen again.*

Fingers were on the keyboard in a flash, googling rooms and pricing and dates as fast as he could. What would he want? What would make Katsuki happy? What would make them happy, damn it? Searching, in and of itself, was easy to do—and the longer he scrolled, the harder it became to stay focused on the matter at hand.

Through his groggy actions, Izuku realized he was more tired than he’d thought. Eyelids drooped, searching became slower, and before he knew it, sleep crawled into his bones and pulled him away.

*Tomorrow, Kacchan. Tomorrow, it’ll be over.*
“You—you really want come with me?”

Katsuki stared in shock at his friends, sitting around him at the lunch table with determination in their eyes and a stubborn insistence on staying put.

“‘Course we’re going with you, Baku.” Camie rolled her eyes, and stepped forward to flick him on the forehead. “Did you really think you invite us to that interview and have us turn it down? This news is everywhere, and I need to be there for the actual thing!”

Yaoyorozu side-eyed her girlfriend. “…well, I’d like to go with you for moral support. I know all of this has to be hard, and even if you’re not the one being interviewed… I can’t even imagine what it’s like to be in your position. Plus, I’d like to be there for Midoriya too.”

When he turned towards Todoroki, all he saw was a raised eyebrow and a really? streaked over his face.

“Do you honestly feel the need to ask?” he said, rolling his eyes in an even more dramatic fashion than Camie had. “Of course I want to be there.”

Right. Right. Of course he would.

That morning, Katsuki had woken up in a panic; everything from the night before had come crashing down like an avalanche, so bad to where Todoroki had run into his room to check and see that everything was okay. He’d skipped his first class, made it to the second with only a little red around his eyes, and only had to run to the bathroom once to cry during the third. Lunch was a welcome relief and a stressor all the same—a break meant food, but a break also meant unwanted eyes boring holes into his skin and only the glares from his friends to keep nasty words away.

He’d kept count.

Six people called him a fake. Five told him he was a bitch. Four said he should be expelled, three tried to elbow him in the hallway, two spit on his shoes as he walked past. And when one slapped his ass on his way back from practice, all Katsuki could feel was numb.

I’m tired.

If Deku’s interview didn’t clear things up, Katsuki wasn’t sure what he’d have to do. It was still the first semester of his third year (almost the second, he remembered), and if he this was what he was going to have to endure if things weren’t resolved…

Don’t think about that. Don’t think about that. This will work, it has to—!

“So are you gonna act surprised any longer, Kacchan?” Camie said, pulling his attention away from those unwanted futures. “Or are you gonna tell us the details for the evening instead?”

Those ready looks of theirs pierced through whatever flaky barrier was left, and a worn, wobbly smile broke out over his face.


The interview would be held in a studio near the outskirts of town—despite being conducted by a major news network, the location wasn’t anything to write home about. When he’d talked to Deku about it that morning (Katsuki had forgotten that he’d fallen asleep with his headphones in and scared his boyfriend awake with his sunrise meltdown), he’d learned that Red Riot and Uravity would be coming with him as well, but aside from them and Katsuki’s own friends, there would only
be the media staff on site.

“Do you think we should wear our hero costumes?” Camie asked. “I mean, I wanna go out there cute. What’s Midoriya wearing? His costume? Something nicer? Ooh, man, I bet he’d look amazing in a white business suit…”

Katsuki shrugged. “He actually, ah… didn’t tell me. I guess it’s fine if you wanna wear yours? S’not a bad idea, but if I wear mine, I’d probably throw civilian clothes on top of it. Don’t wanna attract more attention than we already will on the way there.”

“That’s reasonable,” Yaoyorozu echoed. “I’d hope we wouldn’t have to be involved in anything other than moral support, anyways. Not because there’s anything wrong with helping, but ideally, our help shouldn’t be needed in any other way.”

But from the other side of the table, Todoroki only huffed. “You’ll see me in sweatpants and a shirt at best. The media trash doesn’t deserve anything better.”

And out of all of the answers he’d heard, Katsuki found himself agreeing with that more than anything else.

*He’s right. They don’t deserve our time.*

Deku was putting himself out there to try to calm things down, not to appease the mocking cries and jeers. After all, if the media had their way, breaking up would be best solution.

*But that was never even an option. Not now, not then, not ever.*

He nodded. “That’s fair. I dunno, I think I’ll wear part of my costume just in case, but I’ll throw a jacket on top. Maybe some sweatpants, too.”

They could celebrate afterwards—it wasn’t as if Katsuki didn’t enjoy dressing up (especially when it came to Deku,) but the media didn’t deserve them at their worst—much less their best.

*Next subject.*

“Deku told me to get there early. Just like fifteen minutes or so, so…” Katsuki frowned, thinking for a moment. “We’ll need to be at the studio by six-fifteen, which would mean leaving here by about five-thirty. Five-fifteen if we wanna be safe.”

“So, we’ll meet up after classes, but we’re going to have to skip the exam review session tonight.” Yaoyorozu said, sighing. “Given the situation, I suppose it’s alright, but I’ll need to spend more time going over those subjects for the exams.”

Camie draped an arm over her girlfriend, leaning up close beside her. “Aw, babe, don’t worry. We can do a little special studying, you know…” she giggled, and kissed Yaoyorozu on the nose. “I’ll make it worth your while.”

“Save the flirting for after we’re done planning,” Todoroki groaned. “Get it together. This is important.”

“Fine, fine. Party pooper.”

As much as Katsuki wanted to scream something about it being anything *but* a party, the fact that Camie was willing to put on a smile and freely laugh even now was helping his spirits.
“Let’s just go ahead and leave by five-fifteen so we’re not rushing to get there,” Katsuki said, wringing his hands and sneaking another glance behind him to check for stares and whispers. “We’ll meet up with Deku, Red Riot, and Uravity at the studio, then go from there. I don’t know how long it’ll take or how well it’ll go, but…”

Todoroki’s hand clapped itself on his shoulder and squeezed. “We can hope for the best.”

_right. We can always hope for the best._

“Agreed.” Yaoyorozu dipped her head. “Do you think you’ll be okay for the rest of the day since we’re doing hero training, Katsuki? Or would it be better for you to head back to the dorms and mentally prepare for all this?”

A part of him wanted to do that—run back to his dorm, call Deku, curl into a ball in the sheets he’d forgotten to wash that week. At the same time, though…

“I’ll be fine,” he assured her. “I-I mean, maybe it’d be easier to go back to my room, but it’d probably make shit harder overall. I’d rather think about practice than this garbage, and as long as I’m fighting and moving, I think things should be okay.”

“Makes sense!” Camie grinned. “I’ll make sure to go extra hard on you during practice today, ‘kay? If you start thinking about anything else, you’re gonna be screwed—” she paused, winked. “And not in the fun way, baby.”

Katsuki could only groan again, head lolled back over his chair as lighter banter returned to their table. He was more than ready for lunch to be over—for incessant stares to go away, for those stomach-turning whispers to die down, for the murmurs of _fake, fraud, cheat,_ to leave him be.

_They’re wrong. They’re wrong. But like Deku said…_

“Pfft, I can handle whatever you’ve got.” Katsuki forced a smile, blatantly ignoring the insults thrown from halfway across the room. “Give me your best shot.”

...the hardest thing to change is someone’s mind. All I can control is myself.

Lunch ended eventually and as he left the cafeteria, the shouted jeers turned to crackling white noise and crashed on his friend’s shoulders, leaving only the faintest chants to hit his ears.

_All I can control is myself._

Practice came. Went. Katsuki beat the hell out of a set of training dummies, blew down the side of a building, and did the best in the class during offensive training maneuvers.

_All I can prove is myself._

He allowed himself an extra ten, fifteen minutes in the bathroom stalls to get rid of the lingering nausea building in his stomach.

_All I can… all I can…_

An hour later, Katsuki had thrown on the top to his hero suit, a pair of sweatpants, and part of his belt.

“You ready, babe?”

In the doorway, his friends stood ready and waiting.
All I can be is myself.

A worn, crooked half-smile tugged at his lips.

“Ready as I’ll ever be,” Katsuki said, stepping forward. “Let’s show these assholes what’s up.”

The four of them got to the station and onto the train as quickly and quietly as possible, ducking past tall buildings and weaving their way through thick crowds. Walking past rows of TVs forecasting the interview was easier without the shock value attached to it, and despite his goddamn boyfriend being treated like a piece of rotten meat by every voice around him, Katsuki was able to find some solace in the fact that they didn’t know Deku.

All they know is what he’s shown, and that hardly counts for anything.

And, as Camie had pointed out earlier that day, the photo of them kissing wasn’t as terrible as it could’ve been, either. At least they’d caught that on camera instead of something more risque.

In the back of his mind, Katsuki realized that even Deku’s bedroom might have been tapped.

At least… at least they didn’t get any pictures of his scars. Of us in bed. Of him touching me and me touching him.

Deku was a private person—one of the most private he’d ever met, especially for a pro hero—and the thought of the scars he worked so to hide being ripped open and shown to the rest of the world? A shiver crawled down Katsuki’s spine, and he scooted closer to Yaoyorozu on instinct.

It could’ve been worse. It could’ve been a lot worse.

“Hang in there,” Camie murmured, and took his hand. “We’ve got you.”

That’s right. That’s right. That’s right, they… they’ve got me.

Katsuki would deny crying on the way there, but the way Todoroki held him as the nerves began to spark up again kept him grounded more than anything else.

“Our stop is coming up,” Yaoyorozu alerted them. “The station is only a short walk, thankfully. We’re meeting Midoriya outside, yes?”

“Yeah, that’s—that’s what he said.”

Fuck, I wanna hug him right now.

The train slowed to a stop, and Katsuki was hardly able to get off without falling with as wobbly as his legs were. Camie almost reached to help him, but all it took was a minute of deep breathing against a stray column at the station to get his bearings back.

“You sure you’re okay?” Yaoyorozu frowned. “It’s not too late to go home. I’m sure Midoriya would understand if it’s too much for—”

“I’m fine,” Katsuki insisted, swallowing back the bile in his throat. “I’ll be fine enough, anyways. I’d rather see this happen in person than on TV.”

At least he won’t feel out of reach like this. At least he’ll be right there, right in front of me.

“Baku, you’re pale as fuck.” Camie frowned. “Say what you want, but you’ve been stress-sick since
we picked you up yesterday, and it’s hardly gotten better. It’s an easy trip back—we could even take you by your parent’s house if it’d be more comfortable, but this—"

“None of this is about me being *comfortable!*” Katsuki snapped, sharper than he would’ve liked. “You think I don’t *know* how shitty I feel!? Last night and today have been fucking terrible, and between that and all the hiding I’ve had to do for *months* with my relationship, it’s kinda hitting me! But it’s not like it’s just gonna stop if I go hide in my room till Deku deals with the media! I—fuck, I can’t run away from this shit anymore!”

*I… I-I…*

“This is important to me,” he croaked, throat dry. “Doesn’t mean it’s easy. It’s hard for me, and it’s hard for Deku. But neither of us are gonna go run and hide again. *We can’t.* Not if I’m gonna be a pro hero, and not if I’m…”

_Not if I’m gonna stand by—_

“He’s going.”

_Huh?_

Todoroki had stepped forward, facing down Camie and Yaoyorozu with burning, steely eyes he hadn’t seen in so long. “And I’m going with him. If you two want to go back, feel free. But I think it’s pretty damn clear that Katsuki’s made his choice, isn’t it?”

Resistance turned to silence, turned to shock, turned to acceptance; even Katsuki was stunned by the sudden declaration.

*My choice. This is my choice. This is something I can control.*

“Right.” The word didn’t wobble, didn’t shake. “I’m going, so come with me or don’t. Just think about it,” he paused, fixed Camie and Yaoyorozu with the most confident look he’d mustered all day. “What’s the worst that could happen?”

He could nearly *feel* Todoroki’s glowing pride behind him.

*Thank you. Thank you.*

“…well, I think that settles it.” Yaoyorozu finally said, breaking the tense air between them. “I’ll be coming with you, Katsuki. I feel better about going with you than heading home.”

“Same here,” Camie said, still worried but not about to pull him away. “You’re right. Everything you said is right. But we’ll support you all the way, babe! Just ‘cause this is your thing doesn’t mean you can’t rely on us to help out when you need it.”

And if Katsuki had a cried a little—oh, just a tear or two—upon hearing that, could anyone *really* blame him?

*They’ve always had my back.*

“Then let’s go.” He wiped his face with his sleeve, stood up a little straighter. “No time to waste, right?”

Yaoyorozu was right—the studio *was* only a short walk away from the train station. A small parking lot sat outside, chock-full of the studio’s vehicles and an even smaller section for guests. Deku didn’t
own a car, but from afar, Katsuki could catch a glimpse of the sedan Red Riot had brought along during their internships on a number of occasions. Driving together would likely be safer than taking the train, Katsuki realized, and scanned the area for any sign of his boyfriend.

Where is he, where is he… Deku said he’d be right outside, didn’t he?

But as they got closer, Camie was the one who saw him first.

“That’s him, right?” she said, motioning towards Red Riot’s car. “In the backseat? Huh, it kinda looks like he’s talking to someone.”

Upon closer look, there was no doubt the hunched figure was his boyfriend. Even so, though, Katsuki had no idea why he’d be talking to someone else right now.

It probably isn’t a big deal. Probably just his mom or his friends or something.

Then, upon looking around the area—

Where are Red Riot and Uravity anyway?

He swallowed back the fear trying to creep back into his veins again. Chances are they were inside the studio already, or somewhere else in the parking lot, but as he walked towards the car, it looked as if Deku was half-yelling into his phone while sucking down some sort of convoluted drink.

The fuck?

“Hey, I’m gonna go see what’s going on,” he told his friends, and pointed towards the studio wall. “I’ll meet you guys over there in a minute.”

They did as they were told, giving Katsuki the freedom to run towards the car, grab the door handle, and pull it open without thinking—only to immediately hear shouting again. Deku didn’t even appear to notice that he’d opened the door, staring down at the dirty car floor with his eyes shut and teeth clenched, free hand gripping the bridge of his nose.

“For the last time, I brought my damn hero suit. I’ll take it inside, change after I’m done with the interview—I have a plan, I know what I’m doing—and I’ll be back in sector twenty-two right afterwards.”

Huh?

“You’ve got other heroes to handle the villains! Contact the agency that’s covering the south side of town today or something, have them shift an extra sidekick or two to my area. I’m sorry, but I can’t drop this interview! Look, it starts in fifteen minutes. I have to go,” Deku grit out, clearly frustrated. “I promise I’ll be back out on the field as fast as I can.” A nod, a sigh, another reach for his drink. “Right. Thank you. Bye.”

He watched as Deku hung up, cursed under his breath, and only then noticed Katsuki standing right beside him, his friends only ten, fifteen feet back. Those eyes shot open, partially bloodshot and entirely exhausted.


“Just a minute or so,” he said, the rasp in his boyfriend’s voice all-too-telling. “Is everything okay? You sounded, uh… pretty irritated.”
Deku shook his head, took another long sip from his drink—some sort of mocha, maybe—and leaned back against the seat. “Agency called. Apparently there’s been some unusual amount of villain activity downtown, and while nothing has happened yet, everyone’s on edge. W-When, uh…” he pointed a shaky finger towards the front seat. “When we got here, Kirishima and Ochako had to go over to help out patrols. We weren’t totally expecting it, but with all the villain activity lately, it’s not too much of a surprise,” he sighed. “I’m mostly just pissed because I told them I was taking today off, but they’re trying to get me down there anyways. Maybe I am one of their hardest hitters, but they can handle one more day without me…”

Oh, shit… I see, I see.

“You’re right. They can handle one day without you,” he echoed, and nudged Deku’s shoulder. “Put that sugary-ass drink back in the cupholder. I wanna sit down.”

“Sit down? I mean, there’s another seat—” his boyfriend started, but shut up when Katsuki plopped himself in his lap instead. “...I see.”

“Close the door,” Katsuki urged, leaning against Deku’s chest and wrapping his around him on instinct. “Just for a minute. Promise.”

“O-Oh, okay…”

No resistance, just compliance. Katsuki kissed him as soon as they were shut in the car again, wanting and needing and longing for that familiar comfort.

“We—we probably shouldn’t…” Deku mumbled, but didn’t do anything but reciprocate.

“What are they gonna do, take more pictures of us?” Katsuki scoffed, and cupped Deku’s face in his hands, thumbs circling over his cheeks. “Baby, you look tired as shit. Thought you told me you slept.”

“Since when did you call me baby, baby?” His boyfriend whispered, the faintest smile on his lips. “But, aha… what’s your definition of sleep…?”

“Seven hours,” a kiss, “a pillow,” then another, “a blanket,” then another. “And your eyes closed, not worrying, not panicking, but fucking sleeping.”

Deku’s hands wrapped themselves around his waist. “Well, in that case… guess not. Passed out for a bit last night, but I woke up a bunch of times afterwards. But, hah, that’s what the coffee is there for…”

“Is that what this excuse of a drink is supposed to be?” Katsuki said, and kissed him again. “Hmm… yeah, tastes like chocolate.”

“It’s a triple iced mocha, mind you,” Deku huffed. “And it’s doing its damn job. Yeah, yeah, I know it’s not healthy, but Ochako took pity on me earlier and picked it up for me.” He shifted ever so slightly in the seat, allowing Katsuki to settle more comfortably on in his lap. “But do you really wanna make fun of my coffee choices when we could be making out instead?”

“The interview starts in ten minutes.”

“And?” Deku’s hands slid up under his sweatshirt to run along the skintight fabric of his hero costume. “The question still stands, baby.”

Fuck it.
Lips on lips and hands on skin, and for the briefest moment, Katsuki could forget that they were in the backseat of a tiny car and pretend that this was Deku’s room, Deku’s bed, Deku’s, Deku’s, Deku’s…

*Don’t stop. Don’t stop. All I wanna feel is you.*

Eventually, though, Deku *did* stop—only to bury his face in Katsuki’s chest, to hug him even tighter than before, to let out a choked, muffled sob that wasn’t allowed to come out anywhere else.

“Your hands are shaking,” Katsuki whispered.

“It’s—it’s just the caffeine.”

*He’s scared. I know he’s scared.*

They stayed like that for a long moment, just touching, feeling, holding like no one else was allowed to do. It didn’t matter where they were, not really—as long as they were together, things would be a little more alright. Each second spent in that car, though, was stolen time, and sooner or later something would come to snatch it away.

*So while we have it, we need to—*

A loud, sudden knock against the car window snapped them both to a panicked attention, and Katsuki only allowed himself to relax when he noticed that Camie had made the offending sound.

“So,” she started, opening the car door, “are you two going to keep making out in here, or are you going to get inside for the live interview that’s gonna start in *five minutes!*?”

Deku sighed, and all Katsuki could feel was the same frustration he radiated. “I mean, I’d rather keep making out in here, but I suppose we should try and get this over with too.”

Katsuki almost went to remind him that they could pick up where they left off afterwards, only to remember the call Deku had gotten from his agency only minutes before. This was the only time that they’d had, and now…

*Time’s up.*

They reluctantly climbed out of the car, and upon standing up did Katsuki *really* take note of what Deku was wearing. An old jacket hung over his shoulders, coupled with a shitty t-shirt, sweats, and the ratty red tennis shoes he almost never seemed to take off. He hadn’t expected his boyfriend to wear anything particularly nice, but intentionally dressing so poorly came as a bit of a shock to him.

“Are you really going to be wearing, ah, *that* up there?” Yaoyorozu asked, putting a voice to his thoughts.

“Not for long, don’t worry,” Deku answered, confusing him even more. But as Katsuki watched him pull the case containing his hero costume out of the backseat, he let himself settle on believing that he was just going to change into that instead.

*Hero costume makes sense, that’s fine. But the way he said that…*

Katsuki wasn’t sure what Deku was about to pull, and all he could hope was that he’d be okay.

*Don’t do anything stupid,* he prayed, following Deku through the glass doors of the studio. *I know you’re angry, we’re both angry, but please. Don’t do anything stupid.*
He and his friends followed him into the lobby, sticking close together as the other employees gave them confused and distasteful looks, staying verbally quiet but speaking every insult with their eyes. Katsuki was used to insults at this point, though. And those insults, especially—those based on lies and slander and hardly a shred of truth—didn’t do more than scratch.

“So you finally decided to show up, Pro Hero Valiant,” came the new, husky voice of an approaching reporter. “And you brought company, hm? I thought only Uravity and Red Riot would be accompanying you.”

Katsuki could’ve sworn Deku flinched upon hearing that, but his boyfriend only raised his head and faced the reporter head on. “My apologies, but I think it’s only fair that Katsuki should be allowed to watch in person when considering the situation.”

The reporter met his eyes next, and Katsuki narrowed his own.

_Jeans, bitch? Got something to say to me?_

“…and the others?” the reporter finally asked, pulling his gaze from Katsuki to look at his friends. “Ah. Endeavor’s son and a couple of others, I see… it’s not preferred, but I suppose it’s acceptable. Though what’s_not_ acceptable is this—ugh, whatever you’re wearing, Valiant. I would have thought you’d attempt to at least make yourself somewhat presentable.”

“I’m not changing,” Deku said, firm and immovable. “And if you think this is an issue, I’ll find another station to do an interview on. But knowing how you all work, I think the money you’ll make off of me will more than compensate for my appearance. Need I remind you of_my_ terms, after all?”

The reporter scowled, but didn’t push it. “You’re in the wrong position to be trying to negotiate right now, but follow me.”

...holy shit.

He could tell that Deku was still nervous, from the way his hands still shook and the pinprick green sparks danced along his arms, but he’d stood his ground well.

_If he shows weakness, he loses this game._

Yaoyorozu and Camie whispered amongst themselves as they entered the studio room, and their small group shuffled behind the cameras and onto the folding chairs set out behind them. Just before Deku split off to walk onto the set, though, he handed Katsuki the case with his hero costume in it for safekeeping. Why he didn’t want to wear that over whatever he had on was still a mystery to him, but Katsuki had to trust him.

_If I can’t trust that he knows what he’s doing right now, what can I trust?_

“You can see him, right?” Yaoyorozu asked. “Nothing blocking your view?”

“Nah, I’m good,” he said, watching Deku climb onto the set and greet the reporter conducting the interview in a curt fashion. “All good.”

_His in reach. He’s not on the other side of a TV for me this time._

“All right,” he heard the cameraman say once the microphones had been set up. “We’re live in three… two…”

Katsuki swallowed.
One.

Deku managed to pull off looking relaxed as the reporter began his introduction, sitting quietly as his reasons for being there were laid out in front of him. The whole world saw him as the center of the hottest drama right now, and despite being the other half of that so-called scandal, Katsuki wasn’t sure he’d have the self-restraint to do what his boyfriend was right now.

*He’s pretty incredible, even being able to listen to all this...*

“...and finally, apologies for the slightly-late start,” the interviewer said, shooting Deku a mildly irritated look. “Pro Hero Valiant took his time getting here.”

But Deku only shrugged. “Sorry. My boyfriend and I were making out in the parking lot. We were planning on spending the night together yesterday, but due to all the bullshit that happened, our anniversary celebration was taken away from us because I wasn’t sure if it was safe enough to go home to my apartment. We’re just trying to make up for lost time, you know?”

Katsuki’s jaw dropped, and a part of him nearly screamed.

What the hell is he doing? Holy shit, he does realize he’s on national fucking television, right!?

Even the reporter looked a little flustered upon hearing that. “...I see. Well, speaking of your boyfriend, there’s been a lot of rumor circling in regards to your relationship. I’m sure you’ve seen the photo that was taken of you two kissing floating around—”

“Ah, yes, the photo that was taken without a shred of permission.”

“—and considering your now former stance on remaining single in order to focus on your work as a hero, it came as more than a small surprise to see you with someone else, especially with that someone else being a U.A. student.”

“You keep pushing this idea of me dating a student as a terrible thing, but please, realize,” Deku started, crossing his arms over his chest, “Katsuki is eighteen, which makes him a fully consenting adult. Don’t throw around the word student and act like it’s something scandalous.” His boyfriend cleared his throat, and Katsuki almost missed the slight cough at the end. “In regards to your first point, though, I made that statement over three years ago. You do realize that feelings change, don’t you? I find it more than a little strange that you’re attempting to use that as a point to make me look bad.”

God, I love you.

“He’s good,” Todoroki commented. “Damn.”

“Course he’s good. Wouldn’t date anyone who wasn’t.” Katsuki mumbled, but couldn’t help the swell of pride in his chest. “Now shut up so I can listen.”

The reporter hesitated again, but didn’t stop. “You say he’s a consenting adult, but I do believe I heard you mention that yesterday was your anniversary—that in mind, I think it’s reasonable to believe that you’ve been dating far longer than Bakugou has been eighteen.”

Shit.

“Don’t act like he has to be eighteen to date,” Deku hissed, hands moving back to grip at the armrests of his seat. “Or would you like to admit that you’re privy to even more of my personal life? If that’s the case, I think it’s fair of me to say that knowing what I do in bed constitutes an incredible...
invasion of privacy, considering I’ve never said anything publicly about it.”

Katsuki’s face burned, and all he wanted was to melt into a puddle and die.

Deku turned towards the camera again. “For the record, Katsuki and I did not do anything of that nature while he was under eighteen. All I can ask is that you believe me, and him.”

_We didn’t, we didn’t, we honestly didn’t._


Tension was blooming even more intensely than before, and Katsuki could barely keep from shouting his own words into the fray. As much as he wanted that damn reporter to shut up, though, all he could do was brace himself when he saw that mouth open again.

“If it’s an invasion of privacy you’re concerned with, let’s stick to the occasions when things have been inexplicably public,” came the retort. “Aside from the photo, your behavior at U.A.’s third year sports festival recently appeared very odd; when coupled with the illusion of you that appeared in Bakugou’s fight versus Utsushimi Camie, as well as Bakugou’s strange victory in the finals, it seems reasonable to suspect that foul play was at work.”

Beside him, Camie winced. “Yeah, um… that was a bad move.”

“S’fine, you couldn’t have known this shit was going to come out of it.” Katsuki grumbled. “Not your fault.”

_Not my fault ‘cause I’m not a cheater. And Shindou walked out of that ring completely of his own volition._

“U.A.’s faculty has cleared up whatever misconceptions may have come out of that win.” Deku bristled, and Katsuki was relieved that another pawn against them could be taken out of play. “If you won’t believe me when I say there was no foul play, believe _them_. I had no part in his victory.”

“Then let’s look at Bakugou’s second year final exam,” the reporter tried, only for Deku to audibly groan and roll his eyes. “It’s semi-public, and it’s widely known that you were paired up with him in the match. Based on what we’ve heard, it’s—”

“Again, _U.A. conducted the match_!” Deku growled, each word spiked with venom. “As a _U.A. alumni_ myself, I have a good, working relationship with the school. I had no interference in any of their activities beyond what they instructed me to do. All I’ve ever done with them is follow the rules. If you have any additional concerns, I suggest contacting the administration for more information since you clearly won’t believe a word I say.”

It hurt to even listen to all this. The pain in Deku’s voice shone bright as fresh blood, and all Katsuki wanted was for it to be over, be over.

_Leave him alone. Leave us alone. We haven’t done anything wrong…!_

The reporter seemed to understand that pushing that particular subject wasn’t going to work anymore, so if _nothing_ else, that was dropped. “In that case, would you like to tell us how your weekend trip a year and a half ago with Katsuki was innocent? I don’t suppose you can muster up a good reason why you’d reserve a private onsen all the way in the mountains if it wasn’t for some sort of _tryst._”

Every inch of Katsuki’s body froze.
No. No. No.

Shock spread across Deku’s face in an instant, and for the first time during the interview, his guard fell.

“Why the hell do you know about that trip,” came the cracked, broken voice, and all Deku could seem to do was try and regain his composure. “This—this is an extreme breach in privacy, why the hell do you—”

“We also have reports of you and Katsuki repeatedly meeting at Dagobah Beach Park over the course of his first and second year at school,” the reporter said, faster and more confident now. “This isn’t even including all of his trips to your apartment at that age, and who knows what happens in there…!”

“Shut up, you’re—”

“And finally,” the reporter smirked, gazing up at Deku with a face that Katsuki wanted to punch ten holes through. “It’s easily discoverable that Bakugou Katsuki was the middle schooler you saved at your debut as a hero, and the flimsy nickname you gave him during an interview—Kacchan, if I recall correctly—may as well be proof that you had feelings for him even then.”

Deku faltered, and Katsuki’s heart dropped to his stomach.

This isn’t… no, this can’t be, it can’t be—!

But the utter shock swathed over Deku’s face wasn’t moving, wasn’t changing, and all the confidence they’d built up before the interview was coming crumbling, crumbling down.

This can’t be happening.

“Tell me, Valiant,” came that voice, oozing with nothing but liquid malice. “Knowing all this, are you really qualified to be a hero?”

Katsuki stared—stared, stared, and hoped.

Tell me you have a plan. Tell me you know what to do. Tell me—shit, tell me…!

Deku’s head crooked upwards, and despite the dark clouds rolling over his face, the faintest sliver of hope glimmered in his eyes as he met Katsuki’s.

It’s not over, they said. It’s okay.

Running away would have always been the easier option, but—

I can trust him. I know I can trust him.

“This isn’t an interview,” Deku whispered, and shook his head. “This is a flimsy excuse for you to stomp on what little privacy I had left, and an attempt to shame me for being human. I’ve always hated the media—is that why you’ve been trying to harp on me for years? Because my priorities lie with myself and my work and the people I choose to surround myself with?” He shook his head again, but for some reason, rose from his seat.

What is he…

“I know you all—everyone watching, everyone listening to this—is here for a story.” Hands reached for his flimsy jacket zipper, and for some reason, began to tug it down. “So, you want a story?”
The jacket fell from his arms, and the shirt was pulled up and over his head. Deku stared past the cameras—past the crew, past the equipment, and onto Katsuki—and smiled.

“Mark my words,” thumbs hooked around the edge of his sweatpants, and only now did Katsuki notice he was wearing something different underneath. “I’ll give you a story.”

And before he could say a thing, Deku let his sweatpants fall away too. All he was wearing was a pair of shorts, and all anyone could see was his… his…

His scars.

“Let’s start from the top,” he smiled, and Katsuki almost fell off the edge of his seat. “My name is Midoriya Izuku. I work as a hero, I raise plants as a hobby, I turned twenty-two yesterday, and I’ve been dating my incredible boyfriend, Kacchan, for a year.”

“Deku…” The name dropped from trembling lips. “Baby, I-I…”

He looks scared, but he’s still…

“I… I guess it’s no wonder he always wears longs sleeves and pants,” Todoroki remarked.

“Holy shit…” Camie whispered, honest disbelief in her voice. “His—those scars, they’re…”

“Everywhere.”

Even Yaoyorozu looked stunned.

Deku continued.

“People always look at me weird when I wear long sleeves in the summer, but they look at me weirder when I wear t-shirts or tank tops,” he explained, rubbing his arm with another scarred hand. “Maybe some of you know with body-altering quirks know what it’s like; what it’s like to walk down the street and hear people talking where they think you can’t hear, what it’s like to buy groceries and have people comment on how gross you look, what it’s like to be scared to take off your clothes in front of your partner because you’re convinced they’ll be disgusted with you, too.”

Katsuki stood up, legs moving on their own.

“But there’s always the flip side to that,” Deku swallowed, and rubbed the back of his head. “When people are able to see you for who you are, and love you despite all the flaws. When you can show and be yourself and not feel like you have to hide anymore.”

Deku… Deku, Deku, you…

“Around last Christmas, Kacchan and I took a trip to a private onsen,” he admitted. “One of my friends had won coupons for a free trip, but wound up giving them to me instead. And, ah… I was excited, but that doesn’t mean I wasn’t terrified. Kacchan and I were struggling with our relationship, and while the trip gave us some opportunity to fix things, a part of me was afraid that he’d leave me after he saw my—” he gestured downwards, hands shaking even now. “M-My, ah, legs.”

Never. I never would’ve left you because of that. Never thought bad of you because of your body.

“That was the first time he’d ever seen these scars,” he said, and Katsuki could’ve sworn that even his voice was shaking. “I guess it’s obvious that we didn’t break up then, but I can’t even begin to describe the relief I felt when he made it clear that he still loved me in spite of these. A-And, ah, for
those who don’t know, these are from the accident that left me hospitalized a few years back,” Deku paused, swallowed. “That was the same accident that destroyed my name in the media. The same accident that those seven civilians died in. And it… w-well, it was the same accident that gave me a chance to fix my life.”

I’m going to kiss you, I’m going to hold you, I’m going to love you like you’ve never felt it before.

Just behind the set, though, Katsuki could’ve sworn he saw a flicker of movement. But he hardly questioned it, choosing to watch Deku speak instead.

“Before that accident, all I let myself be was a hero.” Another long pause, another long, long breath. “I was convinced that heroing was the reason I woke up in the morning, the reason I wouldn’t sleep at night, the reason I even existed on this damn planet. It was the most miserable year of my life.”

That worn smile returned, and Deku shook his head again. “But I only realized after I couldn’t do that anymore, in combination with actual counseling and medication and reaching out to my friends again, that there was so much more I’d missed. That it’s okay to have friends, that it’s okay to have hobbies, and that it’s okay to love despite my job.”

That thing behind the set moved again, and Katsuki took another step forward, warily eyeing it but still utterly captivated by his boyfriend pouring his heart and soul out.

“I’ve said before that I’m a hero before anything else,” Deku whispered, so quiet yet so sure. “But that doesn’t mean I’m only a hero.”

Holy shit.

“I’m a hero, yes, but that’s not all,” he said, stronger and stronger. “I’m a son. I’m a friend. I’m a boyfriend, and I’m just as fucking human as everyone else.”

...human.

And just as Deku shifted did that something flicker behind him again, shining with a sickly, metallic sheen that made Katsuki’s heart jump to his chest and panic flood through his throat.

That’s a—wait, what the hell is that!?

“Deku,” he started, eyes blown wide. “Shit, Deku, behind you!”

Sharp, silvery, spiralling—and Katsuki jumped.

Pinpoint blast. Short range. I won’t hurt him, I’ll just—!

Deku stumbled and dropped to his knees, clutched at his head, and all Katsuki could see through the smoke of his blast was red, red, red.

“No!” Katsuki screamed, nearly tripping over his own feet as he sprinted towards him. “Deku—oh my god, oh my god, are you—!”

“I-I…” Deku pulled his hand from his head, slowly, slowly, and Katsuki nearly cried upon seeing that whatever had struck him only grazed his scalp. “H-Holy shit, did you—did I—”

A wall of ice erupted behind them, followed quickly by Todoroki’s panicked shout. “There’s someone back there! I think they’ve got some sort of spike-shooting quirk. Whatever was just shot out was way too big to be any normal bullet, so we need to get this neutralized as fast as possible!”
Katsuki nodded. “Camie, take reconnaissance! Momo, work with Shouto to get the fucker with the spikes out of here! There might be more around here though, so we need to get a full scan of the area!” Next, he turned to the reporter still sitting on the couch, who was somehow looking even more useless than before. “Do you have radio contact with the rest of the staff?”

“U-Um, y-yes?” The reporter stammered, and ran from the set to grab the small radio from behind the line of cameras. “W-What, um, s-should I—”

“Get the rest of the staff back here, dipshit!” Katsuki ordered, still kneeling by his boyfriend. “Whether you like it or not, we’re the damn heroes you have right now! And you!” he pointed to the cameraman, who looked more terrified than anything else. “Keep broadcasting this fight. If you see anything, tell me immediately.”

“A-Ah, yessir!” The cameraman squeaked, and Katsuki felt some sort of twisted delight upon seeing the once-haughty reporters willing to listen to him.

Then, and only then did he let himself turn back to Deku, who’d been struck by such a sudden shock that just seeing the blood on his hands and feel it sticking to his hair was enough to take him out of it.

“Relax, babe,” Katsuki whispered, carefully moving his hair to look at the injury. “It’s bleeding a lot ‘cause it’s a head wound, but this one looks shallow enough. Can you see alright? Are you dizzy?”

Deku shook his head slowly, as if trying to come to terms with whatever had just happened. “I… I can see okay. Hurts a lot, but I’m not… not that dizzy.”

Perfect. Just gotta do first aid, then.

“That’s good, that’s good,” Katsuki nodded, and turned around to look for Yaoyorozu. “Oi, Momo, I need a towel or something! He’s bleeding!”

“W-Wait, Kacchan…” his boyfriend’s voice cracked, and for the first time since he’d kneeled down, Katsuki let himself look at him face to face. “Did you… y-you just…”

Deku stared up at him with a vulnerability he’d never, ever seen before, something Katsuki hadn’t even known was possible.

“I just, uh, pushed you outta the way a little,” Katsuki mumbled, suddenly flushed all the way to his ears. “Sorry if the explosion hurt you at all.”

Blood caked the side of his boyfriend’s face, but brighter than any of that were his eyes.


1... I just...

He could think about that later.

“I left your gear by the chairs, babe.” Katsuki pointed, trying to stay calm. “You did an amazing job talking up there, but I’m gonna need you to help fight for a bit if you think you’re okay enough. The villain probably wanted to get rid of you first because you’re the biggest threat in the room, and if there’s more, we’re gonna need your firepower. ‘Kay?”

“God, I love it when you talk strategy to me,” Deku murmured, still gazing up at his face. “Just lemme grab that towel from Yaoyorozu and I’ll get changed real quick. It’ll only take a second,
And sure enough, Deku steadied himself enough to stand, a bit disoriented but not totally out of it. The towel came quickly enough, and Katsuki watched as his boyfriend wrapped it tight enough around his head to quell the bleeding for now.

“Still stings,” he bit out, grimacing, “but it’s—s-shit, it’s bearable. You’ve got this while I go change, right?”

Not a question, but a statement.

*He trusts me.*

“Course I do, Deku,” Katsuki grinned. “Just watch me.”

And despite how goddamn terrible he looked, the blinding smile that broke over his face burned away Katsuki’s every last uncertainty.

“I won’t look away,” Deku said, grabbing Katsuki’s shoulders and pulling him in for a hug. “Not now, not…” he sucked in a breath, steadying himself as best he could. “Ever.”

Something crashed behind him, and for as much as Katsuki wanted to stay there, stay hugging him, he was still a hero.

“You sure you’re going to be okay?” he asked, pulling back to look Deku over again. “I’m gonna go ahead and call an ambulance in case the bleeding gets worse. Nobody’s gonna blame you if you have to sit this one out, so back down if you gotta, okay?”

“I—I will.” Katsuki’s stomach lurched as he watched as Deku press a hand to the side of his pale, slightly-sweating head, and wince at the pressure. “P-Promise.

Another crash.

*I can’t afford to talk for any longer.*

“Get changed, and meet me back out near the set!” he instructed, pulling off his own jacket to reveal his hero costume below. “The faster we get this done, the better!”

Deku called out some form of acknowledgement, and Katsuki *ran.* Towards the set, towards his friends, towards the crashing and banging and screaming, screaming, screaming. He yelled at one of the reporters to call an ambulance, grabbed an earpiece from Yayorozu’s waiting hands, and shoved it in as he willed his shaky hands to leave for another time.

*I’m in charge.*

“Shouto, is the guy with the projectiles still standing!?” Katsuki yelled, rocketing himself up onto the ice structure his friend had erected to scan the area for himself. Debris littered the ground, a mess of metal beams and torn pieces of the set still scattered everywhere he could see. “Is that what that igloo-lookin’ thing is?”

Todoroki nodded, and pointed ahead. “Yeah. I think his quirk has something to do with growing and firing those thorn-like projectiles from his body, so he’s still been going. I’ve been layering the ice when it starts cracking, but we’re gonna need something stronger to stop him soon enough. I *could* use my fire, but…”
“It’s too dangerous for indoors right now,” Katsuki cursed, and shook his head. “We need something different.”

**Something, something... oh, wait!**

He slammed the button down on his earpiece. “Momo! Can you make anything to neutralize the fucker with the projectiles!? I don’t wanna have to knock anyone out if we can avoid it!”

“Can you make that alloy that stiffens with heat again?” Todoroki said beside him, speaking into his own earpiece. “If it’s just a little fire, I think I can run it through safely!”

*Good idea.*

When Yaoyorozu gave her approval, Katsuki nodded and left them to take care of that one together, blasting off of the ice structure just as soon as he’d jumped on it. Sneakered feet hit the ground, and with a jolt, he sprinted towards Camie’s slightly-disguised form.

“Camie, report!” he said, flattening himself against the wall beside her. “Did you see anyone else? Villains, heroes, civilians...”

“Saw a few civs. Told them to get their asses back here with the rest of us.” Camie said, peeking around the corner. “I think there’s at least three, maybe four more villains? But, ugh, I didn’t see any more heroes. Total bummer.”

“Shit, you serious?” Katsuki cursed. “Are they close?”

“Mm, most of them were in the lobby? But they’ll be here soon, I’m sure.”

*Soon. Soon. Shit, I have to—*

“Throw up an ice wall near the doorway when you’re done with the shooty fucker, Shouto!” he ordered through the comm, praying that the defense would hold up long enough for them to organize. “Momo, check for civilian injuries then return to me! And has the damn ambulance been called yet!?”

The ice wall went up, and Yaoyorozu’s acknowledgement came through moments later. The ambulance had been called, yes, but it’d be at least five or ten minutes before it arrived.

*One thing at a time. One thing at a time.*

Katsuki dragged a hand down his face, sucked in a quick breath, and got back to the action.

“So, the villains,” he mumbled, turning towards Camie. “Did you get any insight on their quirks? Strength?”

*It’s only us three defending right now, and against four more villains in addition to the one guy we just caught...*

“Um... hm. Didn’t get too close of a look at them, but I think one had this, like, badass looking lizard tail?” Camie frowned, finger tap-tap-tapping against her chin. “Oh! And another, like, looked like he was melting into the shadows or something—so cool! Then there was this one girl who had, like, a lot of hair. Like, a lot a lot of hair.”

“Got it,” he swallowed. “Anything else? Didn’t you say there were four?”

Camie tilted her head, clearly trying her best. “Yeah, uh... oof, I’m sorry, I don’t really—huh?”
Some strange, bat-looking shape fluttered overhead, and it only took Katsuki a moment of confusion to realize that the bat was definitely not a bat and definitely turning into a person wielding not just one, but two long, silvery knives. He dove to the ground in one direction as Camie split to the other—for as much as the ice wall was a good idea, he hadn’t considered that someone could slip through that easily.

“Hey, blondie.” The villain grinned, ignoring Camie entirely to turn towards him instead. “Make this easy for me, alright? I don’t have all day.”

Katsuki’s blood pounded in his ears, and upon remembering that these were the people who’d tried to kill his goddamn boyfriend, found a new, brutal surge of energy sweeping through him.

Nobody touches Deku like that and gets away with it.

Shards of broken light glinted off those knives with a menace, and just as quickly as he’d ducked away, the villain leaped.

I need to—shit, I need to—!

Hands hit the floor, and pinpoint explosions rocketed out of them fast enough to hurl him from the ground and into the air. Below him, the villain still ran, nearly crashing into the wall in an attempt to swerve back towards Katsuki. One blast, two blasts, and away he went—only for the damn villain to turn back into a bat and swoop upwards towards him.

“The hell is your problem!?” he screamed, falling back to the floor and ducking as the fucker became human again and swung. “What the fuck do you want!?”

I need to hit him. I need to neutralize him.

His feet landed with the grace of a dancer’s, lithe and avoiding every slice and slash in his direction. Up, over, down, below—with each practiced step, the rage in the villain’s eyes grew, and Katsuki wasn’t sure he’d be able to keep up this tango for much longer.

“What do I want?” The villain cocked his head, too smug for Katsuki’s liking. “Heh. I mean, I’d like all the heroes dead. Valiant’s a good first target—nobody would complain if he wound up with a bullet in his head after all this, right? And this hell of a country as been giving us the perfect opportunity, beating down your own heroes without us having to do it ourselves!”

For as much as he wanted to refute those claims, the villain wasn’t… wrong.

“There’s been a lot more crime spiking lately,” he said, dodging another slash. “You telling me that it’s just because you saw an opportunity? Is that really it?”

He’s matching my movements… damnit, how am I gonna get a jump on him? Keep him talking, maybe!?  

“Duh. It’s been a walk in the park to make all you heroes cower when you’re all bickering with the media.” The villain rolled his eyes. “I haven’t done it myself, but I’ve got a few buddies who’ve been leaking info to the news networks for cash. Never thought it’d be so easy to make the damn networks turn against the people protecting them!”

What!?

Katsuki’s eyes shot open, and in a split second, a mid-range blast erupted from his palms and hit the villain square in the chest. No time to wait—he sprinted towards the him and threw out a few more
explosions along the way, knocking him to his feet as one of the knives clattered from his hand and onto the floor.

*They’ve been—*shit, no, that doesn’t matter now! I’ve gotta focus on winning!

“Momo!” he yelled, hoping she’d hear him without the help of the comms unit. “I need help with restraints!”

But the villain was climbing back to his feet as soon as the words left his mouth, and it was all Katsuki could do to blast the dropped knife out of reach and half-tackle, half-shove him back to the floor.

“Get down and stay down!” he shouted, trying to grab the knife still in play. “You’re not gonna kill Deku, and you’re not gonna kill me, and if you wanna get this over with so bad, quit fight—agh, shit!”

The villain’s free fist slammed into his ribcage, and Katsuki was spun around to the floor in an instant. Legs bracketed his waist and that hand tried to pin his wrists to the ground, but he managed to jerk his knee up hard enough to smack the villain in the balls and roll away before that knife swung down where his head would’ve been.

Too close, too close! Shit, where’s Camie? Where’s Momo? Where’s Deku, for fuck’s sake?!

“Oi, kid. You’re testing your luck,” the villain spat, clambering back to his feet as Katsuki tried to ignore the blood trickling down where the knife must’ve nicked his ear. “This ain’t a place for students, ya hear? I’m here for the heroes, but I’ll take pity on you. You and your friends have one more chance to get out of here before you’re dead.”

Katsuki held his ground, doing everything in his power not to falter.

*I can’t leave. I won’t.*

“I’m no kid,” he hissed. “I’m incoming hero, Ground Zero—” a smirk slid over bloody lips, battle craze fluttering over his face— “and you’d be damned to forget it.”

No wobble, no wav; this was his territory now.

And like hell am I gonna give it up.

He darted forward, aiming for a blow on the villain’s chest before he jumped up and turned into a bat again, that knife melding in with its tiny form.

Vulnerable. Weak.

Katsuki had run before. This time, he jumped. Lunged through the air with a scream that could be heard for miles, blasted the villain with a short, wide explosion to knock him off balance in the air, strong enough to let Katsuki dart in and grab him before he had a chance to transform again.

“Shouto!” he barked, arm cranked back like a baseball pitcher’s. “When I throw, gimmie some ice around it!”

There might’ve been a small noise of confusion from his friend, but Katsuki whirled around to launch the bat fucker from his hand and against the wall before he had a real chance to question it. The villain hit the wall, and just before he had the chance to transform back into anything human, Todoroki threw up a bubble of ice around him.
Yes…!

He resisted the urge to throw more nasty words in the villain’s direction in favor of attending to the rest of the commotion—if nothing else, Yaoyorozu and Todoroki had managed to detain the first villain tight enough, and with that second one down, only the few that Camie had seen earlier had remained.

Unless there’s more, anyways—but, shit. I should go find her.

“Camie!” he shouted into the comms unit, dashing around the mangled set in search of her. “Where are you? What’s going on?”

And where’s Deku? He didn’t pass out, did he!?

No, no—he had to keep his head on straight for now. Deku knew how to take care of himself in a fight.

I have to trust him. I will trust him.

When Camie still didn’t respond, Katsuki tried again, frantically looking for wherever she might’ve gone off to without him. Rubble was still falling, though, and the crashing sounds near the entrance could only have been the work on villains trying to break into what little sanctuary they’d established.

“G-Ground Zero!”

Huh?

He spun around towards the unfamiliar voice, heart lurching in his chest when he spotted a terrified civilian trapped in the mess.

“Ground—please, G-Ground Zero!” The civilian cried out, trying to wrench herself out from the rubble. “I-I need help, and my coworker is bleeding!”

Shit. Finding Camie would have to wait; rescuing was top priority, after all.

“Hold on, I’m coming!” he said, changing directions. “Are you hurt too?”

“No, it’s just my coworker,” she blubbered, hands trembling as she gripped the broken scaffolding. “Part of the set fell on her leg, and I-I’m afraid it’s broken!”

Broken leg? Shit…! That means I’ll need to carry her to safety, and there’s so much rubble here that I’m not sure I can clear myself!

Alright,” he started, throwing some of the smaller, lighter chunks of wood out of the way in an attempt to quash his worries. “I’m gonna see what I can do to move this scaffolding away, and we’re going to work together to get you and your coworker to safety. Sound good?”

“A-Ah, yes, sir!” She nodded, marginally less terrified than before. “Just, um, tell me what you need me to do.”

It was hard to believe that these were the very same people who’d spent the last few weeks stirring rumors about him and his relationships, but Katsuki knew that that couldn’t matter right now.

Like Deku said, all I can do is my job.
But as he started pulling some of the bigger, heavier, more dangerous pieces away, Katsuki realized that there was no way he’d be able to clear the rubble with the extent of his abilities. Explosions could only do so much, and with someone in danger of getting hurt more because of his quirk?

_I need help. Maybe Momo could help prop up these bigger pieces, or Shouto can push away some of the other ones, but that also might just make it worse, and—_

“Kacchan!”

Deku’s voice cut through his thoughts in a heartbeat, and all he could do was melt in relief as his boyfriend ran up to him and the trapped civilians. “Need some help?”

It was obvious he’d thrown his suit on quickly, and his hair still sat in some sort of wild mess, but it hardly mattered right now.

“Think you can lift some of this scaffolding for me?” Katsuki pointed, and Deku nodded. “There’s one more civilian trapped underneath that piece down there, too. She’s injured.”

“Right, right…” Deku murmured, slightly weaker than usual. “So, you want me to lift this one?”

“Mhm. And I’ll go and help her out while you’ve got it up, okay?”

_I can’t push him right now. I have to be in charge._

His boyfriend nodded, and Katsuki ducked inside as soon as the rubble was lifted up above both his head and the civilians. Deku’s super-strength had never been more helpful—getting the first civilian out proved to be almost no issue, but Katsuki had to dig around the rubble a bit more to free the injured one. Getting her up proved to be the hardest part, though; once he had her draped over his shoulders, Katsuki was able to walk out into the clearing and breathe a sigh of relief.

“Thanks,” he said, just as Deku set the rubble back down. “Let’s get them back to the safe zone. Is everything still okay over there?”

Deku bit his lip, but urged him to keep walking. “It’s, ah… well, I’m just trying to keep everyone calm. I think most of the station employees are there right now—it’s like twenty, twenty-five people—but they’re all understandably scared.”

“I-I’m still pretty scared, b-but…” the uninjured woman started, “I’m sorry for everything we’ve done to you two. I… I-I didn’t realize that you were both honestly… y’know, good people.”

_Good people._

“I’m just doing my job, ma’am,” Deku said, and helped lead her towards the rest of the civilians. “It’s all I’ve ever done.”

Katsuki gently maneuvered the injured civilian off his back and onto an empty spot on the floor, and despite having been quiet all the way from the rescue to the safe zone, she looked up at him and stared.

“Ground… Zero…” she whispered, barely audible. “A-And Valiant…”

He got to his knees beside her along with Deku, checking her injuries and trying to listen to what she was saying.

“I-I’m sorry.” Raspy, weak. “I-I’m sorry for… f-for everything I ever said… y-you didn’t have to
save me, a-and I would’ve understood why…”

Deku sucked in a breath and Katsuki looked at him, still confused. “You’re the reporter that stopped me outside my apartment, aren’t you?” he asked, and a sudden bolt of realization struck him. “And, uh, after that one fight with the whirlwind guy?”

A small, broken yes sounded from her, and despite the rage boiling in Katsuki’s chest just upon being reminded of that, he stayed calm.

So did Deku.

“I-I… I-I made your lives hell,” she coughed, each word thinner than the last. “B-But you two, you… you saved mine…?”

“It’s our job,” Katsuki said, just before his boyfriend had the chance to. “We’re heroes. We win. We save.”

“What kind of hero would I be if I didn’t do my damn best to save everyone?” Deku shook his head. “You were in trouble, and I was able to lend a hand. Simple as that.”

The woman stared up at them with some sort of shock, probably partly due to the injury but definitely also because of their words.

“Anyways, we’ll direct help over here shortly,” Deku continued, so much more professionally than Katsuki had learned to be yet. “Ma’am, will you keep an eye on her for a little bit? The cuts on her leg likely won’t be bleeding much more right now, but I definitely think it’ll be a good idea to get the injury checked out when the ambulance gets here.”

The uninjured woman nodded, obviously still in a bit of shock herself, and the two of them left.

“I’ll tell Momo to bring them some bandages,” Katsuki mumbled, still shaken up by the conversation they’d just had. “We probably need to get back out to the front line. I think there’s a couple people trying to knock down the wall Shouto threw up, and——” he stopped in his tracks, staring at Deku beside him. “Shit, are you okay?”

His boyfriend had stopped walking to clutch at his head, sweat beading on clammy skin as his chest heaved in an attempt to breathe again. Katsuki hadn’t noticed it much before, but the towel he’d strapped around his head was clearly crimson, soaking through the fabric more than it should’ve.

“I-I, ah…” Deku winced. “I-I’m losing blood. Kinda dizzy. Might have a concussion, I’m pretty prone to them at this point, and… fuck, I-I guess that thing went a little deeper than I’d originally thought.”

“You need medical attention right now, babe,” Katsuki cursed, one hand moving to run along Deku’s cheek. “This looks bad. And we don’t know if those projectiles were laced with anything, either.”

“I know, I-I know,” he grit his teeth, faced screwed up in some terrible shape. “Five minutes. I can go five more minutes with no issues, I promise.”

We hardly have any heroes right now, and he’ll be better off helping than sitting with the civilians.

“Five minutes,” he repeated. “Okay.”

Deku shook his head again, and for as much as Katsuki wanted to see him sitting down and safe,
their options were severely limited right now.

“Let’s go ahead and head towards the entrance,” he said, waving his boyfriend on. “Did you hear anything else when you were getting changed? I know we didn’t have much of a chance to talk earlier.”

“Oh! Yeah, actually, I checked my phone back there,” Deku replied, a heady mix of relief and concern in his voice. “Ochako and Kirishima texted me. They’re trying to head over here, but they got hit by the villains I was supposed to help with after the interview.” His lip turned down, eyes clouded and gray. “Apparently, the villains they were sent to fight wound up over here instead. God, go figure.”

Wait, that… “That’s kinda what one of the villains was saying earlier,” Katsuki’s throat went dry, mind flooding with connections. “I heard that they attacked this place because you were an easy, uh, first target?”

Just saying that felt nasty in his mouth.

“First target,” Deku scoffed. “Great. As if the media’s bullshit wasn’t enough to put up with already.”

“Apparently, the villains had some part in leaking all that personal shit, too.” Katsuki shook his head. “A-Anyways. Let’s deal with that shit after we take care of the physical things first, right?”

His boyfriend nodded, and for just a moment, squeezed Katsuki’s arm harder than usual.

He’s scared. I’m scared. But we’re not alone this time, right?

“You said Uravity and Red Riot were coming, right?” Katsuki swallowed, trying to formulate a new plan of action. “To be honest, I don’t know how long the five of us can hold them off—especially if more of these villains decide to show up—plus, you’re nearly out of commission.”

“Don’t count me out yet!” Deku scowled. “Five minutes, remember?”

“More like four minutes now, mister I-might-have-a-concussion.” He leaned up, kissed Deku on the cheek. “No time to waste, right? Let’s go.”

They ran towards the entrance, spotting Todoroki still safely perched upon the hill of ice he’d created. But it was clear that his attacks were getting weaker—yeah, he was doing a decent job of holding off the rest of the villains trying to tear down the wall, but Katsuki recognized the spots of ice creeping over his body and the shivers he tried to hide.

He needs to take a break. He won’t make it through another big encounter at this rate…!

“Shouto!” Katsuki dashed up to the base of his structure, yelling up at him. “Use your fire for a bit! We can’t afford to have you using up all your strength right now!”

Todoroki looked more confused than anything, though. “If I stop with the ice, they’re gonna break through. Are you saying that we should—”

“Are all the civilians safe?” he interrupted, mind racing a million miles a minute.

A pause, then— “Yeah, I think so.” Thank god. “Momo’s rounded up everyone she can find, and Camie—wait, where’s Camie?”
“Whaddya mean, where am I?” came the familiar voice from behind him, way too smug for the situation. “Caught a baddie. Didn’t get a chance to talk ‘cause I broke the comms thingy on accident, but I thought it’d be okay as long as I was getting stuff done, y’know?”

Katsuki watched as she dropped a limp body at their feet, dark and tied up in the light jacket Camie had worn. “Gave me a little trouble, but I think they’re done for now,” she said, kneeling down and poking the villain in the nose. “This was the one that could like, melt into shadows? But we danced with my illusions for a bit, and it tired them out enough for me to go in and do a little sumthin’ sumthin’, y’know?”

“I’ll pretend I understood what that meant, but thanks,” Katsuki said, a rush of pride flush in his chest. “You look a bit tired yourself, though. Need to sit down?”

Camie started to object, only to relent and slide down against the wall. “Um, well… maybe just for a minute or two? Hm, yeah… I’m gonna do that. Just for a little bit.”

“Wait, Camie!” Yaoyorozu sprinted into their area, and knelt beside her girlfriend immediately. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

And upon looking at Yaoyorozu, Katsuki could see just how tired she was too. She’d been making restraints and comms units and medical supplies nonstop; and as much as he hated to admit it, Katsuki doubted she could go much longer without more food.

*Shouto’s down, Camie’s tired, and Momo needs a break.*

Katsuki clenched his fists—his battle, his decisions.

*It’s just me and Deku now.*

“I melt down that barrier, Shouto,” he grit his teeth. “Deku and I are gonna take ‘em out as fast as we can.”

Worry was clear in Todoroki’s face, but to his relief, he did as Katsuki asked. “Might get a little wet in a minute,” he said, hopping down to the main floor. “Your boots were a good call.”

‘Course they are, my boots are great!

‘Course they’re a good call. My boots are great,” he said, and jerked his head in the direction of the entrance. “Anyways, you said there’s two villains back there, Camie?”

“Mhm!” she chimed in. “One with big hair, and another with a bigger tail!”

“Big tail, big hair.” Deku confirmed, just as the banging grew louder. “You sure there’s only two?”

The ice cracked more, more, and it was all they could to do brace themselves for the impact.

“I mean, that’s what—oh, shit!”

Chunks of half-melted ice flew with a fury towards them, and it was only Katsuki’s quick explosions and Deku’s gust of wind that kept the group from getting hit head on.

“Camie, Momo, Shouto, head back to the safe zone!” Katsuki shouted. “We’ll take care of this, just protect yourselves and the civilians!”

Maybe the media team had tried to do them in, and maybe they weren’t obligated to help them. But the best revenge wasn’t violence—no, *saving* their asses would show them what was up more than
anything else.

*And if this is still being broadcasted, if we’re still on live TV, then…*

Katsuki grinned.

*Suck my dick, doubters. We’re hot shit.*

But just as the confidence began to ripple through his veins again, a tall, shadowed form appeared in the half-melted doorway—despite Camie having told him that there was a dude with a tail, Katsuki had no idea that the guy would be towering over them at eight feet tall.

“I think that tail was the thing that was banging on the ice!” Katsuki yelled, scooting closer to Deku. “One hit from that and we’re fucked!”

“Look at the other one too, though! I think the girl with all the hair can manipulate it or something!” Deku sucked in a breath, and backed up closer to Katsuki. “Where do you want me?”

*We’re cornered. We don’t have spots to hide in like we did with the exam…! Quick, think, who’s the bigger threat!?*

While the tail definitely looked deadly, that hair would be able to pin them if they weren’t careful.

“Hair first,” Katsuki swallowed, trying his best to stay relaxed. “I’ll keep her at a distance, and you’ll go in once she’s off balance. Got it?”

“Got it.”

Mid-range explosions kept them both at bay, for now—while Deku pitched in with gusts of wind blowing back the (thankfully slower) tail guy, Katsuki focused on shredding the hair girl with sparks. Ten-foot locks braided themselves into menacing tendrils, and from the maniacal grin on her face, he knew that they were in no place for mercy.

*Close-range isn’t gonna work. The minute we step close, we’re gonna get caught in all of that hair, too!*

“Shit, do you think my explosions can burn away any of that hair?” Katsuki screamed, jumping in for another touch-and-go blow. “How the hell are we gonna knock her out!?”

“I mean, I can jump in close, and—”

“No!” Katsuki yelled, retracting whatever he’d planned before. “No, you’re gonna get trapped if you go in there, and I won’t be able to attack ‘cause you’d be held hostage.”

*Especially since he’s the biggest target right now… shit, shit, what can I do…!*

He stole a quick glance at the strands he’d hit in the small explosion he’d let off earlier—it wasn’t much, but it *had* destroyed some of her hair.

*I need a way to set off something closer and bigger. If I can get rid of that hair, we win.*

“Change of plans, Deku!” he called out, avoiding swings from that tail and blasting the small tendrils jolting at him to bits. “My quirk can get rid of that hair! I just need a way to get in close for a bit!”

He ducked as another tendril shot out at him, but unlike the bat dude, these attacks were more flexible. Just barely did he manage to destroy that one before it curled around his ankle, but even *that*
hardly deterred the villain.

“You sure I can’t punch her?” Deku yelled, just barely smacking the lizard guy away. “Kacchan, what if you get caught!?”

“Pfft, I won’t get—”

*Wait. Caught?*

Katsuki stared at that writhing, stringy, giant mass of hair, and all at once, had an idea.

“I’ll tell you when to punch!” he bit his lip, adrenaline pumping through his veins. “I-I’m just gonna —”

He dashed forward, blasting the hair off in every direction he could, but didn’t stop when he felt it twist around his ankles and wrap around his wrists.

*Just a little longer, just a little longer…!*

Something squeezed his stomach, chest, neck, and every inch of him it could touch. He wanted to cry—wanted to yell, wanted to scream, wanted to beg to be put down, but for as much as his terrible claustrophobia was ripping its way through his skin, he had to… god, *had* to—!

Breathe. Breathe. I need to breathe.

“Baby boy,” the girl crooned, and that hair shoved itself in his mouth as soon as she spoke. “Didn’t think you’d make this so simple! You’ll suffocate in no time as long as you relax, so hang tight, okay?”

*Don’t fucking talk to me!*

Sparks tickled his palms, but the fireworks dancing at the edge of his vision were from anything but the ceiling lights.

*A little longer, just a little longer…!*

“Good, good… aww, you’re being *so* good,” the villain murmured, cocooning him with every last bit of hair she had. “It’s a shame your little boyfriend isn’t behaving nearly as well… I think we’re going to have to make this hard for him, sadly. Oh well. At least he’ll leave a pretty corpse, aside from those nasty scars!”

*That’s it.*

Katsuki’s hands lit up in a storm of white, orange, and red, dynamite in human form.

“Deku, *NOW!*”

Sparks, wind, *fire*. The hair around him erupted in a mass of charred fiber, and the sheer *force* of Deku’s charged punch was enough to send even *Katsuki* to the ground in a heaving, coughing mess. It’d worked—distract the villain, blow up her hair, knock her out in the split second of distraction—and as he peeled himself off the ground, he tried to pretend the quaking of his limbs was from excitement and not terror.

*One down, and… wait, shit, the other dude!*

Katsuki yanked his head up to see the lizard guy taking *his* opportunity to stalk forward, and just as
Deku was beginning to come back to focus did that massive tail whip out to strike.

No, no, not towards his legs—!

“Get down!” he shouted, knees digging into the ground. “DEKU!”

His boyfriend turned, stared, and stumbled as he noticed the tail flying towards him, and Katsuki’s almost cried on the spot.

He’s gonna break his legs again. He’s gonna need physical therapy again. He’s not gonna be able to walk again, he’s—

But bright electricity crackled into his vision, and Deku’s hands—his hands, latched onto that massive tail—moved so fast, so smooth, and Katsuki could only watch as his boyfriend flung himself over the top and slammed the villain on his back for the landing.

“Oh, shit,” he breathed. “Holy shit.”


His boyfriend stumbled, dropped to his knees, and Katsuki burst towards him as fast as he could.

Those five minutes are definitely up, now.

Katsuki scrambled to his feet, grabbed Deku’s hand, and let him lean on him for just a moment. The towel had fallen off in his flip, and all across the right side of his face was blood, blood, blood.

He needs to get to the ER. He needs to get in that ambulance as fast as possible.

Phantom sirens banged against his eardrums, and all he could hope was that they’d become a reality before it got worse.

“T-The villain…” Deku groaned, trying to get back to his feet. “S’getting up again, we’ve gotta… w-we’ve gotta…”


If I’m by your side, I can do anything.

And despite the blistering pain scored over Deku’s blood-speckled cheeks, something like hope shone on it, too.

“You got one more hit in you, baby?”

“For… for you?” Deku voice broke, and a stupid, stupid smile grew over his face. “Always.”

The villain was getting back to his feet.

Fuck, it’s now or never…!

Katsuki caught a glimpse of the cameraman still near the fight, and made up his mind.

“Throw me.”

Deku stared at him—confused, but listening. “Like, towards his head?”

An awful, ear-splitting roar was thrown in their direction, and all Katsuki could do was nod, nod and
shove Deku’s hand towards his shirt. “Yeah, that works! Fuck, just throw—ahh!”

He’d known his boyfriend was strong, of course, but the speed at which he launched Katsuki from the ground and into the air was unmatched. One second, two seconds; he latched onto the villain’s head, swerving around to kick him in the chest and pop off an explosion near his face.

“Get the hell offa’ me!” the villain snarled, one clawed hand digging into his back with pinprick spikes. “You’re a real pest, pipsqueak. Just lay down and die already, would you!?”

No. No. Not today.

Katsuki didn’t grace the villain with a reply, enduring the pain shooting through his back and landing a well-aimed punch towards his jaw.

“Deku!” A punch to the face, another, another. “Deku, the tail! Grab the tail!”

Fall, fall, just fall!

His attacks landed with swift precision, sparks tumbling off that scaly face and showering onto the floor. Katsuki’s hands were just barely keeping him in place, swiveling around that snapping, spitting face and only letting go to sink his boots into those fanged teeth, knocking at least one or two out along the way.

Deku, get in here, get in—!

“You really think you can pull that move again?” The villain scoffed, claws raking down Katsuki’s back and dragging a sharp howl from his throat. “Don’t think I haven’t noticed Valiant’s little problem—it’s a damn shame that thorn didn’t kill him when it had the chance, but at least you two will get your happy ending and bleed out together!”

“Shut up, will you!?”

Deku?

Katsuki could hardly see, bloodstains and sparks speckling any vision he had left. But that was Deku’s voice—and in an instant, he felt himself rolling, flying, momentum dragging him into the air and only his thin grip on the villain’s neck keeping him in place.

What—what is he—?

“Kacchan!”

Raw. Desperate.

He’s... he’s spinning the villain around...? That’s why I’m—

“Kacchan!” Deku screamed again, bright and blistering. “Kacchan, let go!”

Trust him.

Katsuki’s hands fell away from the villain, and he flew. No explosions, no jumps—just falling, falling, and knowing that Deku would catch him on the way.

Thump.

Shaking, unsteady, but oh-so-stable all the same, and just as he’d expected, Deku set him back down
on the ground with a relieved smile and a chaste, battle-driven kiss to the forehead.

“You got him off balance,” he breathed, fingers wrapped tight between Katsuki’s own. “I think we’ve got a ten-second window, so…”

Deku looked down at him, ran a hand along Katsuki’s cheek. “You got one more hit in you, baby?”

_Oh my god, you fucking dork. Repeating my own shit back at me…!_

A squeeze of his hand was the only answer he offered, and Deku took it.

_Watch us, media. Just watch us!_

“Gonna throw you again,” his boyfriend whispered, “and you’re gonna let off the biggest blast you’ve got.”

“Works for me.” He grinned. “As long as you give him a nice punch to the stomach for me, yeah?”

This time, he was grabbed by the waist, gentle hands lifting him up into the air.

“Who do you take me for?” Deku laughed, that thin, breathy, _perfect_ laugh. “Let’s get him.”

_Three, two, one—!_

Katsuki rocketed from his grip, _utter ecstasy_ coursing through his veins as Deku’s blazing form shot forward below.

_One hand up. Grab the wrist. Charge, charge, and…!_

White-hot power ripped through his arm, and as the glow of his hands became truth on the ground, a hoarse, victorious _cackle_ tore through his throat—

...followed by another blast, one of greens and whites and crackling lights, topping whatever force the villain may have had left in him to the ground.

_Deku. Deku. Deku, I’m—!_

He fell again, and this time, he didn’t need a reminder that someone was waiting below. Warm, waiting arms caught him, holding him up to his chest with a primal desperation for _contact_, that they’d both _lived._

_We… we…_

“K-Kacchan,” Deku started, voice alight with adrenaline and pure _joy_. “Got you. I’ve got you. We…”

A flurry of green bolts and gold sparks showered down around them, and all Katsuki could do was wrap his legs around his waist and _kiss._

“We won,” he managed, as if speaking any louder would break the illusion. “We… D-Deku, you, me, we…”

His boyfriend silenced him with another messy, spit-streaked kiss, and all Katsuki could do was cradle his face and kiss it again, again, _again._

“They’re still filming,” Deku said.
“Let them.”

One hand moved from his boyfriend’s face, middle finger stuck up towards the camera, but Deku just laughed and kissed him once more.

“You’re right, Kacchan,” he murmured, and as soon as he saw a tear break on Deku’s cheek, Katsuki felt his own start to water. “Fuck them.”

*Let them know. Let them see.*

At some point, Katsuki was sure he heard one of the reporters say something about them really going at it, and he was almost positive his friends were taking pictures themselves. A part of him swelled with pride—this was *their* win, Deku was *his* boyfriend, and holy shit, did they *love.*

“I-I think we should… a-ah, pick this up again later.” Deku mumbled, looking mildly embarrassed. “Kacchan, I love you, but I need to get to the ER as soon as—a-as possible.”

*Oh. Right.*

Katsuki dropped down to his own two feet and helped his very-wobbly boyfriend navigate to where the ambulance had parked, a little ashamed that he’d forgotten about the head wound to make out with him. But just as they were on their way out

“W-Wait, Valiant, sir!”

*Huh?*

The nasty interviewer, followed by the cameraman scrambled to catch up to them as Katsuki kept hold on Deku’s arm, refusing to let go.

“A-And, um, Ground Zero…! I-I, I-I just,” the interviewer’s voice shook, trembling like a leaf in the wind as his eyes darted between the two of them like a scared animal. “I-I’m sorry. From everyone here, we’re… w-we’re sorry!”

The two of them fell quiet, unsure of what to do. Katsuki didn’t want to accept an apology only pulled out in the heat of the moment, but Deku—

“If you’re really sorry, prove it,” he murmured, using every last bit of strength to talk. “I’ll believe you when you leave us be.” Then, he tugged on Katsuki’s arm. “C’mon, baby. Let’s… let’s go.”

They let him up in the ambulance with Deku, and just as they were about to leave did his friends run up to wish them luck, followed by Uravity and Red Riot showing up after the fight had drawn to a close. They’d taken care of the villains outside of the studio, apparently, but promised that they’d meet them at the hospital later. The paramedics assured him that Deku would be okay—the projectile didn’t appear to have been laced with anything, and the wound hadn’t cut deep enough to do harm more serious than a concussion.

“I know injuries aren’t a *good* thing, but…” Katsuki squeezed Deku’s hand as he sat by him in the ambulance. “At least you’re gonna have a badass scar to show off.”

“Aha, true…” his boyfriend’s eyes were falling closed, finally safe as the doors closed and the engine started up. “They’re hot, right?”

“So hot,” he smiled, a stupid, stupid smile saved only for him. “Get some rest, ‘kay? I’ll kiss it better after you get it checked out.”
“We’re gonna… we’re gonna go to the onsen again,” Deku mumbled, so soft, so quiet. “Gonna apartment hunt some more… gonna kiss you all over when I get home.”

God, I…

“Love you,” he whispered, beating Katsuki to it. “I-I… I love you.”

Deku’s hand relaxed in his own, exhaustion and blood loss and a sense of safety finally carrying him to sleep.

“Love you too,” he kissed Deku’s hand again, warmth flush through him. “And when you wake up again, we...” His thumb ran across those freckled cheeks, and a choked, vulnerable, happy sob tugged its way from his throat.

I love you. I love you. I love you.

“We… we won’t have to be afraid anymore.”

Chapter End Notes

*BUSTS DOWN DOOR* /MOM HOLY FUCK LOOK AT THIS RIGHT NOW PLEASE @catskeez DREW ART FOR THIS CHAPTER AND IM LOSING MY WHOLE MIND

(in case u still had any doubts, i promise deku is gonna b okay!!)

Anyways. i cant even begin to express how long ive been excited to write this chapter, and to see the climax finally come about made me rlly emotional going through it, so i hope u all enjoyed too!! And the last chapter will b up as soon as possible (2 weeks max i think) cause im going to a convention plus starting classes again!!

also, if u wanna keep an eye on the project im working on in relation to this fic, check out my twitter!! i love yall so much, thank you for reading this far!!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!